HOW GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND COLLEGE EXPERIENCES AFFECT

LATINAS' UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE PERSISTENCE

by

GABRIELA DIAZ DE SABATES

B.A., University of Buenos Aires, 1987
M.Ed., Harvard University, 1994

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2014

Abstract

This qualitative case study examined how the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affected five Latina undergraduate students' academic persistence in a predominately White, Research Extensive Midwestern State University.

Latinas' gender, race, ethnicity, and college experiences influence their educational achievements directly. Because most research concentrates on understanding Latinas' educational experiences from a cultural deficit perspective, this research addressed the need to investigate Latinas' personal understanding of the challenges they face in college and their responses and coping strategies utilized to navigate their experiences and persist academically.

Cultural Congruity was the theoretical framework for analysis and interpretation in this study because it contextualized the understanding of Latinas' culture of origin and its values in relation to the cultural values upheld by the university Latinas attend. The research utilized life narratives to understand the meaning the participants gave to their college experiences. Life narratives invent, reform, and refashion personal and collective identity for underrepresented people. Life narratives provided direct access to accounts of participants' lived experiences while identifying the ideologies and beliefs shaped by those experiences.

The findings in this study identified the stereotypes, racism, obstacles, and support encountered by Latinas in college and at home. Further findings include: Impact and relevance that caring relationships and high expectations had on their academic persistence, Latinas' determination to be involved in college and give back to their parents and communities, and how academic effectiveness acted as a form of resistance for Latinas' college persistence. Four additional themes emerged: How self-efficacy was used by Latinas to redefine themselves in

college, the changing effect that intellectually stimulating courses had on Latinas in college, their tenacity to succeed, and Latinas' identification of their fathers as feminist role models.

Recommendations for practice and future research are addressed. The results contribute to the limited research on Latinas' persistence in higher education and the personal meaning that they give to the obstacles and support they encounter in college. Further, the findings defy the stereotypes attributed frequently to Latinas.

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Dedication

This dissertation is first and foremost dedicated to my daughter Sofia, my life engine, and to my husband Marcelo, my best friend, partner, and life co-pilot.

I am forever grateful for the intellectually stimulating, caring, consistent, and positive support provided unconditionally by Dr. Kay Ann Taylor, who returned my faith in myself and without whom this finalized product would have never been possible.

I am eternally thankful to my parents, Beatriz Parpaglioni de Díaz and Manuel Alberto Antonio Díaz, who instilled in me this relentless sense of never giving up and always aiming high. I am also forever thankful to my parents in law (Norma Gil de Sabatés and Héctor Sabatés) for showing me, in their very different but always caring ways, that they loved me and supported me as a daughter.

I want to express my gratitude to my many wonderful family members, colleagues, and friends from the bottom of my heart. They have supported me wholeheartedly so I could become who I am in a foreign land and culture, while helping me in making this place my own on my own terms.

Last but not least, I want to thank our beloved Naxos, a.k.a. Mome, who accompanied me during this intellectual venture wagging his tail day and night while I wrote, only asking in retribution that I take him out for a walk.

Tantísimas gracias a todos!

Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

Background

The U.S.A. Latino population has grown exponentially in the last two decades and yet little is known about Latinos' college experiences in general and Latinas' in particular (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Cuádraz, 2004; Villalpando, 2010). Although there were 1.3 million Latinos attending college at the turn of this century, only 40% were enrolled in four-year colleges (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). As indicated by Castellanos and Jones, this number is the lowest among all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.A. This reality, coupled with Latinos having the lowest college graduation rates in the country (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005), makes this study significant. The achievement of higher educational degrees ensures Latinos' economic social viability and leadership in their communities and, therefore, impacts the economic prosperity of the U.S.A. positively (Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003).

Latinas constitute the largest underrepresented ethnic group of females in the U.S.A. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Some Latinas explore and adapt to college by skillfully navigating, molding, and understanding their college experiences. Others drop out or disappear slowly from college, placing themselves and their families at risk for socio-cultural and economic exclusion (Bañuelos, 2006; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Orozco, 2003). Analyzing the factors that affect Latinas' college participation and graduation is challenging because of the heterogeneity of this population. The difficulty in disaggregating data related to Latinas' experiences in higher education translates into a dearth of accurate information at the national level (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Villalpando, 2010.)

Because a college degree is essential for people's perceived potential for socioeconomic

advancement in the U.S.A., Latinas' low college graduation rates place them at a social, educational, and financial disadvantage. Even though Latinas have a rich cultural legacy that enables them to access quality education, some social, cultural, and economic factors play negative roles in their attainment of college diplomas (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Past studies indicate that a large number of Latinas do not graduate from college (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Cuádraz, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Nora, 2003; Segura, 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A few first-person accounts from Latinas inform us directly about their struggles in college and their reasons for not graduating from college (Cuádraz, 2004; Vera & De Los Santos, 2005).

This research presents first-person narratives of the college experience of five undergraduate Latinas in a predominately White, Research Extensive Midwestern State University (MSU). The first chapter is organized into the following sections: (1) overview of issues, (2) statement of the research problem, (3) purpose of the study, (4) significance of the study, (5) research design, (6) definition of terms, (7) researcher's bias, (8) limitations of the study, and (9) organization of the study.

Overview of the Issues

U.S.A. Demographic Situation and Trends

In its origins, the United States of America was a country built upon the influx of immigrants of European descent. However, during the last few decades of the twentieth century the immigrant population represents substantially different demographics (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). By the year 2000, over 25% of the U.S.A. population was composed of underrepresented ethnic groups (including African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans). By the year 2040, about half of the U.S.A. population will be members of underrepresented

ethnic groups, of which 25% will be of Latino origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This means that by the year 2040, about 100 million people in the U.S.A. will trace their ancestry to Spanish-speaking, Latin American, and Caribbean roots (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009; U.S Census Bureau, 2010).

Demographic changes become more significant when examining related data about Latinos in the U.S.A. By 2010, there were 50.5 million Latinos, the largest underrepresented ethnic group in the U.S.A., accounting for 16% of the total U.S.A. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Rapid growth is the most salient characteristic of this group. The size of the Latino population in the U.SA. overall grew 13% from 1990 to 2000 and the Latino population grew 58% during the same time period. Between 2000 and 2010 the total U.S.A. population grew 10%, while the Latino population grew 43%, from 35.2 million in 2000 to 50.5 million in 2010 and, therefore, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total U.S.A. population. In comparison, the non-Latino U.S.A. population grew about 5% during the same decade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). By the year 2025, the Latino population is projected to be 18% of the total U.S.A. population. Within two generations, the United States will house the second largest number of Latinos in the world after Mexico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The steady increase of the Latino population is fast paced, almost doubling the number of Latinos in the U.S.A. in only 13 years. The high birth rate of U.S.A. Latinos is the largest contributor to the steady increase of this population (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009; Vigil Laden, 2004). The exponential growth of the Latino population in the U.S.A. can be explained largely due to being the youngest racial and ethnic underrepresented group in the U.S.A. and almost half of the Latino population is at their prime reproductive age. In 2008, almost 40% of all Latinos

were 20 years old or younger, compared to 27% of non-Latino Whites. One in five school children and one in four newborns are Latinos (PEW Hispanic Center, 2008).

In the last three decades, states in the Midwest that have not received significant Latino immigration historically have experienced a profound demographic change, including the State of Kansas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Between 1990 and 2000, the total Kansas population grew 8%, while the Latino population in the State increased by over 100% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Between 2000 and 2010, the total Kansas population grew 6.1% while its Latino population grew 59.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Latinos constituted 3.8% of the total Kansas population in 1990, 7% in 2000, and 10.5% in 2010. By contrast, Whites constituted 90% of Kansas' total population in 1990, 80 % in 2000, and 78.2% in 2010. Asian Americans' population grew from 1.2% in 1990 to 1.7% in 2000, and to 2.4% in 2010, while the percentage of African Americans in Kansas stayed virtually the same at 5.8% in 1990, 5.7% in 2000, and 5.9% in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Table 1. Comparative Kansas Population Percentage and Total Population Growth 1990-2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 1990, 2000, 2010)

Year	Total White population in Kansas	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
1990	90 %	8.0 %	3.8 %	5.8%	1.2%
2000	80 %	6.1 %	7.0 %	5.7%	1.7%
2010	78.2 %	6.1 %	59.4 %	5.9%	2.4%

Defining the Term Latino/a

Defining the term Latino is complex given that no single characteristic can be utilized for a comprehensive definition (Gracia & DeGreiff, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). In the past twenty years in the U.S.A., the term Latino has been generalized and used to refer to people who are originally from Spanish-speaking countries. Oboler (1995) states that such generalization, albeit useful for general purposes of identifying diverse populations implies that:

> Millions of people of a variety of national backgrounds are put into a single 'ethnic' category, and no allowances are made for their varied racial, class, linguistic and gender experiences. The term ignores, for example, the distinct and diverse experiences of descendants of the U.S.A. conquest, such as the Chicanos, and those of Puerto Rican populations colonized by the United States at the turn of the century. Its users often neglect to contextualize the specific histories and cultures that differentiate these two groups, both from one another and from more recent immigrant arrivals, whether from Mexico, Central or South America, or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations. In so doing, long time native-born U.S. citizens and residents are combined with more recently arrived economic immigrants, who may have crossed the U.S. border yesterday. (p. 1)

All groups are diverse within themselves, however, there are more variations within each group than across groups and Latinos are no exception. Although Oboler's (1995) analysis is important in that it clarifies the diversity that exists among U.S.A. Latinos, it also is critical to note that Latinos share some common characteristics that identify them and not as something else. Gracia and De Greiff (2000) affirm that determining who counts as a Latino is challenging, since at first sight it neither seems to be a homogeneous group nor appears to share any properties in common. Gracia and De Greiff (2000) state:

> Linguistic, racial, religious, political, territorial, cultural, economic, educational, social class, and genetic criteria fail to identify Latinos in all places and times because not all Latinos speak the same language, are of the same race, hold the same religious beliefs, belong to the same political unit, live in the same territory, display the same cultural traits, enjoy the same economic status, have the same degree of education, share the same social class, or come from the same genetic line. (p. 204)

Gracia and De Greiff (2000) affirm that the Latino/a population is a heterogeneous group, formed by subgroups of people whom trace their ancestry to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Central and South America. Therefore, Latino/a is a category that encompasses not just many nationalities but races as well. Latinos differ in terms of place of origin, race, language, religion, political affiliation, customs, social attitudes, physical appearance, economic status, education, class, and immigration status.

In searching for commonalities that allow for a clear representation of Latinos, Gracia, and De Greiff (2000) argue that Latinos do not always share common properties at all times, but that they are rather united by a network of historical relations that differentiates them from other groups in a similar fashion in which a family is separated from other families. This network provides a *parecido de familia* (family resemblance), a web-like connection where Latinos share some familial relation properties with other Latinos, which in turn distinguishes them from non-Latinos (e.g., some common properties such as most Latinos speak Spanish, some are recent immigrants from Latin American countries, some are of Spanish ancestry, some have indigenous roots).

In the U.S.A., an ethnic understanding of the Latino label captures what ties the members of the group together: Some combination of common language, a shared history, a common ancestry, or different historical and cultural factors (such as colonization, penetration of foreign religious values, dictatorships, economic crises, territorial invasions and cultural impositions by developed countries) (Gracia & De Greiff, 2000). Although the terms Hispanic and Chicano/a were used only when citing others' work, the term Latino/a was used consistently in this study to unify the different terms for this population.

Latinos and Education

The economic, social, and cultural future of the U.S.A. rests on the social advancement of the country's growing underrepresented ethnic population largely including individuals of Latino origin. The dramatic increase of the Latino population in the U.S.A. within the last two decades translates directly into a significant growth in the number of Latinos in educational institutions. Currently, 15% percent of the total K-8 school population is Latino, as well as 13% of the high school population, and 15% of the college-aged population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

College education is a key element to having capable, prepared, and productive citizens, thus Latinos' low levels of college graduation are worrisome. Although the number of Latinos in the U.S.A. is growing steadily, they are among the least educated ethnic groups in the U.S.A. (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Darder, Torres, & Gutiérrez, 1997). Low educational achievement for Latinos isn't the result of receiving high numbers of recent immigrants in the U.S.A. Latinos born in the U.S.A. continue to have significantly lower levels of college degree completion than non-Latinos born in the U.S.A. (Araujo, 2009; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). Following high school, only 65% of Latinos born in the U.S.A. attend a two or four year college compared to 74.5% of White students (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004). At the four-year college level, Latinos born in the U.S.A. enroll in universities at about half the matriculation rate of White students, and less than one-quarter of Latino youth receive a postsecondary certificate or degree (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). It is documented that Latino students who enter universities directly after high school have a high drop out rate (65%) between their freshman and sophomore years (DeMirjyn, 2005). Romo (2005) indicated that out of 100 Latino students entering kindergarten, about 63 earn a high school diploma, 32 attend college for the first year, and only 11 complete a bachelor's degree.

Many Latinos graduating from high school (57%) are tracked into community colleges (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004). From the time of their early schooling, many Latinos are vulnerable to negative stereotypes held by teachers, counselors, and school officials, who have low expectations of them, which means Latinos are tracked for technical and community colleges (Valenzuela, 1999; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004). This generates an overrepresentation of Latinos in special education programs and in less rigorous and non-college preparatory tracks of their schools, as well as increased school drop out numbers and 'push out' rates in high school (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Of Latino students attending community colleges, only 10% transfer to universities (Nora, 2003). Villalpando (2010) indicated that Latino students were overrepresented in two-year institutions in comparison to their White counterparts. Villalpando (2010) compared two and four-year college enrollment for White and Latino students in the fall semesters of 1990, 1995, and 2002 (Table 1). Even though the overall college enrollment growth for Latinos appeared to be consistent, it was fueled by enrollment in two-year institutions. Contrastingly, Whites appear to have steady enrollment in four-year institutions rather than in two-year campuses despite the fluctuation in their high school graduation rates (Villalpando, 2010).

Table 2. College Enrollment for Latinas/os by Type of Institution in the U.S.A.: Selected Years, 1990-2002 (Villalpando, 2010).

Population: Latinas/os	Academic Year Fall 1990	%	Academic Year Fall 1995	%	Academic Year Fall 2002	%
All Latinas/os	782,400	100.0	1,093,800	100.0	1,661,700	100.0
Men	353,900	45.0	480,200	44.0	699,000	42.0
Women	428,500	55.0	613,700	56.0	962,700	58.0
Institution Type						
Public 4-year	262,500	33.6	346,800	31.7	468,100	28.2
Public 2-year	408,900	52.3	590,300	54.0	920,500	55.4
Private 4-year	95,700	12.2	138,700	12.7	234,700	14.1
Private 2-year	15,300	1.9	18,100	1.7	38,300	2.3
Composition						
Undergraduate	724,600	93.0	1,012,000	92.5	1,533,300	92.3
Graduate	47,200	6.0	68,000	6.2	112,300	6.7
Professional	1,700	1.3	13,800	1.3	16,100	1.0
Whites non/Latinos						
All Whites	10,722,500	100.0	10,311,200	100.0	11,140,200	100.0
Men	4,861,500	45.0	4,594,100	45.0	4,897,900	44.0
Women	5,861,500	55.0	5,717,200	55.0	6,242,300	56.0
Institution Type						
Public 4-year	4,605,600	43.0	4,303,300	41.7	4,551,700	41.0
Public 2-year	3,779,800	35.3	3,642,100	35.3	3,938,800	35.4
Private 4-year	2,162,500	20.2	2,213,900	21.5	2,502,100	22.3
Private 2-year	174,500	1.6	152,000	1.5	147,700	1.3
Composition						
Undergraduate	9,272,600	86.5	8,805,600	85.4	9,564,900	85.9
Graduate	1,228,400	11.5	1,282,300	12.4	1,348,000	12.1
Professional	221,500	2.0	223,300	2.2	227,400	2.0

Latino college enrollment represented the smallest increase among students of all ethnicities in the last 20 years, growing from 18% in 1988 to only 25% in 2008, while African Americans' enrollment grew from 22% in 1987 to 32% in 2006 (*Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 2009). Also, only 10% of Latino males and 12 % of Latinas finished their college degrees in four years, compared to 38% of White males and 42% of White females (*Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 2009). Latinos have the lowest college rate completion of all races: 32% compared to 34% for African Americans, 47% for Asians, and 48% for Whites (*Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 2009). Factoring in that Latino college students have about a 70% drop out rate during their first year after transferring from a community college into a four-year institution, it is not surprising that Latino college students' recruitment and graduation is a concern (DeMirjyn, 2005; Nora, 2003).

However, starting in 2010 the number of Latinos enrolling in four-year colleges started to rise. College enrollment among Latinos increased 20% (1.2 million) from October 2010 to October 2011 and it was the first time when young Latinos enrolled in college at a higher rate than African Americans (1.1 million). This growth in college enrollment reflects the overall growth of the Latino population in the U.S.A., a record number of college-aged Latinos, and a record high level of Latinos graduating from high school (PEW Research Hispanic Center, 2012). The PEW Research Hispanic Center still emphasized that, despite the record level of Latinos graduating from high school and enrolled in college in the last two years, the number of college degrees conferred to Latinos still lags behind other groups. Among the bachelors degrees conferred in 2010 in the U.S.A., 71% were awarded to non-Latino Whites, 10% to non-Latino Blacks, and 7% to non-Latinos Asian/Pacific Islanders (PEW Research Hispanic Center, 2012).

Many people in the U.S.A. believe that education is the main vehicle for economic and

social mobility compared to other societies and that the economic strength of the U.S.A. society rests largely on the educational attainment of its population. Beyond the individual monetary returns, the U.S.A. society as a whole gains the most with an educated citizenry: The private sector becomes more competitive, tax resources increase, and public issues such as public safety, are affected positively. Therefore, education and economic security are inextricably linked for individuals and groups (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). During their lifetimes, individuals who hold a bachelor's degree earn 50% more than those without a high school diploma. Men who hold a professional degree earn 3.4 times more than men with a high school diploma. Professional women earn 2.9 times more than women with a high school diploma. It is disheartening that, when combining life-long earnings, degree attainment, and race/ethnicity/gender, Latina and African American females receive the lowest incomes in most levels (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010).

Disparities in attaining a bachelor's degree between Latino and White youth are evident. The college graduation gap between White and Latino students remains a complex area of research that has received attention only recently in the literature (Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006). In the last three decades, some quantitative and qualitative studies explored several factors related to underrepresented and dominant students' college graduation (e.g., Hurtado, Carter, &Faye, 1997; Nora, 2003; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1992). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2003) showed that 47% of White (non-Latino) college students complete a bachelor's degree by age 26, more than twice the rate of Latino postsecondary students (23%). Less than one-quarter of traditional Latino freshmen finish a bachelor's degree and nearly two-thirds end up with no postsecondary credential at all (NCES, 2003). Thus, the disparity between White and Latino

college students' bachelor's degree completion rates is larger than the gap between high school completion rates (NCES, 2012). Subsequently, a persistent academic achievement gap exists between Latinos and White students at the college level.

In the past two decades, Latino students' college persistence, college engagement, academic performance, and first to second year persistence and graduation have been addressed (Nora et al., 2006). Research also focused on identifying factors that contribute to Latinos' low college graduation rates (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Darder, Torres, & Gutiérrez, 1997; Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003). A significant portion of the literature related to Latinos' college persistence and graduation relied on different but often overlapping frameworks (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Nora et al., 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Historically, studies focused on a cultural deficit perspective where Latino students, their families, and their culture were identified as the primary reasons for this group's college attrition (González, 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Trueba, 1988; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). More recently, however, studies identified social, cultural, and economic factors that burdened Latino youth while pursuing a college degree. Research also focused on the analysis of various issues, such as institutional climate, cultural dissonance between home and college, importance of having culturally relevant mentors and role models, and the existence or lack of support programs, culturally responsive practices, and curricula at the college level (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Nora et al., 2006; Parra, 2007).

Understanding Latinas' Realities in College

Latinas are the youngest, largest and fastest growing group of ethnically underrepresented women in the U.S.A. and are the group of women with the lowest rate of college graduation in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Latinas have the lowest college graduation rates among

all females and substantially lower college completion rates than White females (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Rodríguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). For example, in 1993 only 6.9% of Latinas completed college, compared to 17.6% of White women, and 10.2% of African American women (Rodríguez et al., 2000). Latinas' low graduation rates are a concern, especially because earning a college degree is essential for financial independence and social mobility (Cardoza, 1991; Gloria et al., 2005).

In the past 25 years, Latino males have made more modest educational progress compared to Latinas. This phenomenon can be explained in part because more Latinas go back to school as adults whereas Latinos enter the workforce (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). In 1980, roughly 3% more White females than males were enrolled in college. During the same period, 2% more Latinas were enrolled in college than Latinos. By 2002, the gap between college-enrolled Latinas and Latinos grew to 16% in favor of the females. This increase in the proportion of Latina enrollment was due to a combination of a 7% increase in Latinas' enrollment with about a 9% decrease in Latinos' enrollment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, in 2006 41% of Latino undergraduates were male compared to females (59%) (NCES, 2008). According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), in 2010 1,545,379 Latinos had a bachelor's degree or higher diploma compared to 1,783,947 Latinas. Vien (2010) stated that some of the reasons that explain why Latino males are graduating from college in lesser numbers than Latinas were the pressure to enter the workforce and contribute financially to the nuclear and extended family, the lack of role models in academia, the lack of guidance, the lack of understanding of what a college degree means, the need to work full time while attending college, and negative K-12 tracking as non-college material.

Until the mid-1960s, issues related to how Latinas fared in higher education was subsumed within the larger picture of women and education (Delgado Bernal, 2006). However, starting in the late 1960s elements such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, and immigration status became relevant. In the last two decades, a limited but growing number of studies have focused on Latinas in higher education (Delgado Bernal, 2006). These studies centered on the educational barriers encountered by Latinas in college (Gándara, 1982; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Segura, 1993); Latinas' marginality in higher education (Cuádraz, 2004; Rendón, 1992); college choices (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998); campus activism (Revilla, 2003); and Latinas' identity and sexuality (Hurtado, 2003).

Several factors affect Latinas' college academic performance and success. Studies done in the early 1990s emphasized the interconnection of social, environmental, and interpersonal non-cognitive aspects of educational experiences (Gloria et al., 2005). Research suggested that Latinas' college academic success is not determined fully by instructional choices but rather by a complex combination of historical, institutional, political, and socio-cultural factors that are intimately related to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and power (Díaz-Greenberg, 2003; Parra, 2007). However, scarce data is available on the interrelationship among socio-cultural, institutional, and educational factors that affect Latinas' college persistence and graduation. There also is limited and insufficient research that centers on Latinas' experiences in college, their integration into the educational institution, and the personal and psychological impact of their college experiences related to the cultural congruity, or lack thereof, between their college and home cultures (Gloria et al., 2005). Moreover, little attention has been given to the personal understanding that Latinas themselves have of these roadblocks for college graduation, their own

responses to such obstacles, and their coping strategies in dealing with unfamiliar, divergent socio-cultural environments (Gloria et al., 2005).

The Importance of Life Narratives

In an attempt to study the history of narrative, Hyvärinen, Korhonen, and Mykkänen (2006) stated that over the last three decades the concept of narrative has travelled successfully from literature into several new disciplines such as social sciences, law, psychology, education, theology, and health studies, among others. Narrative methods have proliferated in many fields. In the U.S.A., psychological theorists such as Jerome Bruner emphasized the storied nature of human lives and human conduct. Bruner was one of the cognitive psychology movement pioneers in the U.S.A. that was interested not only in how an organism responded to stimuli, but specifically the organism's interpretation of such stimuli (Bruner, 1990). Bruner advocated for a more holistic understanding of the mind and its production of cognition, culminating his work in the development of a theory of individuals' narrative construction of reality. In this theory, Bruner affirmed the importance of understanding how the mind makes sense of the world in a narrative form (Bruner, 1990).

McAdams wrote extensively about the importance that narrative identities have in the life of individuals. He argued that narrative identity is a person's internalized and evolving life story wherein the individual reconstructs his or her past and imagines the future to provide his or her life with some degree of unity. The generation of narrative identities provide individuals with a sense of unity and well being (McAdams, 1985). McAdams developed a life-story model of adult identity wherein people living in modern societies start organizing their lives in narrative terms in late adolescence and young adulthood. Individuals create internalized and evolving life stories that serve to reconstruct the past and anticipate the future in ways that provide their lives with

some degree of unity and purpose. Therefore, constructing and internalizing a life story is at the center of an individual's sense of identity (McAdams, 1985). McAdams argued that the construction of a life story is always done within a socio-cultural and political context: The power of conversation and social contextualization are essential for learning narrative skills, shaping identity expectations, and formulating meaningful stories for one's life, reinforcing the powerful significance of social context. Narrative identity is always contextualized in culture (McAdams, 1985).

Holling (2006) affirmed that life narratives allow researchers' access to women's direct accounts of their lived experiences while identifying the ideologies and beliefs that are shaped by their experiences. In the case of Latinas' life narratives, they not only speak about their individual experiences, but also contextualize Latinas' identities and experiences as ethnic minorities (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In this regard, Holling asserts that via life narratives, Latinas' voices underscore their strength and tenacity in challenging forms of their experienced social and institutional oppressions as inhibiting their growth and academic persistence. Latinas' life narratives provide a firsthand view into not only how Latinas maintain their own gender and ethnic identity in a predominately white institution, but also how they construct and re-define their gender and ethnic selves in relation to their environment. It is only when Latinas name their own experiences, give voice to their own world, and affirm themselves as legitimate social agents that they transform the meaning of those experiences (Holling, 2006). This approach challenges educational norms and moves away from traditional cultural deficit and assimilation frameworks that attempt to interpret the educational experiences of Latinas based on the experiences of males or White women. Life narratives are pertinent to this study since they reveal Latina college students' understanding of their college experiences.

Latinas' Life Narratives of Their College Experiences

Because Latinas tend to have a more stressful time in college than Latinos (Gándara & Osugi, 1994) and in the process go through personal experiences determined by their gender, race, ethnicity, and class (Gloria et al., 2005), conducting focused research on Latinas' college experiences told by Latinas is needed. Following Anzaldúa's (1987) call for theorizing the lives of Chicanas/Latinas based on their own experiences and personal accounts of these experiences, several studies formulated theories based upon the voices, narratives, and *testimonios* (testimonies) of Latinas in college (Bañuelos, 2006; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; DeMirjyn, 2005). These studies gave insight into how Latinas understand, negotiate, and draw from what they learn in their home cultures and how this learning helps them survive and succeed in an unfamiliar and, at times, oppressive educational system (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). The research indicated that Latinas' personal stories and narratives questioned educational stereotypes (e.g., lack of women's interest in majoring in sciences, Latinos' chronic academic underachievement, individuality as a main value in academia) and moved away from traditional college culture. Also, it demonstrated how Latinas position themselves to be recognized as producers of experiential and academic knowledge that challenge both formal (academic) and informal (home/community) knowledge (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Holling, 2006). These studies reveal how Latinas find and create supportive spaces (such as peer and mentoring networks) in college, which, in turn, provide them with a sense of institutional belonging (Bañuelos, 2006).

In qualitative studies focusing on Latinas' life and college experiences, oral stories and life narratives provide a direct and powerful way to learn about how they negotiate home and college cultures in order to navigate their college experiences successfully and graduate. Latinas'

stories and life narratives are historical and theorizing sites of knowledge, which generate

alternative ways to understand their lived experiences while producing a new body of knowledge

that is gender and ethnic specific (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2006). Latinas' narratives fill a void in

the dominant university culture where Latino culture is either devalued or non-existent (Delgado

Bernal, 1998, 2006). Thus, it is via the narratives of their college experiences that Latinas

integrate their gender, ethnicity, and class, generating a space for self-definition (DeMirjyn,

2005). Latinas' stories and narratives allow researchers to access and analyze critically lived

experiences while identifying the ideologies and beliefs that are shaped by their experiences

(Holling, 2006).

Statement of the Research Problem

Structural conditions thought to create barriers to Latinas' college graduation include

high poverty levels, de-facto segregation, faulty K-12 education, lack of role models in their

families, community and educational institutions, scarcity of culturally sensitive mentors, and

cultural dissonance between home and college environments (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006;

Gándara, 1982; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Gloria et al., 2005; Segura, 1993). Missing in these

studies was learning from Latinas directly the meaning that they gave to their educational

experiences, what it meant for them to experience cultural dissonance between home culture and

college culture, and how the dissonance affected their college persistence.

To understand fully Latinas' educational barriers, it is essential to use a comprehensive

framework that includes the individual, the educational environment, the institutional culture,

and Latinas' culture of origin situated within an historical and socio-cultural framework

(Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000). In this study, Latinas' life narratives

provide direct accounts of their experiences, exploring how gender, race, ethnicity, and college experiences influence their college persistence.

Purpose of the Study

The low college graduation rates among Latinas and their substantially low college completion rates mean that there is an urgent need for policy makers and educators to understand better the factors that contribute to Latinas' college persistence (Gloria et al., 2005; Rodríguez et al., 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affected five Latinas' academic persistence. Specifically, this study aimed at inquiring and identifying gender role expectations, cultural factors, educational, and institutional aspects that affected Latinas' college persistence as expressed in their narratives.

Research Questions

This study was designed to inquire about Latinas' college experiences. The researcher explored Latinas' perceptions about: (a) their college experiences, (b) their definition of academic success, (c) the socio-cultural, ethnic, and gender aspects included in Latinas' description of themselves, (d) the perceived effects that socio-cultural and gender role expectations have on their academic success, (e) the influence that their college experiences had upon their gender and ethnic identity, and (f) the influence that their college experiences had on their college persistence.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically? (Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005)

2. What socio-cultural and gender role expectations, at home and in college, affect Latinas' perception of their academic persistence? (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado Bernal,

2006; Nora et al., 2006).

3. What college experiences of Latinas influence their gender and ethnic identity?

(Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006)

Methodology

This multiple participant case study examined how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' academic persistence in a predominately White, Research Extensive Midwestern State University. It was designed to collect five Latinas' life narratives and their interpretation of their college experiences (Delgado Bernal, 1998). A multiple participant case study was selected as the method to develop in-depth analyses of multiple individuals. Creswell (2013) asserted that when the researcher has clearly identifiable cases and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of a case or a comparison among cases, a case study is the right approach. Latinas' life narratives (Appendix C), semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D), and demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) provided this study with the needed research data. Specifically, the demographic questionnaire was developed to collect relevant background information in a consistent manner to compare across individual cases (Orozco, 2007).

The research questions in this study were addressed most appropriately using a qualitative research methodology where individual cases were studied in order to inquire into a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). The cases studied were of five (5) Latina undergraduate college students utilizing the demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) and two face-to-face semi-structured interviews that included their life narratives and open-ended questions. During the face-to-face interviews, the interviewer met twice with each participant. During the first interview, each participant told her life story for about 60 minutes. During the second interview and for about 60 minutes, the participants were asked semi-structured questions. The follow-up

interview clarified points made during the first life narrative interview. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to make comparisons between groups or establish a relationship between variables by asking why, qualitative methods were utilized in this study because the nature of the research questions focused on how, what, and in what ways which required exploration and description (Creswell, 2013). The face-to-face semi-structured interviews solicited women's narratives; the questions drew direct answers from participants in their own words, while they talked about their perceptions and understandings of their personal experiences in higher education. This data was enriched with the results from the demographic questionnaire.

Definition of Terms

There are terms found in Latino literature and research that are clarified for the purposes of this study. Therefore, these terms are defined below.

Academic persistence*:* Conceptualized as the student's decision to stay in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The concept has been referred to sometimes as retention, although academic persistence is defined as the ability to stay in school and work toward degree completion (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Studies concentrating on academic persistence of students from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds found that academic persistence decisions can be affected by a number of factors, which include students' perceptions of the college cultural environment (whether supportive or hostile), cultural congruity between home culture and college culture, self-beliefs about own ability to obtain a college degree and social support (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996).

Acculturation*:* Refers to the acquisition by one group of those characteristics, values, and behaviors of another group, without giving up its own values and behaviors. According to Freeman and Freeman, "A person can take on a new culture without giving up his or her primary

culture. This is acculturation, and the result can be bilingualism and biculturalism" (2001, p. 78.)

Freeman and Freeman (2001) argue further that students are able to maintain their first language

and culture and learn English while succeeding academically.

College experiences: Refers to the social and academic interactions that students have

during their college years with peers, faculty members, university personnel, and institutional

rules and regulations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

Cultural assimilation: Refers to the gradual cultural incorporation by a minority group

of some cultural traits that belong to the majority society's repertoire of cultural norms. This

process happens when the minority cultural group adopts the behaviors, characteristics, and

values of the majority group. Freeman and Freeman agreed by stating, "Assimilation involves

losing one's primary culture and becoming similar to those of the target culture" (2001, p. 43).

Cultural congruity*:* Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (1996) define cultural congruity as

the fit between students' personal and institutional values. This fit furthers students'

interpersonal connectedness and cultural validation within their college environment. The "fit of

values" helps students develop a sense of collectivity perceived in their interactions with peers

and faculty. Students' sense of belonging allows them to feel that they are an important part of a

larger family (*familismo)* and a larger community in which they are active participants

(embracing of *comunidad*-community) (Hurtado, 1989). Cultural congruity affects students'

college adjustment, psychological wellbeing, and persistence in their decision-making processes

(Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004; Gloria et al., 2005).

Cultural dissonance/incongruity: Ybarra (2001) coined the term cultural dissonance

from the more frequently used notion of cognitive dissonance to bring attention to issues related

to cultural differences embedded within thinking patterns. Ybarra argues that "the lack of

understanding, the fear, and the suspicions all originate in the cultural and linguistic dissonance that arises between Latino students' discourse patterns and academic patterns of writing" (2001, p. 48).

Culture: Castellanos and Jones (2003) state that culture is the ideations, symbols, behaviors, values, customs, and beliefs that are shared by a human group. Culture is transmitted through language, material objects, rituals and institutions, and it is passed from one generation to the next.

Gender*:* The Merriam-Webster dictionary (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender), defines gender as the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits associated typically with one sex. Nancy Chodorow, an interdisciplinary scholar who defines herself as a feminist psychologist, develops this definition further by stating that "gender difference is not absolute, abstract, or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender. Gender differences, and the experience of difference, as differences among women, are socially and psychologically created and situated" (1997, p. 9).

Identity*:* Schutte (2000) defines identity as "the specificity of a person's self-image and values," rather than "the metaphysical sense of a oneness that exists in the midst of change and variations" (p. 74).

Latinas' gender role expectations: Harris Canul states that "Gender roles are ascribed through socialization and cultural transmission" (2003, p. 172). The Latino culture is traditionally family and community oriented. The stress is not placed on the individual but rather on the collective and, therefore, decisions such as college attendance are made with the consent and support of family members (Orozco, 2003). Because Latino culture usually is influenced by religion (Catholicism in particular), Latinas' gendered socialization is influenced highly by

Catholic values and beliefs: "The gendered role of motherhood and being a nurturer, values espoused by the Catholic church, are tantamount of a 'good woman' (Holling, 2006, p. 89). Expectations for Latinas to be "good women" in their culture are connected not only to motherhood but also to keeping "*la familia*." Latinas negotiate the importance that their culture places on the family constantly, generating a psychological struggle between pursuing an education and fulfilling the traditional highly valued roles of being a wife and a mother (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996; Orozco, 2003).

Latino/a: Latinos are a diverse and heterogeneous group of individuals, formed by subgroups of people who trace their ancestry to México, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, as well as other countries in Central and South America (Gracia & DeGreiff, 2000). The term Latino does not refer to a specific race, it rather includes individuals from different races. It characterizes people from various indigenous origins as White, Asian, Black (due to colonization and immigration waves from Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia) and every single possible combination among those races (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). The three largest Latino ethnic populations in the U.S.A. are Mexican Americans (63%), Puerto Ricans (9.2%), and Cuban Americans (3.5%) (U.S. Census, 2010). Central Americans and South Americans make-up 4.8% and 3.8% of the total Latino population respectively (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Language spoken cannot be a determinant factor in identifying Latinos either, since individuals from this population group speak different languages (Gracia & DeGreiff, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). Besides Spanish and Portuguese (languages imposed by European colonization), Latinos speak many indigenous languages. In South America, for example, Quechua, Guaraní, Aymara, Mocoví, Ona, Puelche, Záparo, Chiripá are spoken; in Central America Kriol, Maya, Boruca, Garifuna, Akateko, Emberá, Pipil are spoken; and Nahuatl,

Purhepecha, Tarahumara, Huichol, Kikapoo, Zapotec, Huave and over 36 Mayan languages are spoken in México alone (Gordon, 2005).

For practical purposes, the definition of Latino ethnicity used in the 2010 U.S. Census stated that: "Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Further, Latinos in the U.S.A. could be:

(a) The original inhabitants of territories that belonged to Mexico and were appropriated by the U.S.A. in 1848 as a result of the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (such territories are now the states of California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico).

(b) Citizens of countries that were annexed by the U.S.A. (Puerto Rico).

(c) From first to fifth generation immigrants from Central and South America and Spain.

(d) The original inhabitants of territories in the Americas that were colonized originally by Spain and Portugal.

Therefore, this study adopts the definition used in the 2010 U.S. census, where the term Latino referred to this population in the broadest and most inclusive sense of the word.

Latina identity*:* Anzaldúa (1987) offers a workable use of the term identity as a concept flexible enough to go beyond the simplistic utilization of univocal categories such as gender or race. Anzaldúa proposes to understand identity (in this case of Latina women) as an *amasamiento* (kneading), where a person claims all aspects of her/his identity (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, native language/s, place of origin) without leaving anything aside. This definition requires women to learn how to embrace the ambiguity of terms and accept their complex identities as a privilege rather than a handicap (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Mestiza: The art of transforming from one culture to another (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Self-efficacy: The belief in one's ability to successfully complete a task or behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study:

1. The number of participants. This research was based upon a collection of personal narratives offered by five Latina students gathered through personal interviews. Therefore, the number of participants limited this study.

2. Language barriers. The Latina women involved in this research had varying degrees of fluency in English and Spanish languages. The author used her bilingual skills to maximize the opportunity to grasp the full meaning of Latinas' responses in both languages. As Spanish is spoken differently in different countries, regions and areas from where Latinas come, varying degrees of semantic differences in the utilization of the language may have affected the understanding partially of the true meaning of what the Spanish speaking Latinas conveyed during the interviews.

3. Latinas' diversity. There is a wide range of gender, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics that are included in the utilization of the term Latina and also among this study's participants. This study included women who self-identified as Latinas and took into consideration as much as possible the participants' different backgrounds but was unable to account exhaustively for all differences.

4. Participants' geographic location: Due to the nature and location of this qualitative research, this study involved only Latinas residing in the Midwest, which limited the scope of the study.

5. Researcher's background. This study was conducted by a Latina, immigrant woman. Therefore, the researcher brought her personal experiences and biases to the study.

Significance of the Study

Rapid and challenging demographic changes require, among other elements, adequate responses to the educational needs of a large, young, and fast growing Latino/a population. Latinos constitute the largest growing segment of the U.S.A. population and they are the largest underrepresented ethnic group with the lowest level of college attainment among females in the U.S.A. It is important that research explores and identifies factors that contribute to the educational success of this population.

It is known widely that both male and female Latino students face challenges in the U.S.A. educational system. Similar to what they experienced during the K-12 school years, Latino college students face significant socio-cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, financial, interpersonal, institutional, cognitive, and environmental roadblocks (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). To explain high drop out rates among Latinas, many researchers and practitioners have focused on a deficit perspective, assuming that Latino students, their families, and Latino culture were the primary reasons for Latinos' college attrition. Excluded from such analyses were the assessment of the effectiveness and cultural sensitivity of existing educational programs, practices and curricula, the institutional climate, faculty interaction with students, and college-home cultural dissonance (Gloria et al., 2005; Nora et al., 2006).

Latinas' gender, ethnicity, race, and college experiences affect their educational achievements directly and, thus, they face burdensome roadblocks on their way to obtaining a college degree (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Because most research concentrated on understanding Latinas' educational experiences from a cultural deficit perspective, scarce attention was given to

the personal understanding that Latinas have of these challenges, as well as of the responses and coping strategies that they utilize to navigate the postsecondary educational environment successfully (Rodríguez et al., 2000). Research and data are lacking on Latinas' own accounts of their college experiences and the strategies they utilize to persist in college. It is imperative to research Latinas' educational experiences from ethnic, cultural, and gender points of view utilizing Latinas' personal narratives of their college experiences (Gándara & Osugi, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2000).

Researcher's Bias

To strengthen this study, the researcher's background is identified. The researcher's awareness and acknowledgment of her personal values and assumptions ensure the validity and reliability of the study further (Guba, 1978). As the researcher, I am a heterosexual, married woman, born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The granddaughter of European immigrants (Spaniards and Italians), the daughter of professional, middle class parents and the oldest of four siblings, I was educated in public schools K-12 and graduated with a Licenciatura (5 year-degree plus 2 year residency) in Psychology from the University of Buenos Aires (a public university). About 25 years ago, my husband (a philosopher) and I came to the U.S.A. to attend graduate school. I pursued a M.Ed. at Harvard University with an emphasis in risk and prevention. Given that we were graduate students and had a newborn baby girl, I did not pursue a Ph.D. and instead entered the labor force to provide for my family while my husband finished his Ph.D. at Brown University. Upon his graduation, we lived for several months in England on a post-doctoral fellowship and later came back to the U.S.A., where we both were offered jobs at Kansas State University. We have lived in Manhattan, Kansas for the past 17 years.

Immigrating to the U.S.A. meant for me not only a drastic change in my daily life, but

most importantly, it meant a sudden change from being who I was to being defined as a Latina by the new society of which I was part of. This experience was perplexing, paralyzing for a while, and meant that my entire world had to be redefined following the cultural norms of the new society. It was made evident that I spoke a language that was devalued, came from a "Third World Country", and belonged to a Latino culture that also was devalued.

Starting graduate school gave me the opportunity to start my journey to regain my professional life, while embarking on a quest to find out what it meant for me to be a Latina in the U.S.A. and how this definition affected my core being. Raising a daughter in a different society from the one I was raised was not only a daunting task, but also a great opportunity to understand American culture from a different viewpoint. It was a prime opportunity to get to know this new society from a different angle; and I took it on wholeheartedly.

The adaptation process that followed my immigration to the U.S.A. was informal and for years narrated in letters to my family but mostly to my mother, who always lived in Argentina. In reading my letters today and her letters to me, the power of clarity, connection with others, and testimony that life narratives provide becomes evident. I consider them a direct window into lived experiences, and as such life narratives allow immediate access to the state of mind of the narrator.

By virtue of my Latina status in the U.S.A., I am empathetic to shared stories of Latina women's realities. I am convinced that because I am a Latina woman, other Latina women will feel more comfortable sharing their stories with someone who is a member of their ethnic group. Moreover, I believe my experiences in the U.S.A. as a Latina immigrant are not unique, but also understand that I had a privileged arrival into this society: I came to the U.S.A. legally (which allowed me to go back and forth to see my family in my home country); I had the financial

means for survival and travel; I attended a prestigious Ivy League university; I came from a middle-class background and had educated parents; I am physically and mentally able; I am married and heterosexual; I speak three languages fluently (Spanish, English, and Italian) and understand Portuguese and French; and I am white.

As the researcher, I made several assumptions in this study. I assumed that students participated in this study willingly, answered the questions truthfully, and that they discussed their college experiences in a manner that described their experiences honestly, fully reflecting their state of minds. I also assumed that the Latina students intended to participate in this study to produce high quality results. I assumed that my personal biographical reflection and investment in the subject guided the study and directed the interviews toward a rich and informative depth of data and analysis.

Organization of the Study

This is a qualitative, multiple participant case study designed to investigate how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' academic persistence and college graduation, as experienced by five Latinas in a predominately White, Research Extensive Midwestern State University. It is organized into five chapters: Chapter 1 presents the context to understand the need for the study and provides an overview of the research questions and design. Chapter 2 reviews the research literature related to how gender, ethnicity and college experiences affect Latinas' academic persistence. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology that guided the research and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Chapter 5 presents the discussion, implications, and recommendations for further research studies.

Chapter 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is organized into the following sections: (1) cultural congruity theory (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) as a theoretical framework to focus specifically on cultural factors that affect Latinas' college persistence; (2) the theoretical and empirical research on the social and cultural challenges encountered by Latinos in college; (3) a review of the cultural deficit model prevalent in the research of underrepresented ethnic groups and low socio-economic status students; (4) the importance of Latina women's gender role expectations; (5) Tinto's theory of student departure; (6) how Latinas' college experiences affect their ethnic identities and, thus, influence their college persistence; (7) life narratives, and (8) a summary.

As described in Chapter 1, although the number of Latinos enrolling in college is rising, this population faces educational and cultural challenges that contribute to their poor college adjustment, which influence their college retention and graduation rates negatively (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Darder, Torres, & Gutiérrez, 1997; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Hurtado, Carter, & Faye, 1997; Orozco, 2003). Compared to 47% of non-Latino White students, only 23% of Latino students graduate from college (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Darder et al., 1997; U.S. Census, 2004, 2010). Further, evidence suggests that Latino students are more likely than non-Latino students to drop out of school during the first two years of college.

The college graduation gap between White and Latino students remains a complex area of research that has received attention only recently in the literature (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006). In the last three decades, quantitative and qualitative studies explored factors related to

underrepresented and dominant students' college experiences (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 2003; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Nora et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1990; Rendon, 1994). Villalpando (2010) compared two and four-year college enrollment for White and Latino students in the fall semesters of 1990, 1995, and 2002, finding that Latino students were overrepresented in two-year institutions in comparison with their White counterparts (Villalpando, 2010).

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Congruity

The theoretical framework for this study is cultural congruity (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) because it contextualizes the understanding of Latinas' culture of origin and its value in relation to the cultural values upheld by institutions of higher education's dominant culture. To understand better college social adjustment of students from underrepresented ethnic groups, Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (1996) proposed a cultural congruity theory, which refers to the students' perceived cultural fit between their personal values and those of the educational institution they attend.

A good fit between the values of the home and those of the educational institution prompts Latino students' interpersonal connectedness and subsequent cultural validation within the university environment. Further, Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (1996) indicate that a good fit of values may assist students in gaining a sense of collectivity that evidences itself in the classroom (e.g., during group activities), embracing values such as *comunidad* (e.g., Latino scholars and leaders in residence), and value of *familismo* displayed openly with peers and faculty members (e.g., out of the classroom learning experiences). Because it affects college adjustment directly, psychological well-being, and persistence decision making processes, university officials are called to ensure and enhance cultural congruity as a central aspect of

educational experiences for Latino and Latina students. Cultural congruity translates into collective identity and is the reverse of the cultural disconnection of a university's non-inclusive curriculum that reflects only white culture and traditional pedagogies while reinforcing individualistic learning.

In their study, Gloria and Robinson Kurpius's (1996) developed, piloted, and validated two measures theoretically relevant to the persistence of Chicano/a students in institutions of higher education. They developed and tested two scales, the Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) and the University Environment Scale (UES). Both scales were tested, piloted, and then administered to 454 Chicano/a undergraduate students at two large, southwestern universities. The authors found strong internal consistencies for both scales. Therefore, there were significant predictors of academic persistence decisions among these students. Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (1996) found that students were more likely to persist in college if they perceived that there was a cultural fit between students' personal values and those of the college attended. Students who perceived greater cultural congruity indicated their increased decision to persist in college (Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996).

In their cultural congruity theory, Gloria and Robinson-Kurpius (1996) indicated the key elements that must be present at a university for Latinas' and Latinos' academic persistence and success. They indicated that the university curriculum must reflect Latinos' community values in order to offer a connection between the learning objectives and the students' lives. The authors established further that group activities, shared communication, and mutual reciprocity between faculty and students must be established to ensure a quality learning environment that promotes cultural congruity. Gloria and Robinson-Kurpius state that this promotion can be accomplished by bringing multiple speakers and guest lecturers who address cultural issues, practice Latina and

Latino-centered pedagogies, and reinforce Latina and Latino students' identities and educational experiences in the classroom. They also state that it is crucial that the university have a critical mass of Latina and Latino faculty who can advocate the cause of Latina and Latino students, guide and mentor them through their educational experiences, and serve as role models in bridging cultural affirmation and scholarly identities. Congruence is an important factor as well in the area of scholarship. Cultural congruity should be made evident between Latinos' values of *comunidad* within the context of research because it can shape one aspect of congruence for students, in particular scholar programs that promote academic integration through cultural learning. Such programs may generate ethnic exploration, affirmation, and community understanding, therein heightening the fit of values (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996).

 Earlier Studies on College Persistence

Earlier studies related to student college retention and graduation focused on students' academic ability and preparation for college, but more recent research suggested that college adjustment is a more comprehensive concept for understanding the academic success of students from underrepresented ethnic groups (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Cardoza, 1991; Gil & Inoa-Vázquez, 1996; Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003; Parra, 2007). For Latino students, the culture of the educational institution they attend is different from their home culture. Only recently has the culture of the academic institution attended by Latino students received increased attention. Young (1992) interviewed 218 Mexican American female college students to find out how ethnicity and gender role expectations at home affected the time it took for them to complete a baccalaureate degree. The findings revealed that 26% of the participants were more likely to drop out of school when they lacked family support or when their family opposed their academic pursuits. Additionally, findings showed that 72% of the women

experienced interruptions to attend family matters while studying at home. Lastly, half of the participants reported feeling guilt about spending time at the university instead of with their families. Young's findings underscored the importance of familial support for Latina students, but also the fit between family values and those of the university attended. In traditional Latino culture, it is the collective and not the individual that is stressed (Gloria, 1999; Orozco, 2007). Thus, although the family may be viewed as having a secondary importance in a university environment, Latinas in college are expected by their families to place the interests of the family and group before their own personal pursuits (Gloria, 1997; Orozco, 2007). Contrarily, college culture expects Latinas to place their families' interests as secondary in importance while in college, and thus this discrepancy generates cultural dissonance between home and college values for Latinas in college (Orozco, 2007).

It is important for Latinas to understand, adapt, and navigate the institutional rules and expectations successfully while at the same time know that their home culture is accepted by the university they attend (Arbona & Nora, 2007; DeMirjyn, 2005; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; González, 2002; Holling, 2006; Nora et al., 2006). Nora et al. (2006) reported that Latinas in college experience feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and culture shock, and often times report that their interests and backgrounds are paid negative or no attention in the university curricula. Such feelings of alienation in college are worsened by a marked scarcity of Latino faculty and mentors, therefore generating clear dissonance between home and college expectations and values. Nora (2003) speculated that cultural dissonance affects Latinas' college persistence and degree attainment negatively. Alternatively, Bañuelos (2006) reported that finding supportive spaces in college (e.g., peer networks and mentoring) fostered Latinos' sense of belonging to the institution and, therefore, a stronger commitment to

their graduation goals (Bañuelos, 2006).

Social Adjustment as a Predictor of College Persistence

A growing body of literature focuses on Latino students' social adjustment as an important predictor of college persistence (Choi-Pearson & Gloria, 1995; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). For example, to examine cultural congruity between college culture and home culture for students from underrepresented ethnic groups, Cervantes (1988) found that students from underrepresented ethnic groups believed that in order to be accepted in college, they had to change themselves and become similar to the dominant group. Cervantes (1988) conducted interviews with 29 students (15 Latinos/Chicanos, eight African Americans, and six Asian Americans) and found that 100% of these students believed that they had to change themselves in order to be similar to the majority group in college in order to be socially accepted. Common comments from students were: "people want me to strip my identity in order to remain here" (p. 37); another said "it is expected that you talk and act in a certain way, so I can act like a White person, and I can talk intellectually, so I am not as discriminated against as people who have an accent" (p. 37). These statements indicate a lack of cultural congruity that is experienced frequently by students from underrepresented ethnic groups in college (Cervantes, 1988; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996.)

The cultural fit between home and college culture for Latino students, including perceptions of social support, validation of Latino culture, the existence of role models among the faculty, and multicultural activities and groups were related to college persistence rates (Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999). For Latino college students, even generating a link between their home culture and their college's culture may be a deciding factor in college persistence and graduation (Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; Gloria et al., 2005; González,

2002). Gloria and colleagues (2005) suggested that the students' views about the university environment in relation to their own cultural values are linked to students' decisions about staying in or dropping out of college. They stated that "as academia is based largely on White male cultural values, Latinas/os are challenged to negotiate the inherent cultural incongruity between the university's values and their personal cultural values" (p. 319). Gloria et al. (2005) studied the degree to which perceived educational barriers, cultural fit, and coping responses predict the psychological wellbeing of Latina college students. This was a relevant study that examined empirically Latina college students' psychological wellbeing within the context of an institution of higher education and their differences in background (e.g., generational level).

Gloria et al. (2005) assessed students' educational characteristics (e.g., class standing) and the interrelationships among the study's variables. These authors surveyed 102 Latina undergraduate students. Seventy-three participants were Mexican Americans, nine Central Americans, four South Americans, one Cuban, and one Puerto Rican. Fourteen participants reported that their families were not born in the U.S.A. and 54 stated that someone in their family was born in the U.S.A. Sixteen participants were freshmen, 14 sophomores, 34 juniors and 33 seniors (one missing). When asked about familial education, almost three-fourths of Latinas reported that one or both of their parents never attended college. The participants were asked to complete a demographic sheet, a perception of barriers scale (POB), the university environment scale (UES), the cultural congruity scale (CCS), and a list of coping responses (LCR). Examination of the results revealed that the most common coping response was to talk to others about problems, the second was to find out more about the situation and take a positive and planned action, and the third was to draw upon their past experiences. The authors concluded that in understanding educational barriers for Latinas, further studies were needed as intolerant

college environments often discount culture, thereby resulting in Latina students feeling unwelcomed, alienated, invisible, and culturally incongruent.

Dominant group's values such as independence (vs. interdependence), competition (vs. collaboration), self-importance (vs. group-importance), or even worldliness (vs. spirituality) are expected by and embedded in institutions of higher education and, therefore, many of academia's values clash with the Latino culture's values (Gloria et al., 1996; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; González, 2002; Watson, 2002). Therefore, it is not surprising that Latino students find themselves unprepared to negotiate such contrasting sets of values (Castellanos & Gloria, 2003; Gloria et al., 2005; Torres, 1999). This, in turn, generates psychosocial stress for Latino students, leading to feelings of alienation, isolation, despondence, and a sense of not belonging in academia that ultimately affects negatively their willingness to persist in college (Gloria et al., 2005, Hurtado, 1994).

A good quality fit between home and institutional culture could be a deciding factor in Latinos' ability to persist in college and graduate (Gloria et al., 2005), but the lack of cultural congruity between home and college affect Latinos/as academic persistence negatively. Bañuelos (2006) stated that having a sense of community and belonging is critical for Latinos/as to be successful in college and that the existence or lack of such fit determines how Latinos/as' life experiences and attitudes are understood and valued by their educational institution. For Latinos, when cultural congruity is established between their home and college's cultures, it affirms a feeling of belonging that validates their own identity as active thinkers and cultural producers (Bañuelos, 2006).

The importance of college students' perception of their integration into their educational institution's social environment cannot be overlooked: Most often, the college

environment reflects a predominately White culture, where the norms are the values, beliefs and behaviors of dominant U.S.A. White culture (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Castillo and colleagues (2006) found that the university's culture defines group norms and expectations and that ethnically diverse groups may be at a disadvantage if they claim a heritage different from a White, majority one (Castillo et al., 2006).

Often, behaviors, cultural values, and beliefs that differ from sanctioned academic norms are understood at these institutions as deviant or abnormal, making students from underrepresented ethnic groups feel uncomfortable and that they do not belong (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Students from underrepresented ethnic groups may experience cultural incongruity in college when their values, beliefs, and home cultures are incompatible with those of their colleges. Choi-Pearson and Gloria (1995) stated that college students from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds experience cultural shock when entering U.S.A. institutions of higher education that are predominately White. Further, individuals from backgrounds that are different from those of the dominant majority college students may experience cultural incongruity if their culture and the college culture are incompatible in terms of values, beliefs, and behavioral expectations (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). These authors suggested that Latino students' isolation in college is the direct result of being part of one of the few racial/ethnic underrepresented student groups on campus (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Often times, Latinos in college perceive that they have to make a choice between their own cultural values and those of the dominant culture, while having their own identities questioned continuously (Fiske, 1988). Hurtado and Carter (1997) stated

that Latinos perceive their college environment as hostile, alienating, and unwelcoming, and that they experience both discrimination and lack of peers and faculty acceptance.

The absence of cultural congruity between college and Latino students' homes generates environmental dissonance between the students' cultural values and those of the institution, which, in turn, generates students' cultural shock, feelings of self-doubt, and low self-esteem (Rendón, 1992). Additional environmental dissonance occurs when the course curriculum is inconsistent with Latinos' cultural values, is inattentive to ethnic-related research topics, and exhibits lack of interest on the part of the faculty to include culturally sensitive material (Torres, 2007). Therefore, the level of dissonance that is felt between the students and the college's cultural environment influences directly how Latino students situate themselves within academia, and this positioning affects their responses to faculty, student peers, and their own views of their academic discipline (Torres, 2007).

Cultural incongruity affects Latino males and females differently. While some Latinas explore, understand, adapt, and navigate their college experiences successfully, others have a difficult time in college and don't graduate. A common feature in the literature on Latinos and their college education is to situate the experience of Latina college students within the context of their male counterparts. It is only recently that a call was made to examine the genderized experiences of Latinas in higher education (e.g., Gloria et al., 2005; Rodríguez, Guido Di-Brito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). Also, it is the case frequently that the realities of Latinas in college are placed under the larger umbrella of underrepresented college women in general. In contrast to Whites and Blacks, Latinas' college persistence has not improved since 1990 (Gloria et al., 2005; NCES, 2003) and Latinas are underrepresented particularly in institutions of higher education, not only as students but also as faculty (Gloria

et al., 2005). Given the slow educational progress for Latinas in the last twenty years, increased research addressing their college experiences is paramount (Gloria et al., 2005).

Latinas and Cultural Congruity

For Latinas, cultural congruity between the university attended and their home has beneficial effects on their academic persistence (Gloria et al., 2005). Moreover, Latinas who experience higher cultural congruity tend to perceive fewer educational barriers in college and, therefore, are less inclined to drop out of college. They also tend to cope better in academia when using a positive, planned, and active approach. Lastly, high cultural congruity was associated positively and consistently with a positive perception of the university attended (Gloria et al., 2005). Castellanos and Gloria (2007) state that it is vital to change the existing institutional climate to address Latinas' college persistence conscientiously. They suggest addressing this issue within a comprehensive framework that includes the role of the individual, the social environment, and the culture (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Such an interpretation of Latinas' college experiences involves a re-definition of their educational goals, while centering on strength-based practices (e.g., revalorizing family ties, culturally sensitive academic mentorship, and cultural congruity). Further, Gloria et al. (2005) assert that a transformation of the existing academic perspective that addresses Latinas and their college experiences is vital to understand the complexity of Latinas' pathways in college to improve their college persistence.

Gloria et al. (2005) state that the core cultural values for Latinos in general are called *familismo* (family ties), and *comunidad* (community). *Familismo* refers to the emphasis on collectivism, cooperation, and intergenerational family ties. In the specific case of Latinas, family ties play a critical role in their adjustment to college (Castellanos & Gloria, 2003), stress

management (Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath, & Landingham, 2006), and college persistence (Hurtado, 1994). Conversely, a lack of sense of *familismo* for Latinas in college generates high levels of distress that affect their college persistence negatively (Castellanos & Gloria, 2003; Hurtado, 1994). The value of *comunidad* (the caring for and responsibility of community) is relevant because it denotes the importance of interpersonal relations, tapping into aspects of loyalty, solidarity, and reciprocity inherent to familial relationships (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). In sum, *familismo* and *comunidad* ensure that Latinas stay connected with each other and related to their environment in ways that are comforting and supportive (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

When Latinas' core values are incongruent with those of the college attended, they are faced with the challenge of retaining their cultural values while adapting to the dominant culture's values. The existence, or lack thereof, of cultural congruity between these two sets of values in college is one framework through which we can understand Latinas' adaptation to college. Latinas attending four-year institutions encounter few culturally sensitive role models within the faculty and the higher administration (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). This is explained in part due to Latinos having the lowest representation among faculty in the U.S.A. (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). To illustrate the reality of the lack of underrepresented role models in college, in 1997 the American Council on Education (ACE) found that only 13.7% of all full-time faculty in higher education institutions were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups compared to 86.3% of White full-time faculty (American Council on Education, 2001). Arredondo and Castellanos (2003) identified a severe lack of Latina women in the professorial ranks, accounting in 1995 for only 2.7% of the full time faculty in higher education. In institutions of higher education, culturally sensitive role models are a

key element for fostering feelings of belonging in students from underrepresented ethnic groups in college (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). These authors state that faculty from underrepresented ethnic groups are prepared better to deal with diversity issues, are more inclined to mentor and support students from underrepresented ethnic groups, are more comfortable dealing with diverse students, and are more likely to include diverse values in their pedagogical practices, thus validating diverse students' cultural background and values (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). Thus, the lack of Latino faculty mentors in college limits Latina students' ability to find culturally sensitive role models who will guide and support them while in college. In the last two decades, Latinas have made relative progress in pursuing and obtaining terminal degrees, becoming tenured faculty, and occupying positions in central administration of colleges and universities (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Harris Canul, 2003). Because universities still do not consistently have a significant body of Latinas among their faculty, there remains a lack of culturally sensitive role models for new Latina students who are trying to succeed in higher education.

The lack of cultural congruity between home culture values and the cultural values of the educational institution are reflected in most traditional studies, where the measurement of Latinas' academic success is based upon a middle class, Euro-American norm (Delgado Bernal, et al., 2006). It is a common assumption in many institutions of higher education that Latinas arrive to college under-prepared, have no clear academic goals, and are, in most cases, bound for academic failure. When identifying contributing factors that explain Latinas' poor academic performance, researchers and university administrators commonly mention gender, ethnicity, low socio-economic background, bilingualism, lack of English skills, absence of consistent schooling, differing family values from dominant culture, lack of understanding of dominant

culture, and attendance in low-performance schools (Gándara, 1982; Nora et al., 2006; Torres, 2007; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). However, recent studies have changed the traditional view of these women's educational experiences: What was understood before as weaknesses in Latinas' backgrounds is now re-interpreted as potential sources of strength and resilience (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Orozco, 2007).

Central to this study are characteristics important to Latinas' academic persistence, such as understanding institutional rules and expectations, sense of purpose in college, motivation to learn, actively meeting academic demands, general satisfaction with the college environment, availability of Latina faculty, mentorship, and peer networks. Barriers to Latinas' college graduation included academic and social isolation, feelings of inadequacy, cultural shock, and cultural invisibility.

Social and Cultural Challenges Faced by Latinos/as in College Settings

As a wider range of studies centered on Latinos' college persistence, researchers identified social, cultural, and economic barriers that challenged Latino youth while pursuing a college degree. Barriers encountered by Latinos after entering college included financial concerns, lack of academic preparation, absence of home/college cultural congruity, and familial and social obligations (Rodríguez et al., 2000). Among these barriers, two are especially relevant to this study: The White mono-cultural educational model prevalent in institutions of higher education and the lack of importance given to students in need of social support.

Mono-cultural Educational Model

Stage and Manning (1992) and Vigil Laden (2004) argued that the existing White, mono-cultural model of most U.S.A. colleges ignores the cultural traditions, norms, and perspectives of other racial and ethnic groups. To explore the extent to which this model influenced the climate of

the educational institutions, researchers as Gloria et al. (2005); Fry (2009); Gupton, Castelo-Rodríguez, Martínez and Quintanar (2009); Nora et al. (2006), and Torres (2003) focused on the analysis of issues such as institutional climate, cultural dissonance between home and college, importance of having culturally relevant mentors and role models, and the existence/lack of support programs, culturally pertinent practices and curricula at the college level. These studies asserted that the barriers faced by Latinos were interrelated, and cognitive and non-cognitive in nature.

There is a growing body of research that urges educational institutions to acknowledge positively the value of the sociocultural capital that is present in low income and underrepresented ethnic communities (González, 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu (1986) developed the concept of cultural capital in the early 1960s to help address that economic obstacles are not sufficient to explain disparities in the educational attainment of youth from different social classes. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that beyond economic factors, the cultural habits and dispositions inherited from "the family are fundamentally important to school success" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 14). Bourdieu (1986) broke with the traditional sociological conceptions of culture as a source of shared norms and values. Instead, Bourdieu (1986) maintained that culture shares many of the properties that are characteristic of economic capital. Specifically, he asserted that cultural habits are resources capable of generating cultural profits that, under appropriate conditions, can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu emphasized that any competence becomes a capital insofar as it facilitates the appropriation of a society's cultural heritage but is unequally distributed, thereby creating opportunities for exclusive advantages. He stated that in societies characterized by a highly differentiated social structure and a system of formal education, these advantages stem

greatly from the institutionalization of criteria of evaluation in schools—that is, standards of assessment—which are favorable to children from a particular class or classes and unfavorable to underrepresented students (Bourdieu, 1977). Yosso (2005) also critiques the static notions of cultural capital that are prevalent in institutions of higher education because they fail to recognize the community capital wealth among students of diverse backgrounds. This community wealth assists low socioeconomic students from underrepresented ethnic groups to be creative and resilient. Yosso (2005) affirms that the cultural capital that is community wealth needs to be built upon.

The White, mono-cultural paradigm offers a one-sided reading of the complex social realities that students inhabit, leaving aside important cultural capital found in diverse races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and countries of origin. For example, Yan's (1999) research indicates that academically successful African American college students bring their unique forms of social capital with them into the educational institutions that are distinct from Euro-centered, White, and middle class cultural norms. An important common denominator in these students' backgrounds was the high frequency with which their parents tended to contact their student's college regarding their future careers, more than White parents (Yan, 1999).

Importance of Social Support

Research continues to stress the importance that social support has in college persistence for Latino students, especially from the students' families (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Gándara, 1982; Orozco, 2007; Romo, 2005; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004; Torres, 2007; Zalaquett, 2005). Family support is especially important for first generation Latino students (Zalaquett, 2005). It is suggested that first generation college students are especially at risk for facing obstacles in college (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Gándara (1982) conducted a study to investigate

commonalities in the background variables of 17 educationally successful Mexican American women. These 17 women came from families where neither parent had completed their high school education, yet the female participants had earned J.D., M.D., or Ph.D. degrees. Gandara's findings revealed the importance of the mothers' role in promoting their daughters' educational drive and college perseverance. Thirteen of the 17 females reported that their mothers were equally, if not more, influential than their fathers with regards to their educational goals. Additionally, mothers, in comparison to fathers, were more likely to promote higher education and nontraditional gender roles. However, due to their limited educational attainment, the mothers in Gandara's study were unable to provide instrumental support, which included help with homework, academic and career choice guidance, and physical aid. Nonetheless, Gandara's results demonstrate the importance of emotional support from families for academically accomplished individuals, in this case Mexican American females who credited their success to the support of their mothers.

A decade later, Wycoff (1996) and Lango (1995) conducted similar research to that of Gandara's (1982), and published similar results in terms of the importance of the family's social support toward Mexican American daughters/students. Wycoff's research with 50 undergraduate Mexican American females investigated the sources of support that served as motivating variables for the students. Wycoff found mothers were perceived as the most supportive (90%) and fathers (60%) for all respondents. Lango (1995) found that 41% (majority) of Mexican American female students identified their mother as the strongest source of support, but fathers were not (Lango, 1996; Orozco, 2007).

Zalaquett (2005) documented the stories of Latina and Latino college students who, in spite of confronting great barriers, matriculated to a university. Zalaquett interviewed 10 females

and two males, and 10 of them were the first ones in their families to attend college. Some of the major barriers identified by the students included lack of or poor information for the college application process and academic choices and guidance, and scarce adult supervision. One of the students indicated that her biggest obstacle was that her parents could not help her apply to college because neither of them spoke English. However, in spite of the language impediments and lack of exposure to the cultural system, family support was identified as a critical factor that helped students to persist academically (Orozco, 2007).

Torres (2003), Fry (2009), and Gupton, Castelo-Rodríguez, Martínez, & Quintanar, (2009) suggested that challenges faced by Latino students in college were associated with the effects of cultural and gender role stereotyping, immigration status, educational under-preparation, social and family obligations, financial constraints, and institutional marginalization. Nora, Barlow, & Crisp (2006) identified other challenges that Latino students face in college, as well as sources and forms of support systems (Nora, 2003; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), student finances (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000), and discriminatory behaviors (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2003) presented relevant data on barriers that Latino students face when in college. The NCES obtains its data for the report from different sources, including federal and state agencies, private research organizations, and professional associations. The data for this report were collected using various sources including surveys, compilations of administrative records, and statistical projections. Some indicators report data from entire populations, such as *Indicator 39* (public elementary and secondary expenditures per student). With these data, information is collected from every member of the population surveyed. Therefore, this universe could be all U.S.A. colleges and universities or

every school district in the country. Other indicators report data from a statistical sample of the entire population. NCES cautions that when a sample is used, the statistical uncertainty introduced from having data from only a portion of the entire population must be considered in reporting estimates and making comparisons.

The NCES (2003) data analysis report listed some major obstacles that Latino students encounter once in college:

(1)   Inadequate and poor K-12 education: The lack of quality education leaves Latinos insufficiently prepared academically to confront the rigors of college education. A significant number of Latino students who graduate from high school have completed a less rigorous academic curriculum than White students. For example, in the key area of mathematics preparation, 46% of Latino high school graduates compared to 28% of White graduates did not complete Algebra II (a course that is taken most frequently in eleventh grade) or a higher-level mathematics course.

(2)   The higher education system's inadequacy to meet the educational and cultural needs of Latino students.

(3)   Culturally dissonant college environments that leave Latinos without appropriate educational resources, equal employment practices, sufficient financial support, and culturally sensitive course curricula, services, and role models.

(4)   Family environments that do not provide Latino students with adequate emotional, educational, and financial support.

Cultural Deficit Model

In the past three decades, much has been written about Latino students' college persistence, college engagement, academic performance, and first to second year persistence and

graduation (e.g., Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 2003; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Nora et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1990; Rendon, 1994; Villalpando, 2010). Research also focused on identifying those factors that contribute to Latinos' low college graduation rates.

Much of the initial research was guided by a cultural deficit model (CD). The CD model originated from negative beliefs and assumptions about the ability, aspirations and work ethic of underrepresented ethnic groups and the poor, and is not unrelated to eugenics and scientific racism (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). The CD model was based on the understanding that students from underrepresented ethnic groups did not do well in school because they lacked exposure to cultural models that were congruent with educational success (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). A White, middle class, European-centered cultural model is the dominant ideology that permeates educational institutions in the U.S.A. and universities are not exempt from it. Educational institutions instill and perpetuate this model, keeping in place social and economic inequalities, and thus place students from underrepresented ethnic groups and poor backgrounds specifically at a clear educational and social disadvantage while contributing to what Oakes (2005) calls the "intergenerational transmission of social and economic inequality" (p. xi) (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Oakes, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Therefore, educational institutions not only mirror the larger scheme of perpetuation of poverty in our society, but they provide the arena where class, gender, and racial oppressions are effected and perpetuated, keeping in place a capitalist system where racism and sexism perpetuates poverty (Taylor, 2009). Taylor (2009) states further that poverty (as well as oppression) is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted, bred in the intersections of historical, political, social, legal, and personal of multiple dimensions overly involved in racism and capitalism. For women from underrepresented ethnic

groups in general and Latina students in particular, race and social class intersect with gender oppression, reproducing unequal opportunities for them at the university level and beyond (Taylor, 2009).

Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) indicated that the CD model attributed the lack of academic persistence of students from underrepresented ethnic groups and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds to the characteristics of their families and cultures, invoking negative stereotypes and assumptions regarding certain groups of individuals. In sum, the CD model operated under the belief that underrepresented ethnic groups and poor students' families did not value education and, therefore, located the students' educational barriers within the students themselves, their families, and their communities (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). The CD model, embedded deeply within the fabric of educational institutions, was propagated via educational research and within teacher preparation programs (González, 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Trueba, 1998; Valencia, 1997). Valenzuela (1999) affirms that the result of the CD model is devastating educationally and personally to students from underrepresented ethnic groups, making schools a subtractive experience for students of color and low socioeconomic background. Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) stated that the CD model failed to address the problems of the educational system, the schools themselves, and society at large, absolving the latter from its responsibility in educating all students to their potential.

Most studies that attempted to explain Latinos' low academic persistence centered on the CD model, which assumed that Latino students, families, and culture were the primary reasons for their low college persistence (González, 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Nora et al., 2006; Trueba, 1998; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Some studies concentrated on the barriers that affected negatively Latino students' ability to succeed academically, especially

before attending college (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Cuádraz, 2005; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Díaz-Greenberg, 2003; Fry, 2009; Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2004; Hu & St. John, 2001; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). Some authors hypothesized that Latinos/as were affected negatively by familial and gender roles that constrained students into rigid role expectations that were divorced from dominant culture's educational and social expectations (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Gloria et al., 2005; Harris Canul, 2003; Nora et al., 2006). Other studies identified factors that played a key role in Latino students' difficulties in persisting and graduating from four-year colleges such as low socio-economic status, first generation college students, economically dependent families, parents' low educational attainment, siblings' school dropout, limited English language proficiency, frequent change of schools, being held back in K-12 schools, and bearing children during high school years (González, 2002; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; PEW Hispanic Center, 2008; Trueba, 1988; Unger-Palmer, 2003; Valencia, 1997; Vien, 2010; Villalpando, 2010; Young, 1992).

Despite its pervasive influence, CD-based research has been discredited by a growing body of literature. By blaming students and their families for low educational persistence, the CD model failed to examine institutionalized barriers (such as school funding, tracking, racial and ethnic segregation) that affect student achievement (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). These authors state further that the CD paradigm fails to acknowledge the connections between school practices, the sociopolitical factors that shape these efforts, and students' educational outcomes and academic persistence (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). Lastly, the CD paradigm failed to explain why some of these same students from underrepresented ethnic groups and poor students, exposed to the same limitations as those who did not persist academically, stayed in

college and graduated successfully (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Rodríguez Morales, 2011).

Latinas' Gender Role Expectations

Latina women encounter not only racial and ethnic biases as college students, but also gender oppression as women. Psychologists Belenky, Blythe, Golderberger, and Tarule's (1997) gender theory was useful to understand women's ways of knowing as a lens through which women understand reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority. Belenky and colleagues (1997) stated that because of how they are socialized, females had more difficulty than males in asserting their authority or in considering themselves as an authoritative figure. Their theory was conceived as the gender schema based on growing concerns revealed from their previous research. The first issue discussed by these authors was women's distrust of their own intellectual competence: "We became concerned about why women students feel so frequently of problems and gaps in their learning and so often doubt their intellectual competence" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 4). The second issue was women's ways of learning and valuing lessons: "We had also become aware of the fact that, for many women, the real and valued lessons learned did not necessarily grow out of their academic work but in their relationships with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvements" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 4).

In their study, Belenky et al. (1997) researched the specific ways of knowing that females developed and valued, and elaborated on the large number of obstacles women must overcome in developing the power of their minds and intellect. These authors interviewed 135 women to explore their experiences and problems as both learners and knowers. Their study grouped women's perspectives or what the researchers called knowing into five major categories: (a) silence, (b) received knowledge, (c) subjective knowledge, (d) procedural knowledge, (e)

constructed knowledge.

In the case of Latinas, because of their family values, they are expected to enact certain cultural gender role expectations that range anywhere from caring for family members to working to help sustain their families economically (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Harris Canul, 2003; Orozco, 2003, 2007; Parra, 2007). These gender role expectations are supported in that the most extended Latino value for women is Marianismo. According to Gil & Inoa Vázquez (1996), Marianismo is about "sacred duty, self-sacrifice, and chastity: about dispensing care and pleasure not receiving them, living in the shadows, literally and figuratively, of your men, father, boyfriend, husband, son, your kids and your family" (Gil & Inoa Vazquez, 1996, p. 7). These authors stated that "Marianismo is a lose-lose situation because Latinas live in a world that perpetuates a value system where perfection is equated to submission and where these gender role expectations are revered among the Latino families and their communities" (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996 p. 7). Today, a Latina's self-denial is not only the norm but also an expectation in order to live peacefully in many Latino families. In the Marianismo system, women's education and priorities are dependent upon family needs. Therefore, Gil and Inoa Vázquez (1996) stated that Marianismo perpetuates an impossible value system for Latinas where perfection for women is equated to submission and passivity, concluding that Marianismo combines with the dark side of the machismo mandate: That men have options and women have duties. Machismo means that a man's place is *en el mundo* (in the world), and woman's place is *en la casa* (in the home). It means that in their families and communities, Latinas' brothers are praised for being ambitious, while Latinas are discouraged from the same quality. It also means that first Latinas' fathers and then brothers and husbands give orders that Latina women must obey (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cuádraz, 2005; Gil & Inoa

Vázquez, 1996; Parra, 2007).

Latinas' lives are tied inherently to their families. Although most Latino families consider education an important life goal for their daughters, it also is important in Latino culture that women contribute to the financial support of the family either through paid or unpaid labor (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; Parra, 2007). For example, many Latinas are expected to take care of siblings, cousins and/or elderly family members while their parents work, regardless of women's class schedule. This forces some Latinas either to sleep late or go directly to college from their parents' home, curtailing their ability to participate in many of their school's extracurricular activities (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Also, Latinas are expected to live at home and leave only when they marry. Leaving home at a young age to go to college far away from the family often is viewed negatively by Latino families (Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; Parra, 2007). Another aspect of Latinas' home gender role expectations is the major responsibility to be the translators for the family, since many times they are the family's only connection to the English-speaking world (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). When the need of a translator arises (e.g., doctor's appointment, siblings' parents day at school, appointment at a social service office), the familial and community expectation is that Latinas miss college to help their families (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000).

Latinas encounter gender oppression in college. Most studies that measure Latinos' academic persistence are based upon a White, male, middle class American norm that is culturally foreign to Latino culture and students' backgrounds (Araujo, 2009; Bañuelos, 2006; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cardoza, 1991; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Cuádraz, 2004; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005). In

researching Latina undergraduate college students' perceived educational barriers and cultural

congruity, Gloria, Castellanos, and Godinez (2005) stated that:

> The university climate of predominately White institutions of higher education have consistently been identified as a White, male, middle-class setting that values individualism and competition — a climate that is often unyielding to individuals who have different values or approaches. (p. 162)

Cummins (1986) and Unger-Palmer (2003) argued that in institutions of higher education,

the stigmatization generated by educational practices that devalue the female gender and Latino

culture inevitably fosters inequitable power relationships, affecting Latinas' college persistence

directly. Some of these stigmatizing educational practices are the prohibition to use any language

other than English, devaluation of Latino culture, deficit view of Latino families, emphasis on

individualism, privilege of monolingual communication, scarcity or lack of faculty members and

mentors from underrepresented ethnic groups, stereotyped representations of Latino women,

erroneous beliefs about bilingualism and multicultural practices, lack of inclusion of culturally

sensitive material in the curriculum, educational tracking, inattention to ethnicity and gender-

related topics, and devaluation of or inattention to Latino culture (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Gándara

& Contreras, 2010; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, &

Wilson, 1999; González, 2002; Hurtado, Carter, & Faye, 1997; Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley,

2006; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Orozco, 2007; Rodríguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000;

Villalpando, 2010). Cultural devaluation of Latino culture generates cultural shock, feelings of

self-doubt, and lower self-esteem in Latinas (Rendón, 1992).

Therefore, Latinas' academic persistence in college is influenced directly by the values

upheld by their culture of origin as well as by the dominant culture. Rigid gender roles assigned

to women within the Latino culture as well as dominant culture's misconceptions about Latino

culture constitute a double burden for Latinas in college. This burden impacts them not only

because of their race and socioeconomic status but also their gender. Throughout history men have shaped the knowledge of women, dictating what constitutes valid knowledge, whether they should be educated, and the limits of women's level of education. Belenky et al.s' (1997) gender theory discussed women's ways of knowing, which are the lenses through which women comprehend and understand reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority, as well as the number of obstacles that women need to overcome in developing the power of their minds. Within the Latino culture, women are oppressed by rigid role expectations that range anywhere from family care to working to help sustain the family. Women are expected to self-sacrifice in favor of the family in general and men in particular. They are expected to dispense care and pleasure but not to receive them, to leave aside personal aspirations in favor of others (Gil & Inoa Vazquez, 1996). These gender role expectations perpetuate a value system equating perfection to submission. Latinas' self-denial is not only the norm but also an expectation in order to live peacefully with their families (Gil & Inoa Vazquez, 1996).

In terms of educational preparation, quantitative data from NCES (2003) and Gloria et al. (2005) provide evidence of the academic under-preparation with which Latinos arrive at college and sustain the reasons for the poor academic persistence of Latinos. Others such as Cummins (1986), Knight et al. (2006), Rendón (1992), and Unger-Palmer (2003) hypothesized the reasons for Latinas' low academic persistence among which the devaluation and misunderstanding of Latino culture are cited. Latinas' culture of origin mandate that they devote their lives to their families, and even though many Latino families expect their daughters to succeed academically, the reality is that they are expected primarily to contribute to the family's economic wellbeing. This forces some Latinas to prioritize work (paid or unpaid) over education. Since many Latinas come from low-economic backgrounds, the schooling that they received was deficient because of

the poverty in monetary and educational resources of the schools they attended. Thus, low expectations, genderized educational misconceptions and expectations, and deficient K-12 schooling constitute serious disadvantages for Latinas to persist in college.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

A relevant development in the area of student college retention has been Tinto's theory of student departure based upon their college integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993). It provided a foundation for understanding the reasons that students have to persist academically based upon their ability to adjust to college. Tinto states that students' college persistence is a complex process that depends upon the meaning that a student attributes to her/his formal and informal interactions with her/his college (Christie & Dinham, 1990; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto's theory asserts that college integration is based on the premise that there is a constant social and educational interaction between students and college environments that happens at a formal, academic level (e.g., advising, testing, GPA performance) and also at informal, social levels (e.g., student groups, campus social life, social interaction with faculty and staff). Further, Tinto's theory states that students' individual characteristics (such as personal attributes, family structure and values, pre-college educational and social experiences) influence their academic persistence, institutional commitment, and ultimate graduation (Tinto, 1975). Thus, students' integration into the social and academic system of the college attended influence the students' level of commitment to the institution, which affects students' academic persistence. Tinto's theory created a measure of student college integration and correlated it with college graduation. His theory explained academic persistence by demonstrating that academic persistence increases when students are integrated into their college's academic and social structures.

Tinto stresses the importance of student integration in college persistence and graduation, while asserting that college students are more prone to withdraw from an institution of higher education if they are integrated insufficiently or if their values differ substantially from the values of the institutions they attend (Christie & Dinham, 1990; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Also, Tinto (1993) highlights the importance of understanding students' backgrounds in relation to the institutional social system. He states that when students enter an institution, they do so with certain background characteristics (e.g., family history, prior schooling, skills, abilities) that shape their level of commitment towards graduation. Essentially, the more the students are academically and socially involved on campus, the greater their commitment to their university (Tinto, 1993). Different levels of commitment affect students' interactions within various academic and social systems.

Tinto's work was a steppingstone for understanding college persistence in relation to the students' ability to connect with the institution's social and academic environment. However, his theory takes a one-sided, person-centered approach to the problem of college persistence (Hurtado, 1989; Hurtado, Carter, & Faye, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004), while not addressing fully the educational institution's responsibility in addressing students' diverse cultures. College integration, as Tinto proposed it, was criticized because it did not value culturally supportive alternatives to college participation but rather the focus is on White-dominated activities (Esquivel, 2010; Hurtado, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For example, Tinto's theory excluded important measures of social integration for students from underrepresented ethnic groups, such as belonging to diverse students' group organizations, religious groups, participating in culturally relevant community service or activism, etc. (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, what is relevant for this study is that Tinto's theory was

instrumental in highlighting the importance of understanding how the connection between the home culture and the college's culture (students' sense of belonging) affected students' college perseverance and graduation. In this study, Tinto's theory is useful in recognizing that cultural congruity is the right theoretical framework for understanding Latinas' college persistence.

Latinas' Ethnic Identities

What does it mean to be Latina? There is significant research and literature in the area of gender, but little attention is given to how gender intersects with Latinas' racial and ethnic identity formation (Baca Zinn, 2002). Individuals' ethnic identities are developed within a specific socio-cultural environment that determines their personal and cultural values. Latinas' personal values may be different from the values of the college they attend. Therefore, knowing about the consonance (fit) between Latinas' values and the values of the college they attend facilitates a better understanding of how their identities may change depending on their college experiences.

Some empirical studies investigated the impact of ethnic identity on academic persistence and revealed that a strong ethnic identity of Latino students is linked to school engagement, intrinsic motivation, and a belief in the value of schooling (Holleran & Waller, 2003; Orozco, 2007). Therefore, Latino students' strong ethnic identity strengthens their academic persistence and graduation, for example, Holleran and Waller (2003) found a positive effect of ethnic identity on academic persistence. They conducted an ethnographic study, which included focus groups and semi-structured interviews, to investigate the relationship between ethnic identity and perceptions of life challenges of Mexican American adolescents 13 to 18 years of age. Their results indicated that a positive ethnic identity, rooted in traditional Mexican culture, may have

served as a protective factor that contributed to the adolescent's resilience, defined as positive adaptation in response to hardship (Holleran & Waller, 2003). For example, *familismo*, which refers to family closeness and loyalty, was a Mexican value identified consistently throughout the interviews. Additionally, 60% of the respondents talked about the acceptance of suffering as a means of transformation, a Mexican core belief grounded in Catholicism and suggests that something positive must come from suffering.

In another study, Torres (2003) examined the ethnic identity development of 10 Latino college students (three Mexican, one Puerto Rican, one Cuban, one Venezuelan, one El Salvadorian, one Guatemalan, one Nicaraguan, and one Colombian). Torres found that the participants in her study, regardless of an Anglo, bicultural, or Latino culture, did not appear to have negative views about their Latino background; rather, they talked positively about their Latino ethnicity and discussed culturally congruent activities including speaking Spanish at home and participating in Latino social functions (Torres, 2003).

Work by feminist author Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), stresses the importance that a non-conflictive ethnic identity has for Latinas/Chicanas. Anzaldúa was a Chicana feminist who articulated how conflicts arised in Latinas' ethnic identity when constantly living in between two cultures (Anzaldúa, 1987; Araujo, 2009). Anzaldúa (1987) contended that while upholding Latino values and culture, Latinas also adapt to the dominant White culture developing a third identity characterized by its fluidity and flexibility. Anzaldúa (1987) stated that Latinas are Mestiza women that cope with living between two cultures by developing a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity and transforming the ambiguity is a key aspect of their identities (Araujo, 2009). Much of Anzaldúa's (1987) work conceptualizes the notion of Latinas' fluid and flexible identity. She discusses the Mestiza consciousness as a process through which Latina

women form their identities. Anzaldúa believes that the identity formation process happens at the intersection of race, class, and gender and, thus, enables a successful negotiation of Latinas' experiences within the dominant White culture in higher education (Araujo, 2009).

Latinas' lives are lived in between two cultures: The White dominant culture to which they have to adapt and their Latina culture of origin. Because many Latinas' ancestors are of different races and ethnicities, Latinas have to bridge the different cultures that they inhabit constantly and learn how to navigate them. Further, Anzaldúa (1987) argued that Latinas should not have to choose one ethnicity over another but rather embrace every aspect of their identities. By embracing their identities as a whole, Latinas develop a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity and learn to juggle their multicultural existence (DeMirjyn, 2005). By juggling the different cultures that they inhabit (Latino culture, family culture, college culture, White culture), Latinas perform balancing acts constantly between different and, at times, opposing cultural paradigms (Anzaldúa, 1987; DeMirjyn, 2005). In this manner, Latinas re-articulate their own selves as ethnic women continually, while weaving together different belief systems, languages, expectations, cultural practices, speech and writing styles, and moral values (Hurtado, 2003).

Delgado Bernal (2006) was interested in learning about the Mestiza ethnic identity of Chicana/Latina college students, specifically focusing on the strategies that Latinas learn in their homes and employ successfully when confronted with challenges and obstacles that interfere with their academic persistence. In her examination of the educational trajectory of Chicana/Latina college students at a state university in California, she conducted a study where students were selected from a list of university students who self-identified as Mexican, Mexican American, and/or Chicana and were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old (2006). Delgado Bernal (2006) collected surveys and semi-structured life interviews with fifty undergraduate

students, where the participants discussed their educational path from elementary school to college. After completing the individual interviews, the author conducted three focus groups. In each of them, she presented her preliminary findings to the participants so they could participate in the data analysis. Over half of the students' mothers (53%) and half (56%) of the students' fathers had less than a ninth-grade education (p. 118). The majority (75%) of the mothers worked as either farm laborers or stayed at home, while 52% of the fathers worked in some form of farm labor or other types of unskilled manual labor (p. 118). Eighty-four percent of the women participants in the study were born in the U.S.A., and all of them attended California public schools. Thirty-eight percent of the students attended a community college as their first institution of higher education and 75% of the students were first-generation students (p. 118). After analyzing the data, Delgado Bernal (2006) found that a Mestiza ethnic identity includes the students' bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spiritualities. The researcher found that, when confronted with challenges and obstacles in higher education, Latinas draw from their Mestiza identity in ways that help them survive and succeed in unknown educational settings. She found that "although the application of household knowledge can reinforce dominant ideologies, it also allows them to interrupt the transmission of dominant perceptions about their language and culture" (Delgado Bernal, 2006, p. 128). Delgado Bernal (2006) affirms that the knowledge acquired at home provided Latinas with strategies of resistance against oppression that challenge the educational norms of higher education and the dominant perceptions held about these students. She also states that the study of Latinas' strategies to persist academically allows for developing innovative curricular and pedagogical tools that include bilingualism, biculturalism, and community commitment as important elements in the educational curriculum.

Hurtado (2003) affirms that Latinas' ability to navigate and adapt to Latino and White cultures and their values (their tolerance of cultural contradictions and ambiguity) constitutes a major resource for their academic persistence. Hurtado argues that Latinas' adaptation to differing cultures attests to their ability to learn from their experiences and be flexible enough to accommodate a new educational environment. Hurtado (2003) reflects on how Latinas' educational experiences influence the formation of their ethnic identities:

> Education was transformative in developing my respondents' political consciousness. College gave them exposure to a variety of frameworks for examining their life experiences and attitudes and those of their families. In fact, a college education was the main path through which most gained awareness about the meaning of their own and others' group memberships. (p. 229)

Attending college could be a conflicting time for Latinas, but it also may be an empowering and positive experience. Delgado Bernal (2006) states that Latinas' communication with their family members and communities served as a cultural knowledge base that provide them with resistance strategies that help them negotiate sexist and racist experiences in academia. Also, going against theories that proclaim that with Latinas' college success comes isolation from members of their own ethnic group, Gándara and Osugi (1994) assert that academic achievement is an expression of self-consciousness for these women, and that their academic success is the result of a successful confluence between their family culture and that of the college they attend. Gándara (1982) illustrates how this confluence affects Latinas' college navigation and success positively by saying the following about her respondents:

> They knew how to handle themselves with high achieving Anglos, and they were still equally comfortable in the company of friends who would never leave the fields, the barrios, or go to college. For the most part, they were able to make the jump into the mainstream without alienating the communities from which they came. (p. 77)

To understand further the relationship between academic persistence and sense of integration for Latinas in college, Hurtado, Carter, & Faye (1997) conducted empirical research that identified various factors that contribute to Latino students' identities in college. In their study, they focused on Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) first dimension of perceived cohesion while in college: the Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS). The SBS was tested on different populations, including those of a mid-size liberal arts college, a city, and several nations. The measure of perceived cohesion while in college applied to large groups and was suited to understand a variety of collective affiliations that may contribute to an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community (college in our study's case). Bollen and Hoyle concluded that a "sense of belonging is fundamental to a member's identification with a group and has numerous consequences for behavior" (1990, p. 484). This sense of belonging contained cognitive and affective elements in the individual's cognitive evaluation of her role in relation to the group's affective responses (Hurtado et al., 1997). Thus, Hurtado and colleagues (1997) asserted that studying students' sense of belonging in college allows researchers to determine which forms of social interactions enhance students' affiliation with and sense of identity in their colleges further.

For their study, Hurtado et al. (1997) used the National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS), a national longitudinal study of entering Latino college students developed in 1990 as a comprehensive longitudinal survey of college students' experiences. In 1993, Hurtado et al. (1997) sent the survey 493 students who were members of the NSHS 1990 cohort. These efforts yielded a response rate of 58% for the most recent survey. The SBS measure was distributed normally with a mean of 21.34 and a standard deviation of 7.21, which indicated that there was considerable variation in the respondents' experiences. Hurtado et al. (1997) limited their

analyses to students who began college in fall 1990. This longitudinal cohort study allowed for the ordering of variables and the assessment of students' changes in attitudes, activities, and experiences according to students' time and exposure to college experiences. The final sample consisted of 272 students (58.1% female and 41.9% male) attending 127 colleges. Of these students, 43.4% were Chicanos, 22.4% were Puerto Ricans, and 34.2% were other Latinos including Cubans and Central and South Americans (Hurtado et al., 1997), with a significant p-value of .001. Findings indicated that the easier the transition to college, the less likely students are to perceive a hostile climate in the second year. They also found that in the third year of college, Latino students are less likely to feel part of the campus community if they perceive racial tension or have experienced discrimination in their second year. The authors found that the ease of separation and maintaining family relationships are essential aspects of the transition to college (confirmed in the measurement model) for Latino students. The results of involvement in social and community organizations and religious organizations suggest the importance of links with external affiliations that enhance a student's sense of belonging and ability to develop their own ethnic identity in a safe environment. Thus, a strong "separation from their families" assumption was not a necessary condition for transition and incorporation (integration) in college. The authors hypothesized that students found ways to become interdependent with their families during college without having to become completely independent from them.

Regarding Latinas' families and their sense of belonging in college, Delgado Bernal (2006) hypothesized about the importance of Chicana feminist pedagogies. These pedagogies are culturally specific ways of knowing for Latinas that extend beyond formal schooling (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). These specific ways of knowing are called the pedagogies of the home and are critical for Latinas' survival in college (Elenes et al., 2000). Delgado Bernal (2006) asserts

that mothers and other family members help Latinas survive in everyday college life by providing an understanding of certain situations and explanations of why things happen within culturally specific ways of teaching and learning, such as legends, storytelling, proverbs, *corridos* (songs) and behavior. It is via these culturally specific ways of teaching that elders share the knowledge of the conquest, segregation, labor market stratification, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance. This specific knowledge and cultural framework used to interpret college situations passed to Latinas by their mothers and older generations are critical to their college survival and success. Delgado Bernal affirms that,

> The teaching and learning of everyday life are also key for the emotional and physical survival of Chicana students, yet they are seldom acknowledged in educational research and practice. In my study, Chicana college students demonstrate that they learn from the home how to engage in subtle acts of resistance by negotiating, struggling or embracing their bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities and spiritualities. (2006, p. 115)

Therefore, Delgado Bernal (2006) states that it is the pedagogies of the home, the knowledge acquired at home by Chicana women that provide these women with strategies of resistance that allows them to challenge the White-centered educational norms in college and the oppressive and dominant perceptions held about Chicanas.

Life Narratives as a Form of Feminist Inquiry

Life narratives are a form of evidence from the field of historical biography (Freedman, 1974). The use of life narratives in the social sciences is a largely accepted research method and is epistemologically grounded as a valid source of knowledge specifically when dealing with non-traditional and underrepresented cultures (Holling, 2006). The experiential knowledge of underrepresented people is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. In fact, the knowledge of people from underrepresented ethnic groups should be viewed as a

strength and source from which to draw their lived experiences by including methods such

as storytelling, family histories, biographies, *cuentos*, and narratives (Solorzano & Yosso,

2001). For example, storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition in African American,

Chicana/o, and Native American communities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), and, as Delgado

(1989) stated, "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool

to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436).

Research notes that Latinas' narratives are more than just stories and that they are of

importance because narratives invent, reform, and refashion personal and collective

identity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Araujo, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Montoya, 1998). Through

their life narratives, Latinas are recognized as subjects who are knowledge producers and

who possess both formal (academic) and informal (home and community) knowledge

(Araujo, 2007). Montoya (1998) connects Latinas' identity formation and feminist method

with the key role that Latinas' narratives play in their own cultural construction of

subjectivity. She states:

> Feminist method has been inextricably linked to consciousness raising and the
> primacy of women's experience. One of the central issues of feminism is the
> cultural construction of subjectivity. In de-constructing themselves and rendering
> themselves as speaking subjects, women of color dismantle the representation of
> stereotypes of themselves constructed, framed, and projected by the dominant
> ideology. Autobiographical writing legitimizes multiple perspectives and
> validates personal experience. The exploration of self-efficacy through
> autobiography and the seizure of discursive space formerly denied to Latinas are
> regenerative acts that can transform self-understanding and reclaim for all Latinas
> the right to define themselves and to reject the uni-dimensional interpretations of
> their personal and collective experience. (p. 38)

The nature of Latinas' cultural origins, lives, complex realities and experiences, coupled

with the lack of substantive research and data on Latinas' college experiences and with

society's stereotypical assumptions about them, encouraged Latina/Chicana feminists to ask

Latinas to write their own experiences as a way to validate, create theory, and recover subjectivities that were marginalized or discounted previously (Holling, 2006; Moraga, 1983; Pérez, 1999). Latinas' life narratives are direct accounts of their lived experiences. Life narratives provide an understanding of how the processes of knowing, listening, and telling life stories intersect with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class, and the way in which Latinas describe, give meaning and live their educational realities. Latinas' life narratives allow for a critical exploration of the nature of Latinas' college experiences, how they interpret their own experiences, how these experiences structure Latinas' process of constructing their cultural identities, and how this structuring affects Latinas' college persistence (Holling, 2006; Moraga, 1983; Pérez, 1999).

Personal narratives are an important site of resistance to refute stereotypical views of women in general and Latinas in particular. Narratives reclaim the right for Latinas to define themselves and to reject mono-dimensional interpretations of their personal and collective experience (Montoya, 1998). Latinas' life narratives speak not only of Latinas' individual experiences, but contextualize their identities and experiences in relation to the larger social context (Delgado, 1998). In this regard, Holling (2006) asserts that Latinas' voices, conveyed in life narratives, underscore their strength and tenacity in challenging forms of social and institutional oppressions that they experience as inhibiting their growth, survival, and success. Latinas' life narratives provided a firsthand glimpse into not only how Latinas maintain their own gender and ethnic identity in a predominately white institution, but also how they construct and re-define their gender and ethnic selves in relation to their environment. Therefore, life narratives are a means by which Latinas' college experiences are known and

understood. In emphasizing the importance of Latinas' oral stories and life narratives, Delgado Bernal (2006) states that:

> There are a limited but growing number of studies that focus on Latinas in higher education to investigate the educational barriers they experience (Gándara, 1982; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Segura, 1993), their marginality in higher education (Cuádraz, 1996; Rendon, 1992), their college choice (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998), their on-campus activism (Revilla, 2003). There are also feminist theoretical writings to their scholarship on Chicanas/Latinas in higher education, which at the same time create *teorías* that are based on the voices, narratives, and *testimonios* of *mujeres*—women in college. In the process, they theorize the mind, body, and soul connection by addressing the personal, political, intellectual and spiritual desires and actions of Chicanas in education. (pp. 156-157)

Delgado (1989) uses a method called counter-storytelling and argues that it is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (e.g., those on the margins of society) and a lens for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power (Delgado, 1989). For instance, while a narrative can support the White dominant story, a counter-narrative or counter-story, by its very nature, challenges the dominant story. Solorzano and Yosso (2005) affirm that the counter-stories serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions: (1) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005).

It is only when Latinas name their own experiences, give voice to their own worlds, and affirm themselves as legitimate social agents that they transform the meaning of those experiences (Holling, 2006). This approach challenges educational norms and moves away from traditional cultural deficit and assimilation frameworks that attempt to interpret the educational experiences of Latinas based on the experiences of males or White women. Through their own life narratives and oral stories, Latinas can explore the construction of their ethnic identities while in college, integrating their ethnicity, class, gender, race, language, and sexuality, and creating a self-defining space in the context of narrating their lives experiences (DeMyrijin, 2005).

Latinas' narratives are important for knowing how to support them during their college years. Castellanos and Gloria (2007) explored institutional best practices for Latinas/os' college success, specifically identifying the importance that a sense of institutional belonging has in academic persistence:

> If Latina/o students' experiences are not appropriately attended, it stands to reason that the end outcomes (e.g., graduation) will not truly evidence a holistic and culture-centered process. It is necessary to have a vision of the sequential steps involved in success processes and the strategic planning and commitment to achieve this end goal. An integrated and family-like numerical mass can translate into *comunidad* [community], multiplying the sense of belonging, reciprocity, and interrelatedness; however, the key ingredient to produce successful Latin/o undergraduates is the integration of la *cultura* [culture]. (p. 394)

Latinas' life narratives assist in understanding how their culturally complex and rich life experiences provided them with critical strategies to inhabit and navigate different cultural environments successfully while bridging them together (DeMyrijin, 2005).

Summary

The research literature delineates the important role that education plays in the lives of Latino students, and that Latinos as an ethnic group lag behind every other ethnic group in obtaining a college degree in the U.S.A. (Nora et al., 2011). Low college academic persistence among Latinos was an issue of concern for researchers, which prompted them to study the reasons for Latinos' lagging academic persistence. Initially, research on Latinos' educational shortcomings focused on a cultural deficit model. For the past 30 years, this model blamed Latinos' culture of origin with its apparently rigid gender roles as the primary reason for their lack of college persistence (Gil & Iona Vázquez, 1996; González, 2002; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; NCES, 2003; Nora, et al., 2006; Unger-Palmer, 2003). However, more recent studies indicated that students in general are less likely to graduate from college if their cultural values are incongruent with the values of the college they attend, or if they experience conflict between their home-culture values and the values of the campus's dominant culture (Fry, 2009; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Olivas, 1997; Torres, 2003; Yosso, 2005; Zalaquett, 2005). To illuminate this key aspect of academic persistence, two important developments in understanding students' college persistence were Tinto's (1975) theory of college integration and Gloria and Robinson Kurpius's (1996) Cultural Congruity Theory. Tinto's work demonstrated that academic persistence increases when students are integrated into their college's academic and social structures (Tinto, 1975, 1993; Reyes, 2011). Further, Gloria and Robinson Kurpius's (1996) theory of cultural congruity and the Cultural Congruity Theory helped measure students' perceptions of cultural fit (or cultural congruity) between university values and students' values. Gloria and Robinson Kurpius found that

students were more likely to persist in college if they perceived that there was a cultural fit between their personal values and those of the university (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Reyes, 2011).

Latinas' life narratives are a direct and major avenue to access Latinas' own accounts of their understanding of themselves and the different cultures that they inhabit. Life narratives provide this study with direct knowledge from Latinas about how they inhabit, makes sense, respond, and succeed in a predominately White college environment. These narratives help synthesize the different cultural heritages from where Latinas draw their cultural knowledge. Delgado Bernal (2006) states that in educational policy and practice, it is important to remember that Latinas experience educational settings from multiple dimensions such as their skin color, gender, class, sexuality, language, and culture. Delgado Bernal (2006) indicates the need to develop policy and practice that value and build on pedagogies of Latinas' home culture in order to enhance their academic success and college participation.

Chapter 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the purpose of the research and the research questions, describes the research design, provides information about the setting and the participants, and explains in detail the methodology utilized for data collection. The content is organized in the following sections: (1) overview of qualitative research design, (2) purpose of the research, (3) research questions, (4) research design of the study and rationale, (5) pilot study and protocol development, (6) selection of participants, (7) researcher assumptions and bias, (8) research setting, (9) data collection, (10) observational data (11) trustworthiness of the data, (12) data analysis, and (13) summary.

Overview of Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative inquiry is concerned about people's lives and, thus, deals with human experiences from which people make sense. Qualitative research methods are used to understand better the complex experiences studied in the social sciences and applied fields (Marshall & Rossman, 1994). Polkinghorne (2005) states that: "A primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness" (p. 138).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term under which a number of research methods that use language data are clustered. Qualitative research allows for the rich interpretation of participants' experiences and perceptions that are shared through individual and collective stories (Creswell, 2013). Diverse qualitative approaches are used to answer different kinds of research questions and use different kinds of methods to analyze data (Polkinghorne, 2005). In order to organize the multiple qualitative research methods, Creswell (2013) proposed five traditions,

each one with their unique design: (1) narrative, (2) phenomenology, (3) grounded theory, (4) ethnography, and (5) case study. In qualitative methods, the area intended to be researched determines the inquiry method used. However, regardless of the approach, all qualitative research follows a basic process that includes an introduction, questions, methods of data collection, and data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

To determine the area of inquiry that concerns qualitative methods, Bogdan and Taylor (1975) stated: 'It is through these [human] stories that the important events and experiences in a person's life are told in ways that capture the person's own feelings, views, and perspective" (p. 12). Therefore, a qualitative, multiple case study approach is the most fitting for this study, since it is based upon Latinas' life narratives.

Purpose of the Research

Latina women constitute the largest group of minority females from underrepresented ethnic groups in the U.S.A., and their college graduation rate is the lowest among all racial and ethnic groups in the country (Castellanos, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Latinas' low college graduation rates place them at a social and economic disadvantage (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Orozco, 2007). The purpose of this study was to examine how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect undergraduate Latina students' perception of their persistence in a predominately White, Research Extensive Midwest State University. It was designed to gain access to Latinas' life experiences, their own interpretation of their college experiences, and learn how these experiences affected Latinas' academic persistence.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically? (Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005)

2. What socio-cultural and gender role expectations at home and in college affect Latinas' perception of their academic persistence? (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Nora et al., 2006)

3. What college experiences of Latinas' influence their gender and ethnic identity? (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006).

The cases studied were of five (5) Latina undergraduate college students. Data was collected through: (a) a written demographic questionnaire (Appendix B), (b) two open-ended interviews with the first designed to solicit the participants' life narratives (Appendix C), and the second designed to ask semi-structured, follow up questions (Appendix D), and field notes as observational data (Appendix H). These three data sources provided direct access to Latinas' perceptions of their lived experiences in college as well as their perspectives on gender, race, and ethnicity.

Research Design of the Study and Rationale

A qualitative research design was selected for this study because: (a) the research was conducted in a natural setting, (b) the researcher was the key instrument for data collection, (c) the data was collected through words and sentences, (d) the data was analyzed inductively, and (e) the study centered on participants' perceptions and meanings of their college experiences (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, I employed a multiple case study approach. A multiple participant case study was selected as the method to develop in-depth analyses of five individuals to compare the cases (Creswell, 2006). According to Yin (2003), case studies are the strategy of choice

when the researcher wants to inquire about how and why and has limited control over events because relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated, especially when the research interest is a contemporary phenomenon embedded within a real-life context. The case study approach also allows the researcher to cover contextual conditions (considered highly pertinent to the phenomenon of study) and gain in-depth understanding of the cases (Yin, 2003). Yin argues that while a single case represents a critical case of a significant theory, multiple cases are sufficient replications to assure the reader of a general phenomenon.

Case Study

As a research strategy, case study is used in many situations to assist our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. In all of the situations, the need to conduct case study research arises from the need to understand complex phenomena (Yin, 2003). In case study research, the researcher explores an issue either through one case (single-case design) or through more than one case (multiple-case design). Creswell (2013) states that case study research is an approach through which the researcher explores a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, involving multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, documents, audiotapes, reports, and observations), and detailed data collection. Yin (2003) indicates that each individual case must be conducted rigorously. He states further that, when multiple data sources are used, data collection must be guided by the subject studied to make sure that the researcher collects relevant data. Such procedure ensures that the researcher conducts a similar procedure from one case to another (Yin, 2003). Case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases, rather the researcher works with the situation that presents itself in each studied case (Creswell, 2013).

Pilot Study and Protocol Development

According to Yin (2003), a final preparation before the data collection is designing and conducting a pilot case study. Conducting a pilot case study helped me refine the interview protocol, related not only to the questions that the study seeks to answer but also for the procedures to follow (Yin, 2003). A pilot study (Appendix I) was conducted at Midwestern State University and included the following participant characteristics: (a) Latina, (b) undergraduate, (c) college student. This pilot study was not a pre-test but rather a formative evaluation that assisted me in developing more relevant questions, better organizing the interview format, and providing conceptual clarification for the research design (Yin, 2003).

To test the research design, the pilot study was conducted with a Latina, undergraduate student at a Midwestern State University. The pilot study tested for clarity and understanding of the data-gathering process and the interview questions. The participant's responses informed modifications to the research questions used for the actual study. I knew the undergraduate student personally and approached her about the study and she was willing to participate. A copy of the interview questions was provided to the participant in advance.

The meeting day, time, and location were determined according to the participant's preferences. The interview day and time were confirmed by e-mail a day prior to the meeting. To gain the consent from the participant the day of interview, the following were addressed:

1. The purpose of the research

2. The procedures of the research

3. The risks, if any, and benefits of research

4. The voluntary decision to withdraw from the research at any time

5. The procedures used to identify and protect confidentiality

The interview was tape-recorded and later transcribed and used for data analysis. To foster the participant's involvement in the interview process, I used general prompts such as "tell me more" or "why did you say so?" Data yielded by the pilot study offered significant insights into the participant's thoughts and lived experiences, as well as information about her social and academic backgrounds.

Based upon the results of the pilot study, I made changes necessary to improve the study's data gathering process, the study's main research questions, and the preliminary interview protocol. Changes prompted by the pilot study included:

(a) Reformulation of the study's main research questions. The scope of the study's main research questions' meaning and clarity was refined. Three main research questions resulted from the reformulation and they were polished and reorganized.

(b) Inclusion of a demographic questionnaire. It was decided to request participants to complete a demographic questionnaire electronically prior to the face-to-face interviews. The demographic questionnaire was included to produce another source of data regarding important aspects of the participants' lives (e.g., place of birth, family composition, academic history, academic and life interests, self-definition, college experiences, life goals). Data from the demographic questionnaire allowed for interpretation or meaning-drawing from direct interview data, following Creswell's (2013) described process of pulling the data apart and putting it up back together in more meaningful ways.

(c) Development of the interview protocol that included conducting two face-to-face interviews on two separate days and requesting participants to discuss their life stories during the first meeting. The pilot study's participant opened the meeting

spontaneously by offering a brief story of her life. Also, during the pilot study the participant often referred to what she stated initially in her life narrative, as if it was a pivotal point of reference and information. This demonstrated the need to provide participants with an opportunity to tell life stories freely at the beginning of the interview process, since life stories provide a point of reference and enable me to frame the participant's answers within her way of making meaning of her own experiences.

(d)   Meeting a second time with each participant to conduct the semi-structured questionnaire interview and provide her with the interview questionnaire in advance to ensure clarity about what was asked.

(e)   Overall reformulation of the interview protocol for clarity and consistency purposes. The final interview protocol format and questions were designed by selecting questions that yield consistent data with the research questions. Reformulation involved discarding questions that were confusing or redundant to the participants as well as making sure that the order of questions made sense to them.

In sum, the pilot study ensured that the data collection process was well-designed and implemented, that the face-to-face interviews were clear, that its questions were understandable, relevant to the topic, and designed appropriately to prompt participants' rich answers. Thus, it constituted the basis for a better-designed interview process and data collection as it was instrumental in helping refine this study's open-ended life narrative and interview questions.

Selection of the Participants

Because qualitative research does not have a pre-established number of participants for a study, I followed Creswell's (2013) recommendation of having any number between five to 25

participants in a multiple case study. Patton (2002) stated that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, since the sample size should be related directly to the purpose of the inquiry, what will be most useful, what will ensure credibility, and what can be done with the available resources (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this study involved five Latina undergraduate college students. The selection of participants in this study was accomplished through purposive sampling and criterion sampling. Purposive sampling allowed me to search for certain traits in participants that provided rich information and ensured that key research themes such as college persistence, cultural congruity, and academic perseverance were addressed (Creswell, 2013). Also, criterion sampling was used because it worked best when all participants selected experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Because the goal of qualitative research was to enrich the understanding of an experience, selection was based on women who exemplify the experience researched. Therefore, the participant selections were not random or by chance since purposive selection of participants brings clarity and detail to meet a predetermined criterion (Polkinghorne, 2005). I considered that the five women selected would provide a meaningful perspective on the issues researched (Polkinghorne, 2005). Patton (1990) recommends selecting information–rich cases for study in depth: "Information–rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposive sampling"* (p. 169).

Specifically, the selection process was conducted as follows: Five potential undergraduate Latina college students were identified (because they were members of Latino student organizations, students in classes held by the researcher in the past, advisees, etc.) and approached by electronic mail with an invitation to meet with me, while three other potential participants were identified as back ups. E-mail invitations were sent to the undergraduate Latina

students (Appendix F). The invitation stated the purpose of the study, the participant's role, and what each participant could expect from the research, as well as how the study contributed to the limited literature on Latinas' college persistence. The students who agreed to participate in this study identified themselves as Latinas and not as members of any other ethnic group. Each of the five participants were invited to take part in the study, to select a pseudonym to safeguard her anonymity, and to sign a consent form (Appendix G). A meeting time was scheduled in a resource center at the university to ensure participant comfort. When they agreed to take part in the study, each received a demographic questionnaire via e-mail (Appendix B) to complete prior to the interview, and was asked to send it back electronically to me. Then, each participant received via e-mail a document with the interview protocol, which included the open-ended life narrative (Appendix C) and the interview questions (Appendix D), as well as the participant's consent form approved by the IRB (Appendix G) for their review. Each participant met individually with me twice for about 60 minutes each time. At the beginning of the first face-to-face meeting when the participant was asked to provide her open-ended life narrative, she signed two copies of a consent form: One for herself and another one for me. Then, the participant was invited to share her life story with the researcher. Within a ten-day period from the first interview, the participant met with me for a second face-to-face interview, when she answered a semi-structured questionnaire. After I transcribed each interview, each participant was provided both interviews' transcripts so she could add or delete any desired information and check for accuracy.

Researcher Assumptions and Bias

Studying participants within their own contextual environment provided me with an understanding of how they constructed meaning in their lives (Guba, 1978). However, I was

not an impartial observer in this study and brought personal biases into the study. Thus, it was imperative that I identified as much as possible my personal values, preferences, and assumptions while assessing how these factors may have impacted the study. According to Guba (1978), the researcher's awareness and acknowledgment of her personal values and assumptions ensure the validity and reliability of this study further.

I am a middle class, professional heterosexual woman who was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the 1960s during military dictatorship. I am the oldest of four siblings and had two college-educated, middle class, professional parents. My original language is Spanish but I also speak two other languages (Italian and English). I graduated from the University of Buenos Aires with a degree in clinical psychology, conducted research on family dynamics for the University of Buenos Aires and international, non-governmental organizations, worked as a clinical psychologist for several years in Argentina, and emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1990 with my husband to pursue graduate studies. I obtained a M.Ed. from Harvard University and am currently pursuing my Ph.D. at the institution where this study was conducted. I have a Latina, bilingual daughter in college. I am active in several Latino organizations on campus, the advisor to student organizations, and an instructor in the Women's Studies Department, teaching three courses in the Fall and Spring semesters every year.

A qualitative researcher faces a number of complex issues arising from the research process itself, such as in data collection, data analysis, and data sharing (Creswell, 2013). To maintain ethical standards for researchers in qualitative studies, Creswell (2013) and Merriam (1998) offered useful guidelines such as:

1. The researcher must protect the anonymity of the participants.

2. The researcher must treat the participants with dignity and respect.

3. The researcher must not engage in any deception about the nature of the study and must explain its the purpose clearly.

4. The researcher must obtain written permission from the participants.

5. The researcher must present the facts when reporting the research findings.

6. The researcher must consider seriously whether or not to share personal experiences with the participants, and only do so when it's appropriate. When working with Latino community, the sharing of experiences on the part of the researcher may help participants connect with their interviewer and feel at ease.

During the interviews, my role as an interviewer was to guide the participants by asking opening questions and presenting follow-up questions designed to elicit elaborated answers from them. My background in clinical psychology, extensive experience in leading focus groups and classroom instruction, being a Latina bilingual/bicultural woman in the process of pursuing a higher education degree in the U.S.A. all assisted in creating a trusting interview environment. This trust facilitated a rich conversation about participants' stories, experiences and ideas. Importantly, I was aware that even though there could have been some similarities between the participants' life experiences and mine, the personal and situational circumstances among participants and researcher differ.

Research Setting

Because the focus of this study is to learn about the college experiences of Latina undergraduate students attending a predominately White, research extensive Midwestern State University, participants from one university were selected. Studying Latina students on one university campus allows for comparison of similarities and differences in Latinas'

individual experiences while keeping the institutional setting constant. This study was conducted at a land grant predominately White, research extensive Midwestern State University with an enrollment of 24,378 students. The university was located in a city of approximately 55,000 inhabitants in a Midwestern U.S.A. state. Tables 3 and 4 show the racial/ethnic and gender composition of the university's undergraduate students and faculty population for fall 2013.

Table 3. Undergraduate Population, 2013 (University's Office of Planning and Analysis website)

Males	10,503 (52.4%)
Females	9,666 (47.9%)
African Americans	808 (4.0%)
American Indians	90 (0.4%)
Asian Americans	258 (1.2%)
Latinos	1,159 (5.7%)
Whites	15,567 (77.1%)
Total Undergraduates	**20,169 (100%)**

Table 4. Faculty Population, 2013 (University's Office of Planning and Analysis website)

Males	859 (62.7%)
Females	511 (37.2%)
African Americans	30 (2.18%)
American Indians	7 (0.5%)
Asian Americans	143 (10.4%)
Latinos	33 (2.4%)
Whites	1,058 (77.2%)
Faculty Total	**1,370 (100%)**

Data Collection

Protection of Human Subjects

This study followed Midwestern State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol for research involving human subjects (see Appendix E). There were several ways in which this study protected its participants:

a. Participants signed consent forms (Appendix G) to participate in this study before the interviews began. Also, participants completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). The consent forms and questionnaires were stored separately from the face-to-face data collected.

b. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym to be used during the interviews to keep their identity confidential.

c. All taped recordings were password-secured in the researcher's office and were accessible only to the principle researcher and stored on a password-protected computer.

d. Three years after the completion of this study all paper and digital files will be destroyed.

Timeline

I developed a structured timeline in consultation with my major professor. I had a topic in mind to research, which was developed further with my major professor to identify the specific research questions that would yield potentially rich answers.

Because I am an immigrant Latina woman pursuing a degree in the U.S.A., I was invested personally in researching the factors and life experiences that supported Latinas in higher education. When I started this study, I was interested in investigating (a) Latina females, (b) undergraduate college students, and (c) women's life narratives. I needed a theory that would take into consideration not only gender and race, but also social class and culture of the educational institutions. Qualitative research was selected because it allowed for the voices of the Latina women in college to be heard.

The dissertation proposal was presented to my doctoral committee in November 2013. The committee approved the proposed research and presented suggestions. An application to IRB for approval was sent thereafter and granted by the end of February 2014. After receiving the approval, I identified and contacted potential participants. Interviews were scheduled during the month of June 2014. Once the interviews were recorded, I transcribed them and sent them to participants' for member checking. All raw data was collected by the end of June. The primary investigator met with me regularly during the process for peer debriefing and timeline progress.

Interviews

Based upon Creswell's (2013) assertion that interviewing is a valid form of data collection, this study utilized a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) an open-ended life narrative (Appendix C) and semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D) for data collection (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

The demographic questionnaire was developed to collect background information for comparison across individual cases, as it was done by Orozco (2007) in her study. Orozco (2007) conducted a study to examine ethnic identity, perceived social support, coping strategies, university environment, cultural congruity, and resilience of Latina/o college students. She studied 150 Latina/o college students in a predominately White State University and used characteristics such as ethnic identity, perceived social support from family, friends and significant others, coping strategies, university environment, and cultural congruity. Orozco's demographic questionnaire was developed to obtain specific information about the participants in a consistent manner. She included a total of 18 items. Participants were asked about general personal information (ethnicity/race, age, birth place, languages spoken, and length of time living in current place of residence); family variables (family composition, birth order, and family's

place of origin); higher education experiences (institutions attended, reasons for attending a university, major/minor, expected graduation date, future plans); financial resources while at the university (place of employment, hours/week, grants, loans, or scholarships); and living arrangements while in college. Her demographic questionnaire was relevant for this study since its aim was similar to this study's, also was conducted at a Midwestern State University, and concerned Latina students. See Appendix B for the demographic questionnaire.

The life narrative solicited the participants' interpretation of their life experiences. As described in Chapter 2, life narratives provide direct access to first-person accounts from Latina undergraduate students about how each negotiates the cultures of home and college to navigate her college experiences successfully and persist academically. In this study, life narratives provided an open-ended, unstructured method with which to probe what respondents' saw as important, relevant, or explanatory of their experiences in college.

The open-ended interview questions were designed to follow up the data gathered via the demographic questionnaire and the open-ended life narrative. The open-ended interview questions also were designed to explore ways in which gender may interact with each respondent's sense of cultural congruity. To design the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D), Cultural Congruity Theory was aligned with three main themes, as shown in Table 5. Table 6 establishes the connection between Cultural Congruity Theory and the organizing themes and interview questions.

Table 5. Cultural Congruity Theory: Organizing Themes and CC Statements

Organizing Themes	Cultural Congruity Statements
Need to change identity/cultural fit	• I feel that I have to change myself to fit in at school • I try not to show the parts of me that are "ethnically" based • I often feel like a chameleon, having to change myself

Organizing Themes	Cultural Congruity Statements
	depending on the ethnicity of the person I am with at school • I feel that my ethnicity is incompatible with other students' • I feel that my language and/or appearance make it hard for me to fit in with other students • Given my ethnic background, I feel accepted at school • Given my ethnic background, I feel as if I belong to this campus
Family and college values	• I feel that I am leaving my family values behind by going to college • My ethnic values are in conflict with what is expected at school • My family and school values often conflict • I can talk to my friends at school about my family and culture
Ability to communicate with others	• I can talk to my family about my friends from school • I can talk to my family about my struggles and concerns at school

Table 6. Cultural Congruity Theory: Organizing Themes and Interview Questions

Cultural Congruity Themes	Interview Questions
1. Need to change identity/cultural fit	• Tell me about your experiences at the university you are attending. How welcome do you feel here given your ethnicity and your gender? • Since you came to college, how and why do you think that you have changed as a Latina woman in the way you act, think and talk?
2. Family and college values	• In the Latino culture there are many gender expectations for females that people from other cultures do not understand. What are the gender expectations for women in your culture? How do you, as a Latina, experience these expectations? • How does being a Latina woman influence your experiences in college? • How is your home culture different from the culture at your university? How are they both similar? • Tell me of a time when you experienced a conflict between your home culture and the culture of your university. How did you resolve such conflict? • Do you view yourself as a successful student? Why so?
3. Ability to communicate with others	• What did your family say about your decision to attend college? • What does your family say about college? What do they understand about what you are going through? • What do your professors and classmates say about your home culture? Can you talk to them about it? • As a Latina woman, which obstacles did you find in attending a university? • Which were the greatest challenges that you had to face to attend college? Please give me some examples. How did you resolve those challenges? Who/what helped you to do so? • Which experiences helped you in college? Who forms part of your support group in college? • Who made a difference in your life so you could attend college? Why and how did they help you? • What else do you want to share that is important for understanding your experiences?

Data collection took place in June 2014 after IRB approval was received (Appendix E), and the process was as follows (in chronological order):

1. Each participant was sent an e-mail explaining the study and its goals, and was invited to participate (Appendix F).

2. Each participant received via e-mail the demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) that they completed and sent back to me.

3. Each participant selected a pseudonym and convenient times to participate in the face-to-face interviews.

4. Participants were provided with an electronic copy of the open-ended life narrative and questions prior to the meeting with me. Also, paper copies of the open-ended life narrative and interview questions were available to participants during the interviews.

5. Each participant signed two consent forms, one to keep and one for me.

6. Each participant was interviewed face-to-face twice, individually, for about 60 minutes both times. During the first interview, the participant was asked to share her life narrative by talking freely about her life before and during college. During the second interview, the participant was asked semi-structured questions, as a follow up to the themes that emerged during her life narrative. The face-to-face interviews focused on the participants' life stories and college experiences and their reflection upon the meaning of those experiences.

7. To start the face-to-face interviews, I re-stated the purpose of the study to the participant and assured the confidentiality of her responses. I followed by prompting the participant to tell her life narrative from an open-ended question.

During the second interview, I asked the participant semi-structured questions. Each interview was audio-recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim in the language(s) spoken (English/Spanish). To member check after each interview, I provided each participant with a transcript of her interview to read, clarify her responses if needed, and eliminate any part with which she did not feel comfortable.

8. I offered participants the option to hold the face-to-face interviews in English, Spanish, or in both languages. One of the participants elected to interview in Spanish.

9. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private environment that was comfortable for both the participant and me, located in a resource center on campus available to university faculty and students. The interview room was sheltered from noise and external distractions, and equipped with comfortable chairs and a table. By conducting the face-to-face interviews in this room, I eliminated outside interference and distractions, while allowing the use of audio recording equipment.

10. Each participant was encouraged to share as much as she felt comfortable sharing.

11. I conducted, audiotaped, and transcribed the interviews.

12. The major professor acted as the peer debriefer in this study.

Observational Data

Field notes. In my field notes, I documented my observations before, during, and after each participant interview. I documented the participants' actions, behaviors, hesitations, emotional reactions, facial expressions, voice changes, and other non-verbal cues. After all notes

were taken, I rewrote and organized them. I compared and cross-referenced the field notes with the interviews' transcriptions for data analysis (Appendix H).

Audiotape, Transcription, and Storage

I voice-recorded and transcribed all interviews. Access to data was granted only to me and the principal investigator. Electronic data is secured in my personal, password-locked campus computer. Participants' consent forms are stored separately from the interview data. Audio-taped recordings, computer disks, and taped transcription materials are stored in locked file cabinets in my office on campus. Files are accessible only to me and the principal investigator. All data was coded and data information documents are stored in a secure place. Lastly, all data will be destroyed three years after the study per IRB policy.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is defined as "the judged credibility of a qualitative research study based upon the appropriateness of the data gathering and analytical process and their resulting interpretation" (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 694). In this study, trustworthiness was established by (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility is the counterpart of internal validity. According to Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002), valid strategies to establish credibility include: (a) prolonged engagement in the field, (b) peer debriefing, (c) member checks, and (d) data triangulation. For prolonged engagement in the field, I conducted two interviews with each participant and stayed in touch with them to make sure they reviewed their interview transcriptions and corrected or added if needed. Participants were sophomores, juniors, and seniors, ensuring that all participants had at

least one year of college experience.

My major professor served as the peer debriefer by asking methodological questions about the study and keeping me focused on and true to the study. I met with my major professor before, half-way, and after the data collection process to discuss the design and implementation of the study.

In this study, member checks were addressed immediately after I completed the interview transcripts. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is essential in establishing credibility in any study. In this study, participants were asked to read and comment on the accuracy of their transcribed interviews. They also could alter any parts of the transcribed interview or accept the entire transcribed interview before I began coding for emergent themes. None of the participants indicated a desire to change their transcribed interviews.

Data triangulation was achieved by contrasting data from participants' demographic questionnaire, the interview questions, and field notes. The field notes I took before, during, and after each interview were logged (Appendix H). Field notes encouraged me to self-question assumptions, how each interview was conducted, and to have a reflective attitude regarding the research process. The audit trail served as one source for data triangulation and its confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation allowed me to corroborate evidence from different sources (interview transcripts and audit trails). The first source of triangulation was through comparing data from the transcripts of participants' interviews with each other, since they reflected their lived experiences within the same college context. The second source of triangulation was my field notes (Appendix H) that served as a reflexive/reflective journal for data analysis as it contained valuable observations regarding how interviews were

conducted, my assumptions, expectations and considerations after each interview, enriched by my observations before, during, and after each interview. After data revision from these sources, I identified emerging themes, categories, and patterns.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability is the equivalent of external validity and involves (a) providing rich description and (b) purposive sampling (Anfara et al., 2002). Creswell (2013) explained that thick and rich description facilitates transferability. Rich description includes providing information about the participants as well as verbal and non-verbal cues logged into the field notes by the researcher. To ensure transferability, I provided rich, thick descriptions of the emerging themes and categories through life narratives from the participants' responses. In addition, I supplied in-depth information about the context and setting of the study and the participants to ensure further that a detailed description was provided. In this study, after the initial criterion sampling utilized to select participants, purposive sampling determined the final research participants.

Dependability

In quantitative research, dependability is the counterpart to reliability and includes creating an audit trail (AT), code-recode strategy (CRC), triangulation (T), and peer examination (PE) (Anfara et al., 2002). Lincoln & Guba (1985) stated that when researchers provide evidence of the appropriateness of research analysis, the study gains satisfactory levels of dependability.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability is the equivalent of objectivity in quantitative research. Confirmability ensures that the data and conclusions drawn from the study are logical.

Anfara et al. (2002) assert that confirmability involves data triangulation and the practice of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Data triangulation was discussed earlier. Reflexivity means that the researcher acknowledges that her actions and decisions inevitably impact the meaning and context of the experiences being researched (Anfara et al., 2002). Field notes and awareness of one's actions on the part of the researcher allow for her to take into consideration the extent of the impact that her actions had upon the interview and subsequent interpretation. Further, Creswell (2013) stated that confirmability is achieved through peer debriefing, since it constitutes itself as an external check of the research process. Therefore, the peer debriefer's role was to function as a "devil's advocate," assisting me in staying honest by inquiring about the study's methods, meanings, and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the peer debriefer was my major advisor.

Data Analysis

Data analysis can be difficult in qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994). To establish a clear and trusted process for data analysis and interpretation, Creswell (2013) recommended four methods: (a) categorical aggregation, (b) direct interpretation, (c) patterns of similarities and correspondences among categories, and (d) development of naturalistic generalizations. In this study, I incorporated those four methods:

(a) Categorical aggregation: I searched the data for a collection of instances with expectations of finding emergent relevant themes.

(b) Direct interpretation: I interpreted or drew meaning from a single instance without looking for other multiple instances. Creswell (2013) states that this is a process where data is analyzed by pulling it apart first and then pulling it back together in a meaningful way.

(c) Establishing patterns and looking for similarities and/or correspondence between two or more categories: This correspondence among categories generated a matrix, a grid that hypothesized the relationship between categories.

(d) Naturalistic generalizations from the data analysis: The generalizations I generated in this study may help other researchers learn from the case study, either for themselves or for application to similar populations. Creswell (2013) recommended taking it a step further and to add description to the case with the purpose of gaining a detailed view of the facts of the case studied. This recommendation was useful for this study since it helped to aggregate the data into categories (categorical aggregation) and collapse them into patterns. In turn, this was essential to explore patterns and/or themes that emerged and how they compared and contrasted with one another.

Data Analysis Spiral

According to Creswell (2013), the analysis process conforms to a general shape represented by a spiral. The data analysis spiral is a constant comparative method that includes data managing, reading, memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing, and visualizing. In a spiral data analysis, the researcher begins the process with data and ends it with an account or narrative.

For data analysis in this study, I approached data analysis following Creswell (2013) four recommendations: Categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishment of patterns, and naturalistic generalizations. To begin the process of moving in an analytic circle rather than a fixed linear approach, I employed a code-recode strategy: First, the data were categorically aggregated; second, data were analyzed for emerging themes; third, once those initial themes were identified the data were analyzed further to streamline major themes. I started the data

analysis process with the data and ended with an account or narrative, touching on several aspects of analysis and circles on the data analysis spiral.

Data Managing

The first loop of the data analysis spiral is data managing. First, I organized the e-mail communications, signed consent forms, demographic questionnaires, audiotaped and transcribed materials, field notes, and computer files into individual folders for each participant.

Reading and Memoing

After organizing the data, I followed Creswell's (2013) indication and read all material belonging to each participant several times because doing so allows the researcher for full immersion into the data and gives the researcher a sense of the interview as a whole. The disaggregation of the data allowed for its direct interpretation (Creswell, 2013). I read each participant's materials in isolation from one another and after the third pass on all participants' materials, I began to organize and classify the data.

Memoes are short phrases, ideas, themes, or key concepts that occur to the researcher. I wrote memos in the margins of the interview transcriptions, demographic questionnaires, and field notes indicating what was occurring to me when reading the material.

After reading all five interviews, I reflected on the data and formed initial categories in a matrix based upon the common words and ideas emerging as depicted in Table 7.

Table 7. Code Mapping: Initial Codes

Family	University	Self
Composition	Stereotypes	Good student
National and class origins	Tracking	Overachievement
History	Cultural indifference	Independence
Education	Expectations	Self-determination
Support	Opportunities	Self-fulfillment

Values	Lack of diversity	Bridging cultures
Stereotypes	Inequality in classes	Change mindset
Cultural norms	Acceptance	Juggling roles
Non-traditional expectations	Faculty support	Involvement
	Obstacles	

Describing, Classifying, and Interpreting

The third loop in data analysis spiral involves the description, classification, and interpretation of the data. This step is the core of the data analysis, where the researcher generates the initial codes. In this step I described in detail the emerging themes, considered and grouped those themes that were common for at least two participants. Then, I utilized the cultural congruity theory to inform the second round of analysis based upon Creswell's (2013) indication to describe, classify, and interpret. Although the second round of analysis was informed by the cultural congruity model, I was open to emergent themes. I wrote in the exact words as said by the participants.

Classifying the data involved taking it apart to look for categories and identifying common themes. In searching the data, I was looking for participants' individual experiences, the words used to describe those experiences, their cultural context, and a detailed description of a situation. The data was coded following the Cultural Congruity Theory's organizing themes:

1. Need to change identity/cultural fit

2. Family and college values

3. Ability to communicate with others

Data analysis yielded additional emerging themes. They were organized under the overarching theme:

4. Educational as personal uplift and change.

    4.1. Redefinition of self by self-efficacy

    4.2. Intellectually stimulating courses as change producers

    4.3. Tenacity to succeed.

Representing and Visualizing

    As the last phase of the data analysis spiral, representation and visualization was achieved by presenting the data in text format. To do so, I followed Rodríguez Morales's (2011) indication to make naturalistic generalizations in this fourth phase, since naturalistic generalizations helped me establish in detail "the extent to which the findings could be applicable beyond the case" (p. 91).

Table 8. Data Analysis Matrix

Sources of data	Data Analysis Strategies (Creswell, 2013)	Alignment to Cultural Congruity Theoretical Framework (Initial coding categories and general themes explored)
Demographic Questionnaires	Categorical Aggregation Direct Interpretation Establishment of Patterns Naturalistic Generalizations	**CC1- Need to Change Identity and Cultural Fit** • Stereotypes and Racism • Obstacles • Involvement **CC2 - Family and College Values** • Caring Relationships and High Expectations • Giving Back **CC3 – Ability to Communicate with Others** • Integration and Determination • Resistance and Academic

Sources of data	Data Analysis Strategies (Creswell, 2013)	Alignment to Cultural Congruity Theoretical Framework (Initial coding categories and general themes explored)
		Effectiveness
Life narratives and Semi-structured interviews	Categorical Aggregation Direct Interpretation Establishment of Patterns Naturalistic Generalizations	**CC1- Need to Change Identity and Cultural Fit** • Stereotypes and Racism • Obstacles • Involvement **CC2 - Family and College Values** • Caring Relationships and High Expectations • Giving Back • **CC3 – Ability to Communicate with Others** • Integration and Determination • Resistance and Academic Effectiveness **Themes beyond CC – Education as Personal Uplift and Change** • Redefinition of Self by self-efficacy • Intellectually Stimulating Courses as Change Producers • Tenacity to Succeed • Fathers as feminist role models
Field Notes	Categorical Aggregation Direct Interpretation	**CC1- Need to Change Identity and Cultural Fit** Stereotypes and Racism • Obstacles • Involvement

Sources of data	Data Analysis Strategies (Creswell, 2013)	Alignment to Cultural Congruity Theoretical Framework (Initial coding categories and general themes explored)
	Establishment of Patterns Naturalistic Generalizations	**CC2 - Family and College Values** • Caring Relationships and High Expectations • Giving Back **CC3 – Ability to Communicate with Others** • Integration and Determination • Resistance and Academic Effectiveness

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the design of and the rationale for the case study research, my role as the researcher, the selection of participants, and the processes of data collection and data analysis. It utilized Latinas' life narratives as a way to understand women's personal and collective identity by listening to their voices and interpreting their life narratives and interviews.

This research is a qualitative, multiple participant case study. Cultural congruity was the theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of the data. The trustworthiness of this study was established through (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research.

Chapter 4 - FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports the results of the case study of the lived experiences of Latina undergraduate students at Midwestern State University. There are four sections: (1) the five participants' demographic data, (2) the personal depiction of each participant, (3) findings in accordance with research questions and emerging themes, and (4) summary.

This study sought to understand how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' undergraduate college persistence. To collect data from each participant, I utilized two sources: A demographic questionnaire and two face-to-face individual interviews. The demographic questionnaire was sent to each participant in electronic format for completion and returned to me at the participant's earliest convenience. Each participant's two face-to-face interviews consisted of: A first interview 60 minutes long where I solicited the participant's open-ended life narrative and a second interview about 60 minutes long where I solicited the participant to answer semi-structured interview questions. The two interviews were crafted carefully to gain an understanding of how participants' life stories and college experiences influenced their college persistence. The information contained in the participants' demographic questionnaires provided insightful information for the interviews that followed. The first life narrative interview provided me with a framework that fostered understanding participants' subsequent answers in the semi-structured interviews.

I organized my data analysis by following Creswell's (2013) four recommendations for qualitative analysis: (1) categorical aggregation, (2) direct interpretation, (3) establishment of patterns, and (4) naturalistic generalizations for the data analysis.

Each participant was interviewed individually during June 2014. One participant's second interview was recorded inaudibly, therefore, she was re-interviewed. One of the participants indicated that she preferred to speak Spanish instead of English during her interviews, but the rest of the participants' interviews were conducted entirely in English.

Participants received a copy of the interview questions prior to the face-to-face interviews and paper copies of the interview questions were available to them during each interview. I recorded and transcribed all interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, each participant received an electronic copy of the transcription to make corrections and to member check for accuracy. No participants expressed an interest in modifying their interviews and all of them indicated that what was conveyed during their interviews represented their experiences fully.

All participants were invested in the interviewing process and indicated so verbally. All of them arrived either on time or a few minutes earlier than arranged to their interviews and expressed their interest in being of help to the research and to other Latina students. The life narrative interviews yielded insightful and spontaneous background information to conduct and later interpret the participants' answers to the semi-structured questionnaire during the second interviews. Through sharing their lived experiences in college, participants named and framed their experiences in their own words.

Demographics

Table 9 presents each participant's demographic data organized as follows: (a) self-identification, (b) birthplace, (c) bilingualism, (d) family members, (e) birth order, (f) parents' attained educational level, (g) marital status, (h) children, (i) colleges attended, (j) undergraduate status, (k) MSU GPA, (l) college major/minor, (m) working while studying, and (n) grants, loans, and scholarships.

Table 9. Demographic Data of Participants

Pseudonym	Beatriz	Yolanda	Anna	María	Sam
Self-identification	Hispanic/Latina, female, student, wife	Mexicana	Hispanic	Latina	Female
Birthplace	Dallas, Texas (TX)	Lexington, Nebraska (NE)	Scott City, Kansas (KS)	Asunción, Paraguay (PA)	Garden City, Kansas (KS)
Bilingualism	English Spanish	Spanish English	English	Spanish English Italian	Spanish English
Family members	mother father younger sister three adopted children by father 2 step-sisters 1 step-brother Lives with: husband	mother father	mother father sister Lives with: husband 2 children	mother father 2 brothers	mother father sister brother
Birth order	Second of eight	Only child	First-born of two	Second of three	Second of three
Parents' attained educational level	Mother: First three grades in elementary school Father: Some college courses	Mother: Some high school Father: 8th grade	Mother: College Father: High school	Mother: High school Father: College	Mother: College Father: Not sure
Marital status	Married	Single	Married	Single	Single
Children	0	0	2 (6 year-old girl and 3 year-old boy)	0	0
Colleges attended	Collin CC (TX) MSU (KS)	MSU (KS)	MSU (KS)	MSU (KS)	Garden City CC (KS) MSU (KS)

Pseudonym	Beatriz	Yolanda	Anna	María	Sam
Undergraduate status	Senior	Senior	Senior	Sophomore	Junior
MSU GPA	3.77	3.29	3.20	3.25	3.76
College major/minor	Major: Anthropology & Pre-law Minor: Women's Studies	Major: History & Women's Studies	Major: Psychology Minor: Women's Studies	Major: Psychology	Major: Public Relations Minor: Spanish
Working while studying	Yes (10 hs/wk)	Yes (15 hs/wk)	Yes (25 hs/wk)	No	Yes (20 hs/wk)
Grants, loans, and scholarships	Grants, loans, scholarships	Scholarships	Grants, loans, scholarships	None	Grants

Personal Depiction of Participants

This section presents information about each participant in a narrative format. It is a written portrait of the participants, informed by the demographic questionnaires, my field notes on impressions before, during, and after each interview, and the participants' verbal renderings of themselves collected during the two face-to-face interviews.

The five participants were highly articulate women who shared their information and experiences with me eagerly. They were all undergraduate college students and each of them self-identified differently from the others. Beatriz identified as "Hispanic/Latina, female, student, and wife," Yolanda as "Mexicana," Anna as "Hispanic," María as "Latina," and Sam as "Female." Three participants were bilingual (English and Spanish); one was an English speaker only; one spoke Spanish, English, and Italian; and one had full proficiency in English, could write and read Spanish, but was unable to speak it. One was born in Asunción, Paraguay, while the other four participants were born in the U.S.A. All five participants were petite, with skin

complexions ranging from light to dark brown. Their eye color ranged from hazel to brown. Two participants were married and one had two children (ages six and three). Only one participant did not work when attending college, while the other four worked between 10 to 25 hours per week.

All five participants were attending Midwestern State University (MSU) and majoring in departments in the College of Arts and Sciences. One participant was a sophomore, one a junior, and three were seniors. All participants had a college GPA of 3.2 or above, which made them successful students. Two participants attended a community college before entering MSU while for three, MSU was the only college attended. Two participants received financial support in the form of loans, grants, and/or scholarships, one received grants, one received scholarships, and one paid for her education out of pocket. Three participants planned to continue on to graduate school after completing their undergraduate studies.

All participants came from a two-parent home. One participant was an only child, one had one sister, one had two brothers, one had a sister and a brother, and one had seven siblings. Two participants were the middle children. Two participants were married with spouses in the military. One had two children (a six year-old girl and a three year-old boy). Regarding parents' education, two of the participants' mothers completed college, one completed high school, one had "some high school," and one completed third grade. One father graduated from college; another took some college courses; one completed high school; one studied up to eighth grade; and for one it was unknown the level of schooling acquired.

Personal Depiction 1: Beatriz, "Self-determined and Proud"

Beatriz was the most outspoken of all participants. She self-identified as Hispanic/Latina, female, student, and wife. Beatriz was 22 years old, petite, had olive skin and dark, vivacious eyes, a strong personality, and a way of expressing herself that denoted her analytic and logical

mind. She said what she wanted to say without softening her discourse and expected the same from interlocutors. She was graduating at the end of the semester and in the process of applying to law schools primarily in Texas. Beatriz was born in Dallas and both her parents still live there. Her parents were born in El Salvador, a country that she visited many times. Her father left El Salvador at a young age because of the extreme war and drug violence in which the country was immersed during the 1980s. He joined the military and lived in Mexico for some time, but Beatriz was not sure about that part of the family history because her father did not like to talk about that time in his life. Beatriz's father's first language was an indigenous one from El Salvador. She stated that when her father went to live in Mexico he had to learn how to speak Spanish. After being in Mexico for a few years, her father moved to the U.S.A., married his first wife (who was white), divorced her, and later married Beatriz's mother.

Beatriz's mother was from El Salvador and came from a large family. She was the out-of-wedlock daughter of a low socioeconomic class and indigenous woman and a wealthy white man. Beatriz's grandmother raised nine children by herself in extreme poverty, thus Beatriz's mother was never able to attend school. Beatriz's mother married at 15 years of age and had two children. Her husband was addicted to drugs and was abusive to Beatriz's mother. He left her and the children when he emigrated to the U.S.A. and never returned to El Salvador. A few years after her husband left her, Beatriz's mother decided to leave her two children with their uncles and aunts in El Salvador and moved to Dallas alone. She worked as a nanny and housecleaner for years, sending money back to help support her children. She met her current husband in Dallas and he was Beatriz's father. As a condition for their marriage, Beatriz's mother told her new husband that he had to bring her two children from El Salvador to the U.S.A. He did so and she agreed to have more children with him: Beatriz was their daughter.

Beatriz's relationships with men were tainted by two early negative experiences. When Beatriz was in third grade, she was abused by her older sister's Latino husband, who was in jail for drug-related and minor abuse charges. Also, during the five years between her high school and first semester in college, Beatriz was in a relationship with a white high school boyfriend who was abusive to her. She eventually broke up with him and met a college classmate, a man of Vietnamese origin, whom she married. Her husband was in the military and supported Beatriz. She described her relationship with her husband by saying that she liked to have "a partner who supports [me]." Beatriz said that she liked her husband because he was physically, ethnically, and culturally different from the two men who abused her and that such difference allowed them to have a special bond, one where she felt safe and cared for. She made a point in saying that even though they both came from different cultures, they bonded because they had elements in common: They were both Catholics; had big families; and were both people of color.

As soon as she graduated, Beatriz was moving back to Texas with her husband and hoped to start law school. She was certain that this was what she wanted and said that nobody or nothing would interfere with her goals.

Personal Depiction 2: Yolanda, "A Motivated Student"

Yolanda was an outspoken and vivacious single woman with pale skin, curly dark hair, and hazel eyes. She self-identified as a Mexicana woman and described herself as a "motivated student." Yolanda was graduating with a double major in history and women's studies at the end of the semester when she was interviewed, a goal that she accomplished in three and a half years with a 3.29 GPA. She worked about 15 hours a week in the Study Abroad office on campus, received scholarships, and has kept herself busy working since she was 15 years old. At the time she was interviewed, Yolanda had applied to graduate school and was waiting for their response.

It was never an option for Yolanda not to attend college. She seemed to be highly motivated to succeed, was well organized, and devoted to her parents. Her parents didn't have the chance for a college education, so her family's expectation was that she would do so. Since grade school, Yolanda rarely missed a day of school because her parents "did not believe in those."

Yolanda was an "intended" only child born in Lexington, Nebraska, of immigrant parents of Mexican origin (from Chihuahua). She was fully bilingual in English and Spanish and switched back and forth from one language to the other during both interviews, saying that she was glad that I was fluent in both languages as well. She had a strong voice, smiled a lot, appeared relaxed, and seemed to enjoy answering the questions and discussing her life story with me.

For Yolanda, her parents were her strongest supporters and she was proud of them. Yolanda stated that both her parents were "strong individuals," hard working people who taught her good morals and the importance of hard work. Both her parents had to take responsibilities within their families early in life. Her father immigrated to the U.S.A. when he was a teenager in search of jobs and her mother emigrated to the U.S.A. when she married Yolanda's father. Her father was the eldest in a large family of eight children. When his own father died prematurely, Yolanda's father had to drop out in eighth grade to work to support his family. At the age of sixteen, he came to the U.S.A. and has worked hard ever since. Yolanda's mother dropped out during her second year of high school because her own mother had twins and became seriously ill. Therefore, because Yolanda's mother was the eldest child in her family, she had to take care of her own father and two younger siblings until she married Yolanda's father.

Several times during her interviews, Yolanda mentioned proudly the good relationship she had with both her parents and how supportive they were of her in and out of college. She

stated that her father ("perhaps because he was raised by a single mother") had feminist views on women's equality and rights, and, therefore, always supported Yolanda to do "whatever you want, and not to let anyone tell you any differently." Equally, Yolanda expressed her admiration for her mother, saying that she was "so strong, so wonderful," and that her mother always supported her choices in anything she wanted to do. Yolanda stated that: "she is my mom but she is a person who is not going to judge me for my decisions." When presented with a decision to make, Yolanda's mother usually said to her: "good or bad, it's your choice." Yolanda felt guided and supported strongly by her parents and was thankful for their trusting her enough to make her own decisions.

Yolanda's support network in college consisted primarily of her parents, even though they lived five hours away from the university she attended. Yolanda stated that she was an outspoken and sociable woman who had people she loved and trusted in college as well. But when asked about her support system, without any hesitation she indicated that her parents were, first and foremost. Yolanda relished being "super close to my parents" and being able to talk to them about anything and everything, especially since her college friends seemed to be unable to have such a good relationship with their parents. She said that she would rather talk to her mother about anything than to anybody else. She had a male cousin living in Manhattan ("we look like twins") with whom she kept in touch. They supported each other throughout the semesters, but she said that they were opposite in personality traits and, therefore, she did not feel too inclined to discuss her issues with him.

Most of Yolanda's extended family lived in Chihuahua, Mexico. Being in college made it more difficult for Yolanda to go back to Mexico since time and funds were scarcer. But, as the family-oriented woman she was, she always made sure to travel to Chihuahua during the

summers. Her family gathered several times a year to celebrate birthdays and holidays at her grandmother's home and she mentioned how important it was for her to see her extended family on a regular basis.

When talking about the women in her family, Yolanda was appalled at the lack of utilization of the earned college degrees of her paternal aunts. She said that, even though several women in her family had college degrees, none of them used their degrees because after marrying they became stay-at-home moms. Yolanda blamed these women's spouses for expecting women to follow in the traditional Latino women's footsteps: Becoming mothers and housewives was a top priority. Yolanda stated that she definitely wouldn't follow such stereotypes and that her parents would not let her do that either.

Personal Depiction 3: Anna, "A Biracial Kid, Non-traditional Student"

Anna was a clear-headed, determined, self-sufficient woman. She self-identified as Hispanic. Anna was early to both her interviews, said that she was very interested in participating in the research, and was eager to schedule our meetings well in advance. Anna said that she needed to schedule everything in advance because her life had little room for free time: She worked about 20 hours per week, was a commuter student, attended college full time, had a spouse in the military that was deployed at the time of the interviews, had two children that depended on her, was graduating at the end of the semester, was already accepted into and headed on to graduate school after graduation. Anna was a non-traditional student: She was older than most undergraduates, married, and had a six year-old daughter and a three year-old son.

Anna's parents met in high school in the U.S.A., married young, and had Anna right away. Anna had a sister who was five years younger than her and said that she and her sister are "attached at the hip" because of their close relationship. Both women looked similar to each

other. While Anna had white skin, green eyes, and blond hair, her sister had dark hair, dark skin, and brown eyes. Her mother was of French descent and her father was an immigrant from Mexico. According to Anna, her parents were one of the first biracial couples in their Midwestern town. When Anna was about two years old, the family moved to another Midwestern town and stayed there until today. Anna emphatically mentioned that: "It was really hard on them and on their families to understand the mixing of these two cultures." The extended family on both sides were "scattered throughout the U.S.A."

Anna discussed at length how difficult it was for her mother and father's families to talk with and understand each other because of the cultural and language differences. Her father came to the U.S.A. when he was an eight year-old child and was not fluent in English until he was in high school. Anna's Mexican grandmother did not speak English well, so Anna cherished her time with her grandmother even though their verbal communication was limited. On her mother's side of the French family everyone spoke English, but didn't speak or understand Spanish or French. Because of language difficulties, Anna's father decided not to raise his children bilingual, so Anna spoke only English (but said that she understood some words in Spanish). Her parents did not want their daughters to be "confused and have a such a hard time in school as her father did." She said that she and her sister were the only non-bilingual children on their father's side family. Fortunately, most aunts and uncles on her father's side of the family were perfectly bilingual in Spanish and English, so she was able to communicate with them in English.

Anna was always a high-achieving student who took as many advanced classes as possible. Her family had high academic expectations from her. Anna's mother graduated from college with a 4.0 and even though her father only had a high school diploma, he always pushed

and supported both daughters to pursue their education. Anna graduated from her Midwestern high school in the top 10% of her class and headed to college right away. She had a steady boyfriend by that time and during her freshman year she found out that she was pregnant with her daughter. Even though Anna was not raised in the Catholic faith, many Catholic views and values were still imposed on the daughters by the family, influencing how her father reacted to the pregnancy news. He was adamant about Anna and her boyfriend getting married, but Anna stated simply that she and her boyfriend then went against her family's desires ("we were just very stubborn"). Instead, they decided to have their daughter first and married a year later: "We wanted to make sure that everything worked out before we decided to get married. That really upset my dad, but he got over it."

Right after marriage, Anna's husband joined the military and was stationed in South Korea. Anna left college and moved overseas with their 18 month-old daughter and lived in South Korea for two years, where her son was born. She tried to take some MSU classes online, but the classes were electives and she decided to wait and attend college once she returned to the U.S.A. Both her parents requested that she resume her studies when she returned. Anna said that her father was "very understanding" when she took two years off from college, but that her mother was, instead, relentless: The same day that Anna came back from South Korea, her mother asked if she had talked to MSU to resume her studies. She told her mother to give her some time and space, but called the university right away. For Anna, earning her college degree "is something that I really love," so she didn't come back to college just because her parents wanted her to do so, but because it was her personal goal to obtain her Ph.D.

Personal Depiction 4: María, "Thankful for Being in a Family Habitat While Opening my Eyes to the World"

María was a sweet yet firm young woman who self-identified as Latina, born and raised in Paraguay. She was the middle child, only daughter, with two brothers. Both of her parents were white, upper-middle class, and college educated individuals from Asunción. María's father was an attorney and her paternal grandfather was a well-known physician who founded the medical hospital where she was born.

María had fair skin, green eyes, and long, dusty blond hair. During our interviews, she spoke softly and selected her words carefully, as if she wanted to infuse every word with its full meaning. María spoke Spanish, Italian, and English, and was able to read Latin (language taught at her high school). She studied during her high school years in the U.S.A., Switzerland, and Italy, besides Paraguay. She spent her childhood and adolescence in a "controlled" environment, where she only associated with people from her Catholic faith, school, and her upper-level social class. She participated in many extra-curricular activities after school such as tennis and ballet. María said proudly that she was always close to her mother and that her mother was her rock. She admired her father: "I've always looked up to him and wanted to be like him." But, when she said with whom she had the closest relationship, she chose her younger brother because "since we were two years old we shared everything; he was my main responsibility in the family." María lived a privileged life, seemingly sheltered from social, financial, and family problems. When her parents separated for a period of time, as a young adolescent she was sent to live with her paternal uncle in the U.S.A. and attended high school there while her parents worked on their marriage.

María wanted to prove herself independent and attend the best university she could in the U.S.A. Her father, instead, allowed her to attend only Midwestern State University since her older brother was an undergraduate student there and they could live together. María said that her older brother's guidance was helpful in navigating her first semester in college. She came to the U.S.A. to study Psychology, but ventured into a Women's Studies class and decided to double major.

María said that she was a sociable person, but preferred to be selective with her best friends: She had about five best friends, a "good number" to her. She mentioned how difficult it was for her in college to make friends with white Americans because they already had their clubs and organizations such as sororities and fraternities, friends from high school, and religious interest groups that she didn't. Most people she met during her freshman year were all international or underrepresented students. Because she lived a sheltered life, she emphasized how much she enjoyed campus life and meeting so many people who were so different from her in origin, sexual orientation, and interests. María said that homophobia and negative stereotypes against gays and lesbians were common in her country of origin, and in the U.S.A. she learned to understand homosexuality as a normal way of being. She said: "I think that I am entering a new atmosphere and that I have to deal with that in all areas of my life." Gender equality and social behavior in the U.S.A. were issues that she was surprised positively about. As an example, she mentioned how in the library, "the women were actually explaining subjects to the men."

Personal Depiction 5: Sam, "I Love Being Involved: I Want to Help the Hispanic Community"

Sam was a 20 year-old fully bilingual (Spanish and English) Latina woman that self-identified as a "female." She attended Midwestern Community College (MCC) and received an

Associate of Art degree before transferring to Midwestern State University (MSU) during her junior year. Sam was a delightful, petite woman. She had fair skin, dark slanted eyes, and dark hair, perfectly made up in a bun. She said that because of the way she looked, all of her life most people confused her as someone of Asian descent. Sam was right on time for her interviews, submitted her demographic questionnaire on time, and prepared her answers carefully, which denoted her detailed consideration of them prior to the actual interviews. She was concise and precise in her answers, without losing her friendly manner.

Since Sam was not sure about what to study when she finished high school, she decided to stay at home and attend the community college while weighing her options. She received a full scholarship to study art, but soon switched to communications. During her first semester at MCC, Sam became involved in extra curricular activities, serving as the president of the prestigious Hispanic American Leadership Organization (H.A.L.O.) and as its vice-president the following year. She was a member of the art club and worked in the financial aid office. Sam was a dedicated and excellent student at MSU as well: She obtained a 3.7 GPA, was on the Dean's honor roll, and majoring in public relations with a minor in Spanish. When Sam transferred to MSU she missed being "involved," so she started to participate in extra curricular activities and was elected as the League of United Latin-American Citizens (L.U.L.A.C.) public relations chair. She said "I have high expectations for my grades." Sam worked about two hours a week as a para-professional in the English as a Second Language Program at Midwestern High School and made every effort not to ask her parents for money to pay for her tuition or expenses in college. Sam said proudly: "I just want to do the best I can for them because I know they sacrificed a lot for us. And I want to give back to them."

Sam's parents were born in Mexico. When her father was young, he was traveling constantly between Mexico and the U.S.A. in search of work. He met Sam's mother in Mexico, decided to get married, and came to the U.S.A. They settled in a Midwestern State. Sam was the middle daughter and had an older sister and a younger brother. Except for a couple of uncles that live in Phoenix and a cousin in California, everybody else in their extended family stayed in Mexico, so her family of five were the only ones in this country.

When Sam was young, her family moved to live close to the feedlot where her father worked, about 10 minutes away from where they lived. Her mother worked at home. After a few years, when Sam was in the third grade, her family moved to another Midwestern town located about 45 minutes away from their previous Midwestern residence. Once there, her older sister attended a community college, received her degree, and moved to Australia where she completed her college degree and now holds a job as a social worker. Sam said of her sister moving away: "She kind of left." Sam missed her sister and was not sure when was she going to see her again.

Sam's family considered education a top priority. She mentioned several times how her father was always working alongside her mother around the house and how he supported his wife while she was getting her college degree. Sam's mother graduated from college with an impeccable 4.0, whereas Sam was not sure the level of education attained by her father. She was instilled with her parents' strong work and study ethic and said of her parents that as long as she pursued her bachelor's degree, they would support her fully. She was warned by her mother's godson: "Not to leave home and forget about my parents."

Findings in Accordance with Research Questions and Emerging Themes

In this chapter, the data were analyzed by exploring how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' undergraduate college persistence. These Latinas defined themselves

by using their own life narratives and giving their own meaning to their college experiences. The theoretical framework for this study was Cultural Congruity (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) because it contextualized the understanding that Latinas have of their culture of origin and the value that they have in relation to the values upheld by the university attended.

There were several themes that emerged from analyzing the data. They were organized in three clusters pivoting on the three research questions: (1) Stereotypes and racism, obstacles; (2) caring relationships and high expectations, involvement and giving back; and (3) integration and determination, and resistance and academic effectiveness. Additional emerging themes were identified under "Education as personal uplift and change": (1) redefinition of self by self-efficacy, (2) intellectually stimulating courses as change producers, (3) tenacity to succeed, and (4) fathers as feminist role models.

In this study, the data indicated the importance for Latinas to develop personal strategies in college to be successful academically, to re-define themselves, to establish and maintain their support networks, to overcome obstacles, and to reaffirm their sense of academic effectiveness and independence, while staying connected to their roots and giving back to the family and the community.

The following themes emerged from the three research questions:

1.   What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically? (Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005)

Theme CC: Need to change identity and cultural fit

Emerging themes: Stereotypes and racism

Obstacles

2. What socio-cultural and gender role expectations, at home and in college affect

Latinas' perception of their academic persistence? (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado

Bernal et al., 2006; Nora et al., 2006)

Theme CC: Family and college values

Emerging themes: Caring relationships and high expectations

Involvement and giving back

3. What college experiences of Latinas influence their gender and ethnic identity?

(Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006)

Theme CC: Ability to communicate with others

Emerging themes: Integration and determination

Resistance and academic effectiveness

Education as Personal Uplift and Change Themes

Additional emerging themes were identified during data analysis. Because of their

thematic concordance, the three additional emerging themes were organized under "Education as

personal uplift and change." The three themes were: (1) redefinition of self by self-efficacy, (2)

intellectually stimulating courses as change producers, (3) tenacity to succeed, and (4) fathers as

feminist role models.

Table 10. Research Questions and Emerging Themes

Research Questions	Themes CC and beyond	Emerging Themes
Research Question 1 What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically? (Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005)	Need to change identity and cultural fit	• Stereotypes and racism • Obstacles

Research Questions	Themes CC and beyond	Emerging Themes
Research Question 2 What socio-cultural and gender role expectations, at home and in college, affect Latinas' perception of their academic persistence? (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Nora et al., 2006)	Family and college values	• Caring relationships and high expectations • Involvement and giving back
Research Question 3 What college experiences of Latinas influence their gender and ethnic identity? (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006)	Ability to communicate with others	• Integration and determination • Resistance and academic effectiveness
N/A	Education as personal uplift and change	• Redefinition of self by self-efficacy • Intellectually stimulating courses as change producers • Tenacity to succeed • Fathers as feminist role models

The analysis of the data collected through the participants' demographic questionnaires, life narratives, and semi-structured interviews was informed via the Cultural Congruity theoretical framework (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). To analyze the data, I first identified the three main themes around which the cultural congruity statements were organized (Table 5). These themes were: (1) need to change identity and cultural fit, (2) family and college values, and (3) ability to communicate with others. Second, I organized the face-to-face, semi-structured interview questions around the three main themes identified in the CC (Table 6). Third, emerging themes were identified and mapping of the initial codes was done (Table 7). Fourth, participants'

emerging themes were organized under the three CC main themes as follows: Research question 1: Stereotypes and racism, and obstacles; Research question 2: Caring relationships and high expectations, and involvement and giving back; and Research question 3: Integration and determination, and resistance and academic effectiveness (See Table 10). Fifth, additional emerging themes were identified under "Education as personal uplift and change" and were: (1) redefinition of self by self-efficacy, (2) intellectually stimulating courses as change producers, and (3) tenacity to succeed, and (4) fathers as feminist role models.

Research Question 1: What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically?

Theme CC 1**:**   Need to change identity and cultural fit

Emerging themes: Stereotypes and racism

                     Obstacles

The need to change their identities and the cultural fit between home and college are two main patterns that emerged from the data. Participants asserted their identities by including in their life narratives self-identification elements such as ethnicity, race, class, and gender. These essential elements of their identities were related intimately to who they were and, therefore, affected their college experiences directly (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Thus, identifying Latinas' meaning of their college experiences was crucial for understanding their academic persistence within the framework of cultural congruity between home values and college values (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). The emerging themes during the interviews were: Stereotypes and racism, and obstacles.

 Stereotypes and Racism

Because stereotypes affect self-confidence and, therefore, abilities of the individuals,

racist and sexist stereotypes hindered Latinas' ability to demonstrate who they really were and their capabilities.

Families' stereotypical gender roles. Constricting stereotypical gender roles for Latinas by family members were discussed by Yolanda, Anna, María, and Beatriz. Yolanda mentioned in an amused way with high-pitch tone while raising her eyebrows that even though all of his father's sisters received a college education, none of them worked outside of the home:

> I think that on my dad's side they are all so smart. One is a teacher for disabled students, two are accountants, and another one is in early child development, but only one of them actually works in what she studied, which I find strange, because they worked so hard. I think it's the people they married that weren't as supportive of them working outside of the home.

Anna said that, even though her family is not practicing Catholicism actively, still those religious views were imposed upon her and her sister. She said:

> I found out as a freshman that I was pregnant with my daughter. And so that changed things a little bit, but we worked through that, my dad is very traditional: 'You get married as soon as you find out. If you are having children you have to be married and we need to make everything legitimate.'

María discussed how her father wouldn't let her study far away from home because he was afraid of the violence and drugs that can be found at university campuses. For her, the only way it was acceptable to her father to let her come to MSU was under the condition that she lived with her older brother.

> My dad said that he didn't want me to go to college in the U.S.A. because life there is too dangerous for women, because they are very exposed to drugs and sex, and since I was such a protected family girl, that I wouldn't probably do well. So my dad started wanting me to go to the university in Uruguay since it is close [to home].

María's cousins also tried to dissuade her from studying in the U.S.A.:

> So I got together with my cousin who studied psychology in a Catholic college in Uruguay, and she told me to not even consider going to the U.S.A. because the people are very different.

Sam compared her father and her boyfriend's standing on women's gender roles. While Sam's father talked about gender equality and acted upon it daily in the family, Sam's boyfriend was conservative in his views. She said: "I know my boyfriend, whenever I'm at his house, I'll be like: 'If we ever live together you are going to help me clean and wash the dishes' and he is like: 'No'." Sam's extended family suggested she not move too far from her family. With a sister living in Australia and a younger brother, it seemed in the eyes of her extended family that Sam's responsibility was to come back home after college and take care of her parents.

Thus, participants articulated the dichotomous and often times contradictory values that their families imposed upon them. Even though their parents instilled in participants' the importance of being educated and independent, parents, boyfriends, and family members also expected participants to occupy traditional Latina gender roles, such as submission to the parental authority, dependency, importance of marriage. Such dichotomous expectations coming from caring adults interfered with Latinas' ability to adapt to their college environment and persist academically. Because of traditional Latino family values and expectations of female members, Latinas were expected to enact cultural and gender role expectations even when they attend college. These gender role expectations ranged from being the main caretakers of family members to provide for them financially (Gil & Inoa-Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Harris Canul, 2003; Orozco, 2003, 2007). These stereotypical gender roles were discussed by the participants as constricting roadblocks to asserting their professional identities and plans for the future.

Campus and employment stereotypical gender roles. Beatriz encountered a troubling situation at her campus job where her boss misunderstood and mistreated her because of the boss's inability to understand Latino culture. Beatriz said that that difference between

"helping a friend for free" and assisting a co-worker for monetary compensation were two ways of looking at the same situation. Beatriz understood the situation as if she was helping a friend, but her boss wanted to compensate her monetarily for helping her co-worker. Beatriz's boss became angry and mistreated Beatriz when she refused to accept the payment. Beatriz complained about the lack of cultural sensitivity of this university official:

> She was mad that I didn't take her money and I explained that I was offended in the most polite way possible, but I said 'look, the way I was raised this is just something that we do not do. When I take a friend home I am not going to take money for it.' And she explained that she worked with students and that they are her employees and she knows how hard it is to pay for gas and that was her intention, and I said that I understood, but culturally there was a difference there.

> Yolanda also discussed stereotypes that influence Latina women negatively at the

university. With a dead-serious face and assertive tone, she said:

> I think that there are several expectations of being a Latina here. You are supposed to fit a mold and they assume that is who you are. I've gotten asked many times while being here if I had any children. They just assume that I have to have a child because I'm Latina (…) and then that I have a lot of siblings, and no, I'm an only child. But also Latina women and minorities are also supposed to be much more sexualized.

Yolanda presented these stereotypes as being so foreign to her life experience and who she truly was, that her indignant tone of voice was obvious at the end of the last sentence.

Anna spoke at length about another way of stereotyping that she experienced as a pregnant freshman on campus. For her, being young, married, and a mother was a prejudice-magnet in college. Anna was pregnant during her freshman year and she was disappointed at the looks and negative attention she received from peers and faculty. She said that: "our university is very traditional, they expect traditional students, and the culture is formed around that, and if you don't quite fit into that, then you stick out like a sore thumb." To make her statement stronger, she added:

> I was pregnant on campus with Brecklyn and there was a definite judgment on that.

And I wasn't married at the time. There comes a different judgment when you are married with kids and when you are not married with kids. And I didn't mind, that was my choice and who says that you have to be married to have children anyways, you know? But I was 18, walking around pregnant on campus and I attracted a lot of attention and a lot of questions.

Anna's was aware of the negative stereotype that she was associated with when she was pregnant as a freshman. However, she defied the stereotype by questioning the very center of it.

Because her mother was white and her father Mexican, with her fair skin and green eyes, Anna also attracted negative attention when she was a child. Some people jokingly said that she was not her father's child because his skin and color were so much darker than hers. Anna's sister, instead, had a darker complexion and Anna said that her sister "grew up as a very much darker child, she was exposed more to that different treatment." Anna was aware that she could pass for white since she inherited her French mother's complexion and not her Mexican father's color. She mentioned painfully how her sister was discriminated against and treated differently from her in school and around town because she looked Mexican. Anna said that she learned from such experiences that she should not disclose her true heritage in order to avoid "situations."

Three participants discussed at length how negative it felt for them to be stereotyped in college by university officials, either because they were non-traditional students, mothers, or because they had cultural values different from those of the dominant culture. Participants felt vulnerable to stereotypes and responded by behaving in two different ways: They either tried to avoid uncomfortable situations by denying their own cultural values, or they confronted others by exposing the limitations of the dominant culture's values. In either of these cases, stereotypes influenced participants' college experiences negatively. They were critical of the racism and

stereotyping experienced and lamented the lack of cultural sensitivity that university officials exhibited toward them.

Obstacles

Participants encountered different obstacles before or while in college. Some obstacles came in the form of life situations and others as part of the campus culture.

Life situation obstacles. One participant had to resist her father's stereotypes against U.S.A. societal culture. One had to adjust to having children and a husband in the military and deployed while in college; two had to put their college plans on hold for a short while and live overseas because their spouses were deployed; one had to endure an abusive relationship; one had to live with the scars of an early sexual abuse committed by a close family member when she was a child.

Anna said:

> There are so many things that people don't understand about having children. Yes, they have day care, but sometimes things come up with kids and it is just extremely hard to explain to someone who has never had children. I felt like some days I could not get a break between one catches something and then the next week the other has it. And [the professor says] 'why are you missing again' and I'm like 'try to remember when you had children.' And then you are sitting in class looking dead because you already missed two weeks of class, and you're like 'I feel like death.'

For Anna, one of the biggest obstacles she encountered was having children while in college and being alone when her husband was deployed.

In the case of María, she had to fight her father's resistance to allow her to study in the U.S.A. She said:

> My dad said that he didn't want me to go to college in the U.S.A. because college life here is very dangerous for women, because women are very exposed to drugs and sex. Since I was such a protected family girl my father said that I probably wouldn't do well. So I ended up coming to MSU because my brother was here. There wasn't another option.

María lived all of her life in an upper-middle class, highly controlled social environment, and her father was initially against her desire to studying in the U.S.A. Her father believed that it was dangerous for women to live and study alone in the U.S.A.

Like María, Sam also had to confront friends and relatives when she decided to leave her hometown to attend college. She said:

> Our family friends told me not to move too far, because I had to come back and take care of my parents. My mom's godson, his parents came over here when my parents visited and all of their kids went to college, but they told me not to leave and forget my parents.

Beatriz endured repeated sexual abuse as a child by her sister's husband. Her victimization tainted her way of relating to men and establishing a loving bond with her current husband.

> I remember third grade and on. It is difficult because I do remember the sexual abuse that I suffered by that husband that ended up being an abuser of children. I never actually told my parents until a lot later. I think when I was in high school, I just felt like I wanted my older sister to know all the facts and I wanted her children to be safe.

Beatriz was involved also in an abusive relationship that lasted five years when she started college. She was able to end it during her freshman year, when she met her current husband.

For the participants, life situation obstacles presented themselves in different forms: One father held stereotypical views of the culture in American universities; family members believed that going away to college meant that the participant was abandoning her family and home culture, a parent believing that it was necessary for the participant to have a male "protector" from the ever-present dangers of sex and alcohol. These stereotypical life situation obstacles were meant to act as deterrents of participants' sense of independence. However, rather than preventing participants from being independent, these life situation obstacles generated the opposite effect in them. These obstacles furthered participants' sense of efficacy and determination to attend MSU, be educated, and independent.

Campus culture obstacles. Anna clearly expressed that university professors and personnel were, in general, not understanding of the lives and needs of non-traditional students, resulting in uncomfortable situations for her. She mentioned a time when she spent an entire night at the emergency room with a sick child. Her husband was deployed and her family lived far away, however, she managed to go to class the next morning. She said:

> And then you are going to class looking dead, and I'm like 'I wasn't out drinking last night, I wasn't, I was all up night doing this.' And then the teachers were like: 'Well, you're nodding off.' And I'm like: 'I'm not trying to be disrespectful but it was just rough, but I wanted to come to class because I'm dedicated still to come to class.'

Anna spent a significant part of her interviews discussing the university's lack of resources for students like her. She indicated how the university system was geared toward traditional students and criticized the lack of proper support for non-traditional, older students who had different needs than single, young students. She said that: "I'm just so non-traditional and there just wasn't the support you wanted and needed."

Anna said that she was always busy, but her last semester in college was hectic. With her husband in the military and deployed, two young children, a job where she worked 20 hours a week, and a full time college schedule, she said that there were not enough hours in the day to get involved in campus activities. Actually, Anna was involved on campus, but in a different fashion from the way in which traditional students are involved. Traditional students are usually single, young, and have no children. Her profile as a non-traditional undergraduate student was different from traditional students' profiles. Anna said with an expression of sadness that "our university is very, very traditional, and the culture is formed around that. And if you don't quite fit into that then you stick out like a sore thumb. It is still very expected to be a traditional [student.]" For Anna, the most significant obstacle at the university was that it provided support and involvement opportunities that were non-compatible with the responsibilities that non-

traditional students juggle on a daily basis. Therefore, the institution fell short from becoming a welcoming and productive environment for older, married, students with children. By serving the needs of traditional students, Anna felt that the university failed non-traditional students.

Yolanda lamented the lack of racial and ethnic diversity on campus and the poor cultural sensitivity of some faculty members and students. She said:

> In my hometown there is a much stronger Hispanic community. I think it's about 60% there, so that is something that really affects me here. In there they see more diversity on a daily basis. They see a person from Guatemala, Cuba, Argentina. When you see them and hear their accents it is OK, you know they are from Latin America and you move on. It is not as important. But here it is so important, people mark you by who they think you are. This is so low on diversity that, when you walk through campus you see all white, may be someone who is Black, a Hispanic, and maybe an Asian, but the number you see is so insignificant compared to the vast majority who are white.

Beatriz spoke about how evident students' social class and privilege were on campus. She was openly critical of the frivolous campus climate, a culture oriented toward having material things but not toward gaining actual knowledge. She said:

> My culture is so different from the culture of the university, because there are just so many things that are oriented towards having money, and there are just certain things that other students always bring up and they are like 'yeah, didn't you ever do this?, don't you ever go skiing in Colorado?' Or sometimes some of those things happen, where you just notice, there are things that I never would have access to. The only reason I am here is because my husband was lucky enough to be stationed here, and the fact that I had loans and financial aid helped. And I would not have gone if I had to pay full or out of state tuition. The only reason I could come here is because they waived my out of state tuition because of my military status.

Beatriz also was critical of university personnel and the lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity exhibited by her boss on campus. She explained that during a campus function one of her fellow student co-workers fell ill and she took him back to his house to rest. When she came back to the event, her boss wanted to pay Beatriz for taking her co-worker home. Beatriz told her boss that she was just helping a friend and did not need to be reimbursed for doing a favor. Her boss insisted and they got into an argument. Beatriz said:

She [her boss] was going to pay me some hours because I took him home. And right away my reaction was that that was really offensive, and I wanted her to know that I was not taking that. Because the way my parents raised me was that you don't get paid to help your friend. Your friendship with someone is something you can't put a price on. If you put money into your friendship, it's going to get ruined. She was mad that I didn't take her money, and I explained that I was offended in the most polite way possible. Culturally there was a difference there but she didn't understand it and took it as an offense.

Participants identified the obstacles they encountered with MSU's campus culture clearly. Two participants spent a considerable amount of their interview time elaborating on the obstacles they faced. Lack of consideration for non-traditional students' needs and potential, classism and racism embedded within the university culture, non gender-sensitive university services, and lack of involvement opportunities were all obstacles that influenced participants' college experience negatively.

In sum, stereotypes and racism, and obstacles encountered at the university influenced participants' college experiences. Participants expressed the need to change their identities in order to fit the culture of the university. At the same time, participants had to go against stereotypical Latino gender role expectations in order to be independent and succeed in college, i.e., in order to succeed academically, participants had to go against stereotypes and obstacles in both their home culture and the culture of the university. In spite of having endured many obstacles, participants exhibited creative and positive behaviors to these oppressive situations, reacting to them by redefining themselves, holding onto their cultural heritage, and establishing solid support networks. Thus, they resisted oppressive situations they encountered and persisted in their academic pursuits (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gloria et al., 2005.)

Research Question 2: What socio-cultural and gender role expectations at home and in college affect Latinas' perception of their academic persistence?

Theme CC 2**:**　　　　Family and college values

Emerging themes: Caring relationships and high expectations

                       Involvement and giving back

Caring Relationships and High Expectations

High expectations from caring family members, school counselors, and university personnel motivated all participants in this study to push themselves further and excel. The key element mentioned by all participants was that these individuals, beyond having high expectations for them, also were caring and supportive of them.

High expectations from caring family members. Even though three out of five fathers and three of five mothers did not attend college, and none of the Latinas' husbands attended college either, mothers, fathers, spouses, siblings, and children supported Latinas' advancement in higher education in varied ways. Academic and emotional support expressed as high academic expectations by these caring family members were mentioned during the interviews frequently. All five participants discussed at length how her mothers and fathers played a constant crucial role of encouragement and support.

In Yolanda's home, not attending college was never an option because "my mom and my dad said that education was something that you really needed in life." With those words, Yolanda subsumed the common expectations that participants' parents had. Even when sick, Yolanda had to go to school because, she said: "My parents didn't believe in those [sick days], so I was always in school but I think that that really helped me." Yolanda also said that:

> Both of my parents are strong individuals, very hard-working people. They taught me that from a very young age. 'Whatever you do, work hard and do whatever you want *con la cabeza muy en alto* [with your head proudly up.]'

Sam had similar experiences of high academic expectations from her family. Her mother didn't allow her to "have a second job because she wanted me to focus on my studies. I have

high expectations for my grades." Sam's parents were supportive of her as long as she'd move away from home to attend college. She did so and considered herself a successful college student. When discussing her parents' academic expectations of her, Sam said: "They expected me to go to college, because education for us [siblings] has always been really important to my parents. So, I didn't think it was an option for me not to attend college." She added: "[Because of my parents' example] I feel like I knew what to do here [in college], just to study and work hard." Sam's words sum up what was true for all participants in this study.

Anna said of her family:

Academics were extremely important both to my mom and my dad. My mom graduated with her masters and my dad only had his high school diploma, but he always wanted us to continue with school, so school was a big priority for my sister and I. When we were growing up, we were not allowed to participate in too many extra curricular activities because our focus was school, so I graduated in the top 10% of my class.

Anna stated further that her nuclear and extended families were part of a major support system for her. She said:

My mom and dad pushed me. My husband is as much [pushy as my parents]. It's sometimes a pain to have to deal with all my school stuff, but he's my biggest support. Always, when I thought this wasn't going to work out, he was always there to push me. He was like 'this is going to get done.' And my kids, they are very proud; they are old enough now to understand that mom goes to school and they think it's really neat that mom goes to school.

For all five participants, parental expectations went beyond education. Participants were expected to be independent and self-reliant. Yolanda said proudly that both of her parents were strong individuals, "very hard working people who taught me that from a very young age that you are an independent person and you don't need a boyfriend."

Anna praised her Mexican side of the family and the ongoing support that she received from them:

One thing that we took from our Mexican heritage is that family is everything. You take

care of your family, you take care of them even if you are not happy with them at the moment. I remember as a child one of my father's cousins had some issues in Mexico and needed to be taken care of, so he [dad] dropped everything and went back.

These kinds of experiences taught Anna that she was different from her peers in college:

I didn't realize how different that was until I got into college and realized how much people don't contact their family. I felt an obligation to always call everyone and check up. I always called my dad, checked on him, made sure everything was fine, called my mom and sister just because I wanted to keep that family bond. My children will be raised with that upbringing that family is everything and that you drop everything for your family.

Mothers, fathers, spouses, siblings, and children constituted a network of support for this study's participants, which proved effective in assisting them to make a positive connection between home and university culture. These caring individuals' support came in the form of high academic expectations and participants understood these expectations as a way to push them to achieve academic excellence. These caring family members had high expectations from Latinas while offering them emotional support and fulfillment. These caring adults believed in participants' intellectual and social abilities to excel academically.

Mothers were an essential source of consistent caring support. Beatriz remembered that: "During elementary school, I was a regular kid and I did really well in school because my parents always pushed me. And I read a lot, I was a big reader." When she lost her scholarship for a large university in Texas, Beatriz was depressed and unmotivated to leave her house. Her mother said to her: "I know that you are depressed, but you can't sit at home. We need to go sign you up for a community college." In Anna's case, her mother was the engine behind her going to college and graduating so she could became independent from others. She said:

My mother has a masters' degree. She went to college, so I think that is where the big push on education is. My dad always pushed me too, but education wasn't a huge thing for women on his side of the family.

Yolanda credited her mother for being the strong woman she was. She learned to be independent from "spending so much time with my mom, I think that helped." She said that it made her proud that her mother was always accepting of her and her decisions and was never judgmental toward her. She said:

> My mom is strong, she is so wonderful! She is a very strong woman, and she believes that you can do whatever you want and not to let anyone tell you any differently. She supports my choices in anything I do. Good or bad, she's like 'it's your choice'. She's my mom, but she is a person who is not going to judge me for my decisions.

With a smile on her face, Yolanda said that her mother's attitude helped her greatly to open up and maintain ongoing channels of communication between both of them and that was invaluable personal support. For Yolanda, her mother "has already helped me in school, because if something goes wrong and I want to talk to her about it, it' is not like 'oh well, you should have done it this way.' She supports my decision and how I decide to deal with issues." Yolanda's mother told her how she would have approached it, but as a modeling behavior for her and not as a reproach. Yolanda said that her mother, by guiding her into trusting relationships, taught her how to be herself and trust herself when establishing relationships with others.

Mothers' support was essential to the participants. Their support came in varied ways, from teaching by example (mothers getting a high GPA in college and expecting their daughters to do the same or better) to trusting the participants' independent decisions. Whether their mothers achieved a college-level education or not, participants learned from their mothers' example of dedication and hard work and understood them as powerful women. Open communication with their daughters was another successful way to support the participants, because it demonstrated that these mothers trusted their daughters' decision-making processes and independence. When mothers needed to push their daughters to achieve higher in education, they did so and were relentless, especially if participants were at risk of not finishing their

college degrees. Mothers provided unconditional support to the participants while making sure that their daughters were academically successful and obtained their college degrees.

Fathers also were an unconditional source of support and *consejos* for participants and advised their daughters against following traditional cultural and gender roles. Anna's family on her father's side had traditional gender role viewpoints where women were assumed to be the "natural" caretakers: Women were supposed to stay at home, clean, and take care of the children. But at her home, something made her father change the way in which he raised his two daughters. Anna argued that because her father was raised by his single mother in poverty, he witnessed her struggle raising her children successfully. That experience, Anna claimed, changed her father's perspective on how to raise daughters. She said assertively:

> My dad definitely raised us differently where it was not expected of me and I should not follow [tradition] and if I didn't follow it then it was OK because that meant that it's fine, you don't have to make everyone happy all the time. So I think that's why school got placed so heavily on me as a child is that my dad did want me to do something more than just being a high school graduate and go and get married right away: He wanted something where I didn't need to have someone to support me, I could do it on my own.

Her father instilled in her the need to be self-sufficient and not to depend upon anyone for monetary support: "My dad raised me [with the idea that] I don't need to do traditional roles. He said not to worry about getting married quickly because his sisters got married at 16 and had children at 16."

Yolanda believed that her father was highly supportive of her as a woman because he was raised by a single mother who worked hard and endured severe hardships to raise her children. Yolanda asserted that her father learned from his mother how difficult it was for a woman to have a good life without having an education. Yolanda's father, who had an eighth-grade education, told her "you are an independent person" and she said that she loved it: "I think it's so

great. Because my uncles are a little sexist, and they are just not as in tune with [education], even though they have daughters."

Anna said that when she got to college, "my husband and I were dating at the time and I found out as a freshman that I was pregnant with my daughter. And so that changed things a little bit, but we worked through that." Her father was supportive of her:

> My dad was always proud of me no matter what, because he said whatever you can accomplish, you'll accomplish more than what I did. So he pushed me, but he was very understanding when I took a two-year break. My mom had the hardest time because she's like: 'There's got to be some way you can do this.'

Anna's father told her:

> You didn't need to make everyone happy all the time. School got so heavily placed on me as a child because my dad wanted me to do something more than just being a high school graduate and go get married right away. He wanted something where I didn't need to have someone support me.

Anna added: "My schooling is for me. That is something I have just as mine. I view myself as a good student, a dedicated student." Anna is going to graduate school because "it is something that needs to be done. I have the support that I need here with my family and I can go to school and just be done."

Sam said that even though her dad never attended college, he was fully supportive of his wife doing so. Sam's mother was about to graduate with a bachelor's degree in secondary education and a 4.0 GPA. She said about her father:

> He was always really helpful, and if she [mother] had to do homework or something, he would really help. I feel like he's just different because he helps around the house or if he has a day off, he washes the dishes and helps around the house.

Four out of five participants expressed and described in great length how important their fathers were in their decision to attend and graduate from college. Fathers told participants' the reasons for which participants needed to be educated, and the main one was being independent.

Participants admired their fathers and were grateful that their fathers supported them to achieve high educational goals and academic excellence.

Except for María whose family was upper class and had domestic employees, all four other participants provided a detailed account of how their fathers did house chores alongside their spouses and how fathers supported participants' mothers by being involved in the day-to-day homemaking and caring for family members. Some participants described their fathers as "feminists" because these men believed in gender equality, taught them about it, and acted accordingly on a daily basis. Fathers were extremely supportive of their daughters in daily life and pushed their daughters to become as highly educated as possible, often voicing to them the importance of delaying marriage and having children.

Fathers' examples of strong support and gentle care of their daughters and other family members was a salient theme for participants. Surprisingly, fathers were described by four participants as breaking from traditional Latino cultural gender roles. Three participants explained their fathers' non-traditional behaviors by indicating that their fathers were raised by struggling single mothers. Thus, participants believed that experience taught their fathers that women needed to be educated in order to be financially and emotionally independent. Mothers were loved and described as either pushing their daughters or being caring, but both characteristics together were assigned only to fathers.

Whether Latinas' parents had a college education or not, they expected their daughters to attend and graduate from college. All participants' parents lived together, so all of them had an intact, two-parent family. What was meaningful for the participants was the emotional and intellectual investment of their caring family members in their academic success. Families'

expectations propelled Latinas' desire and energy investment in obtaining high grades and the best possible academic performance.

For most participants, their parents were the ones who motivated and supported them to have high academic goals. For others, it was a combination of parents, siblings, spouses, and children who provided the most meaningful and consistent support. Participants mentioned the importance of having parents who supported each other. The sense of interdependency and self-efficacy in Latinas was shown and modeled primarily by their parents but also by other family members. It was a way of showing trust in each other's independence, judgment, and decisions, thus modeling behavior for their children.

Caring relationships with spouses play a critical role in Latinas' ability to adapt, navigate, and persist in college. Even though Anna's husband was in the military and absent from home during long stretches of the year, he was a strong supporter of his wife's academic plans. She said that:

> My husband, although it's a pain in his butt to have to deal with all of my school stuff, he is my biggest support. Always when I thought that this wasn't going to work out he was always just there to push me. He was like 'this is going to get done. I know that you're a mom. I know that you're dealing with my career. I know that you're dealing with your own career and trying to get off the ground, but please just take the time to finish what you are going to. It'll pay off in the end.'

 Anna extended the importance of support received by caring adults to how crucial it was to be supported by her children and explained that as a twofold gain: She modeled behavior for them, while receiving loving support from her two children. She said:

> Of course my kids, they are very proud. They are old enough now to understand that mom is going to school to finish, like I always explain to them. And they are a support too, you know, they know when I have homework, 'please give me a minute to finish this' and they go and play in their rooms.

Supportive people around them instilled in Latinas the *ganas* (desire) to move forward and succeed while being supported. Participants asserted that it was crucial for them that caring people around them consistently trusted any big or small decisions that they made. All participants stated several times during their interviews how crucial it was for their academic success to have loved ones who supported them and expected high academic achievement from them.

High expectations from caring university professors and personnel. Caring relationships and high expectations from university professors and personnel for participants constituted an instance of personal support. These meaningful adults supported participants wholeheartedly, exhibiting appreciation and attentiveness toward them, and treating them as valuable people playing complex roles. Faculty members played an important role pushing some participants to aspire for more. It was mentioned by four participants how encouraging it was for them to have a professor or advisor requiring them to work hard and attain high academic achievement.

Beatriz's history professor changed Beatriz's life. This professor was interested in her way of thinking, reasoning, and in how she was going to use her skills in the future. Beatriz said:

> [My history professor] put me on the path towards being a lawyer. She is the one who pointed at me in the class and asked what my degree was in and what I was learning, and I said 'anthropology,' and she said she thought [I was] pre-law. When I asked why, she said how she saw me listen to other people and then speak, and I say exactly the thing that should be said next to move the discussion. She noticed how analytical I am and how I can move things into a certain direction.

Beatriz trusted this professor fully, so much that when she encountered a challenging situation right before graduating she did not hesitate in requesting her history professor's advice and support. She said: "I met with her [history professor] recently because I had a scary moment in the middle of the semester; I was scared about graduating."

Anna graduated from a Midwestern high school among the top 10% top of her class. But as a non-traditional student juggling a military husband usually deployed abroad, two children, and a job, Anna knew that her professors expected her to do as much as any traditional student without considering the obligations that she had on top of the traditional ones. She said that she preferred to keep quiet about the personal details of her life and tried to perform as well as anybody else in class. Despite her busy life, Anna's GPA in college was 3.2. She said that when one of her children was sick and she was unable to attend school she told professors that she was not "looking for sympathy, [but] for understanding. If I'm missing class it's for a good reason; I'm a reliable student."

Anna had a particularly positive experience with a male professor when she was a freshman and pregnant. Anna attended classes in college up to the week prior to giving birth and said it was difficult for her to fit in the desks for regular students. Her professor was looking at her because she seemed to be uncomfortable sitting at the desk. The next class, the professor gave her a chair to sit in and told her that he was not trying to make her uncomfortable in the class but rather the opposite. He said to her:

> Just so you are more comfortable and you don't have to sit here and squeeze in. I just have a chair right up here. It's still in the middle of the classroom, so you don't feel like you are being singled out in the front or in the back.

The simple gesture through which the professor recognized Anna's needs, trying to make her feel more comfortable demonstrated his understanding and valuing her as a worthy person. His gesture made a big impact on Anna. She said:

> He was just trying to be very sweet and didn't treat me as a child who made a bad decision like [the way] you might get treated outside by your classmates. It was more of a comfort and he did well not to point out or make me feel uncomfortable in any way, shape, or form and I thought that it was really nice, like I always remember that experience at MSU.

Sam, in a confidential tone, shared that different people along her educational path had high expectations of her and helped her reach her goals. Her media professor at the community college was stern and expected only the best from Sam. It was a two-year long and hard class for Sam, but that particular professor motivated her to do her best at every turn. She said: "If it wasn't for her, I feel like I wouldn't have been ready to come over here [MSU]." Sam also said that her high school art teacher helped her get a scholarship at the local community college because she was always an applied and successful student. Sam was particularly impressed with the student organization's advisor who pushed and helped her become the H.A.L.O.'s president. Sam said:

> Our advisor at the Midwestern community college was a Latina woman, and she pushed me to be president and do as much as I could because she said that it was really important for me to stand up for those that can't really speak for themselves. So I really feel like I have grown and become a better student and person and I just want to help people who cannot speak out.

Caring, invested, and sensitive university personnel were important in making participants' feel valued and knowledgeable in college. All participants established at least one positive relationship with university personnel. These individuals had high academic expectations for the participants while guiding them to become academically successful. High academic expectations coupled with caring relationships made evident to the participants that they were much more than students, wives, mothers, or daughters in the eyes of these caring university individuals. Caring university personnel validated participants' personal values and educational worth, therefore establishing a meaningful bond between home values and college values. This, coupled with the support that participants received from family members, acted as a strong caring network that propelled participants to achieve higher while feeling supported and

valued in college. Moreover, in some instances, this support constituted a key factor in participants' decisions to further their education and attend graduate school.

Involvement and Giving Back

Giving back was a theme mentioned by all participants. The desire to give back occupied an important space within participants' narratives and answers to the semi-structured questions. However, each participant defined giving back in her own personal ways, such as giving back to the community, to their parents, and to their families to keep the tradition going.

All participants mentioned that they were open, helpful, and sociable, and that their active involvement on and off campus helped them develop these skills. For Sam, involvement is what motivated her, helped her make friends, and allowed her to give back to the community. She stated:

> I was really involved in my community college. I had a scholarship to be on the magazine staff, so I was really busy doing that. I was in the art club because at first I was on an art scholarship, and I was involved with H.A.L.O. Last spring I was its president, and last fall I was vice-president. And I worked at the financial aid office as well. So I was really busy and I met a lot of new people, and I made a lot of really good friends. When transferring to this university, I was worried about my grades because they said it was really hard over here, and so last semester I focused on my studies and didn't get involved that much, but this semester I got involved in L.U.L.A.C. and next year I will be the PR chair.

Yolanda also spoke of how she worked continuously since she was 15 years old: It felt strange to her not to work during her freshman year, a choice she made because she wanted to concentrate on her studies. Yolanda said proudly, with a wide smile and bright open eyes:

> I have always had a job and been super busy, so that was a hard year from not having a job and not being super involved. But that changed during my sophomore year when I got a job and got much more involved on campus and now I work at the study abroad office and have a scholarship. I enjoy working and being productive.

Sam spoke highly of her parents, was supportive of them, and wanted to give back to them by being independent from their help, especially from receiving financial assistance. She

said that in situations of financial need, "I can't go to them right away, I have to try and figure it out for myself first." Sam mentioned other support people besides her parents that helped her succeed in her academic goals. Those key people were her media advisor at the community college (who expected a lot from her academically), her art teacher in high school (that guided and helped her obtain the scholarship so she could attend the community college), and H.A.L.O. advisor (who pushed her to run for the presidency of the group and attain it). With a serious expression on her face, she stated clearly that she wanted to "go back [to my community], and for my career I want to help the Hispanic community over there."

Giving back took a different meaning for each participant. For Anna, giving back meant keeping the family tradition going. She was serious when she said that her whole family attended and graduated from MSU and she was not going to be an exception in the family tradition. She said with emphasis, stressing every word:

> MSU is a family tradition on my mom's side of the family. My mom, my grandmother, all of her siblings, all went to MSU, so it's kind of expected that you would go to MSU as well. So I wanted to finish at MSU since I started here.

In Yolanda's case, giving back meant making a difference for her and her community to change the stereotypes of Latinos in society. For Yolanda, coming to the Midwestern State University town was an experience of living in a white-majority city where she couldn't find much racial or cultural diversity. She said that in her hometown most people were of Latino origin and, therefore, she grew up in a place where racial and ethnic diversity was everywhere. Differently, coming to MSU meant for Yolanda living in an environment that was mostly white, very different from where she grew up, a place where she was asked many times about her ethnicity and that she understood as hostile toward her cultural identity. She said:

> I still go places and I tell them my name and they're like: 'Oh, where are you from?' that's always the question that follows, it is never like: 'Hi, nice to meet you.' They

always assume I'm not American. [When they ask where I'm from] I always respond 'another Midwestern town,' and that is not the answer they want. Then they ask me where I'm originally from, and I respond 'another Midwestern State.' And then they'll say: 'No, but where are you FROM?'

Yolanda articulated well the lack of diversity and, because of that, racism that she had to endure on campus. But she went beyond naming the problem and denouncing it: Yolanda was determined to be involved actively in changing the apparent lack of diversity on campus by exposing as many people as possible at MSU to domestic and international diversity. To make sure that such change should happen at a larger scope than merely one university, Yolanda was going to attend graduate school and later work in the area of social equality for underrepresented women and children.

For participants, involvement on campus and in their community and the possibility of giving back was an important element in their sense of belonging and desire to do well in college. Whether it was to show their parents that their life efforts were fruitful, to replicate at MSU the leadership they achieved by leading in student groups at other institutions, or to create opportunities for others such as the ones that were offered to our participants in college, these women made it clear that giving back was an intrinsic part of being a successful student in college. At the same time, aiming to give back gave them a sense of purpose, ownership, and personal satisfaction. By giving back, participants were active "doers" at the university and not merely passive recipients of education. Achieving by giving back created a strong sense of purpose for them.

Research Question 3: What college experiences of Latinas influence their gender and ethnic identity?

Theme CC 3:   Ability to communicate about college experiences

Emerging themes: Integration and determination

Integration and Determination

Perceiving themselves as part of the university's culture by occupying leadership roles or by being accepted by professors and peers was crucial in participants' determination to succeed academically. Sam liked MSU, felt well treated there, and was amazed at the diversity she saw on campus, compared with the scarce exposure she got to different cultures in her hometown. But she said that she came to MSU to get her degree. Sam stated that she "knew what I had to do when I got here. Study and work hard. I have high expectations for my grades." She also was determined to ask for as little as possible help from her parents, since she was determined to be self-sufficient, "I have to try and figure it out by myself first."

Yolanda expressed her strong sense of determination when she explained that she rarely left things to chance. She was adamant in asserting her own identity and fighting stereotypes. For instance, when she moved to campus, she fought against stereotypes held against her for being Latina. Yolanda said:

> I think I've become more assertive in who I am, in defending who I am because when people ask me who I am, I think if they would've asked me that when I was not in college I think that I automatically would have not tried to argue and told them what they wanted to hear. But now I want them to realize that what they are doing is incorrect. That is NOT an OK question to ask. I don't go up to you and ask: 'What are you?' You don't need to fit any of the stereotypes because there shouldn't be any stereotypes of what I need to fulfill.

She added:

> I think that I am so strong in my home culture that I bring with me. People just assume that I have to have a child because I am Latina. And I don't have a child, and then [they assume] that I have a lot of siblings and I'm an only child. It is just that the faculty is not sensitive toward some students.

In a proud tone, Yolanda also said that she rebelled against stereotypical views that teachers and counselors held of her when she was in high school. She said that the general

expectation in her high school was that she, as a Latina, would only attend and graduate from a community college. Her answer was always: "No, I don't care about your opinion. I care about mine and my parents' opinions."

Because Anna wasn't raised bilingual, she said that she always wanted to know more about having a bilingual upbringing. That desire for knowledge influenced her decision to attend college. She thought that by attending college and taking courses related to her ethnic identity she would be able to find out more about being a bicultural but monolingual woman. In her quest to learn about herself, she took two years of Spanish college courses so she could communicate with her grandmother, but in the end two years were not enough to do so. She said so eloquently: "I tried so hard to get just more knowledge and do that part of my family justice to be able to communicate. And I tried, but I failed." Even though she was not successful, Anna made a sustained effort to learn more about her Latina heritage and made decisions in college to attain those goals by taking courses in areas such as Women's Studies and American Ethnic Studies. As a non-traditional student juggling a military husband frequently deployed, two young children, a job, and a full time schedule in college, Anna spoke about how proud she was of being able to model behavior for her children. Throughout her life narrative, Anna expressed how, against all odds, she was graduating with a 3.2 GPA and going on to a Ph.D. program. She said that she was determined to obtain a college degree and because of the support of her family and husband, she was successful.

For María, the right decision was to attend college far away from home. Excitedly, she said: "I think that I'm entering a new atmosphere and that I have to deal with that in all areas of my life." Her determination to change, adapt, and do well in her new environment meant she had to revise the way she always thought about issues such as homosexuality. With open eyes and a

big smile, she got closer and seemed to confide in me with: "Being here I can be whoever I want to be and no one can control me."

Integration and determination are crucial to Latinas' decision to succeed in college (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Delgado et al., 2006; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996). This perception of cultural and social integration is significant to participants because their identities are developed within socially and culturally specific environments that give meaning to their cultural and personal values. Therefore, feeling culturally integrated in college influenced Latinas' gender and ethnic identities positively (Anzaldúa, 1997; Gloria et al., 2005). For participants, developing a non-conflictive ethnic identity was crucial to their determination for college persistence.

Resistance and Academic Effectiveness

Participants conveyed clearly the importance that it had for them to go against ethnic, class, and gender stereotypes. For them, the ability to resist societal gender and ethnic stereotypes held against Latinas facilitated their assertiveness as effective producers of knowledge. Beatriz was proud of what she had accomplished so far, and imagined how her life would have been had she lived in El Salvador. She said: "I probably could have married someone controlling; there would have been machismo in the original sense of the word." Yolanda said that it was her decision and actions that made her part of this campus. She was discouraged by the lack of diversity at MSU and the stereotypical views of her peers and professors. She said:

> Here people mark you by who they think you are. I've had a lot of people ask me 'where are you from?' And I always responded "from another Midwestern town' and that is not the answer they want so I tell them what they want to hear. 'I'm from Mexico' I say, and they'll say that 'you don't look Mexican'. And I'm like: 'What do you want me to look like?' I obviously don't fulfill the stereotype because I'm so light skinned, but I think 'you obviously have never been to Mexico and the diversity that there is among people

there.'

Participants resisted being labeled as intellectually inferior to men and whites, being considered natural homemakers, and being understood as stay-at-home mothers with numerous children. Anna stated that as a freshman people gave her odd looks when she walked around campus while being six months pregnant. But all she cared about was finishing the semester before giving birth. She said: "Schooling is for me, I try so hard. I do view myself as a good and dedicated student."

In the narratives of these five Latina women, the concept of academic effectiveness was related to how they accomplished academic goals by adapting to the university's culture while being supported fully by their parents and significant others and, therefore, keeping their culture of origin. They reminded me frequently that their parents, spouses, and family members paved the way for them (even though some never made it beyond an eighth grade education).

The participants' narratives made clear that it was their self-determination and sense of purpose that made possible for them to succeed in college. "I think that I am a person who puts in a lot of effort," said María with a determined expression on her face as she continued: "I dedicated my entire semester to studying, and showing my parents that it was worthwhile the opportunity they gave me to come here." Anna was proud that, as a Latina woman in academia, she defied every single stereotype of Latinas in education (marry young, stay at home and clean, have many children). Even though she got pregnant at 20 years of age, married, dropped out of college, and moved to a different country for two years to be with her military husband, she came back home and re-started a successful academic career where she was going to start her Ph.D. program after graduation.

For María, it was important to be a successful student and she was determined to become one. She talked to her older brother and asked: "What is the secret of doing well here [college]?" She said that even though she was a quiet person, she decided to talk to a professor because she was worried about her grades. She was surprised positively when her professor helped her and gave her tips on how to succeed in the class. María even applied for a scholarship during her first semester at MSU, knowing that it was going to be difficult for her to get it. She didn't get the scholarship but said that she learned a lot from the application process. She said proudly: "It was a big achievement for me to even have tried."

Sam was determined to move away from societal stereotypes of Latina women as "stay at home mothers who just cook and clean." She was a successful student at Midwestern Community College, but knew that coming to MSU was going to be more demanding. She said:

> When I got here I needed straight As, and last semester I got a 3.7 and I got into the dean's honor roll. I made it on there. So, this semester hopefully I will get all As. I don't know why I always wanted myself to do that. I have high expectations for my grades.

Sam measured success as high grades and was determined to be as successful as she could be in college earning all As.

For participants, being academically effective was their way to defy gender and racial stereotypes (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Cuádraz, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Villalpando, 2010). All participants, even though their parents may not have been college-educated, defied the stereotypes with the support of caring adults. For participants, academic effectiveness was their way of paying back the effort and help received from their parents, caring family members, and adults, while confronting negative portrayals of Latinas in college and offering an alternative cultural representation of Latinas as intellectually capable and effective (Yosso, 2000).

Resistance was participants' way to defy and change dominant stereotypical views of Latinas on campus. Their narratives showed that participants resisted sexism, racism, classism, discrimination, and oppression in college and that they worked actively against being stereotyped and defined by cultural norms that were unjust to them. For participants, resistance to being stereotyped served as a direct and prime avenue to assert their culturally relevant ways of knowing and to demonstrate their ability to persist and succeed in college (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Cuádraz, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2006.)

Education as Personal Uplift and Change Themes

In their own ways, all five participants articulated how being in college was an important factor in changing their lives and heightening their sense of self-worth. Four additional themes emerged, which articulated how education was a vehicle for personal uplift and change for the participants: Redefinition of self by self-efficacy, intellectually stimulating courses as change producers, tenacity to succeed, and fathers as feminist gender role models.

Redefinition of Self by Self-efficacy

Beatriz discussed at length how being away from home attending MSU was an opportunity to redefine herself as a worthy person and gain a strong sense of self-efficacy. It was her history professor who helped her view herself in a way that she had never done before. Her professor highlighted that Beatriz was a thoughtful and ambitious woman, a good listener with exceptional analytical skills. Her newly discovered strengths made Beatriz redefine her career goals, deciding to go onto law school after graduating with a major in anthropology, and gain strength to stand up against a professor.

Beatriz described a time when she was taking an Anthropology class with a "very frightening professor" and he assigned his class a twelve-page paper for the next day. She

frantically tried to write and was going to stay up all night writing, but to her own surprise, she

decided otherwise. This is what she said:

> And there was one day everyone was rushing to type up their twelve-page rough draft the night before, and I didn't do it. I thought: 'I am not staying up for this man.' So later on in the semester he was meeting with us individually about our paper and he said that he noticed that I hadn't turned in a rough draft that was twelve pages as he required. And I said: 'Yeah, because I didn't want to stay up and write a bad paper and then give you a bad paper.' Exactly in those words. And then he said: 'You are right, I don't want to read your bad paper. You make it perfect and then turn it in.' And it worked. And it was fine.

For Beatriz, her history professor's confidence and trust in her made her reconsider her

career path and sense of self-efficacy. It was within the college environment where she

discovered that she was a woman who was intelligent, capable, and worthy of intellectual

consideration by her professors and peers. Moreover, her newly gained sense of intellectual self-

efficacy made her able to stand up for herself, demonstrate to her Anthropology professor that

she was capable of high quality academic work, and articulate for him what she needed to

produce quality work. Beatriz, unequivocally, demonstrated that she was not a passive and

submissive student but rather an active one who could excel academically if given the needed

support. She changed the rules of her assignment and was not afraid to inform her professor of

the reasons for the change. The ability to effectively change her university environment to

benefit herself and others acted for Beatriz as an affirmation of her sense of being a valued

individual in her own right in a university context that has values different from her own.

For Yolanda, the social equity awareness gained in her Women's Studies classes made

her develop an ability to observe and analyze critically what she experienced every day. She

said:

> I have an internship in this town and just this past weekend we held an activity day geared toward Native Americans. And they were making shawls and bone shields. And they interviewed a guy and he said that the boys could make the bone shields and the girls make the shawls. And I was like: 'But they are kids; they aren't going to distinguish

this is for boys and this is for girls.' It is just a craft they can do and then what you are advertising is so sexist. Being a Women's Studies major I think has made me more aware of things like that, because when I'm in my other classes I'm just like: 'This is wrong, you need to rectify what you are doing to make it politically correct and to make sure that you are not offending a huge group of people.' And I don't think some people care.

Yolanda explained further that her gained analytical abilities allowed her to do a fine-grain analysis of what was happening around her:

I was in one of my history classes when we were writing our capstone paper and one of the guys in there was writing about female spies in the revolutionary times, which is a great subject. But I mentioned that he might want to delineate which women he was speaking of, like African Americans, white affluent women, and he was like: 'Why does it even matter?' like it doesn't matter. And I was like: 'That's fine, but you are wrong; your paper is wrong; and everything you stand for in your paper if you don't do that.' It is little things like that that irk me. But it is a big deal.

Yolanda denounced the racism and stereotyping of Native Americans embedded in the activity that she was asked to do with children, while questioning the very reasons for doing it assisted by the knowledge she gained from her Women's Studies class.

Self-efficacy took a different form for Sam. Knowing that she was a successful student while being heavily involved in Latino organizations at MCC, reaffirmed the idea that she wanted to be involved in Latino organizations at MSU to support people without a voice. She said that, as a Latina woman, receiving an education was very important for her because, "I really feel that I have grown and become a better student, person, and advocate, and I just want to help people who can't speak out [for themselves.]" Her desire was to be the voice that other people did not have, and that the education that she received was a key element in her ability to provide needed help to others.

Therefore, college experiences of self-efficacy reached further than just providing participants with a sense of academic effectiveness. For participants, these experiences went beyond the reaffirmation of being academically successful: The newly gained knowledge and

support network offered participants the opportunity to redefine themselves as independent

knowledge producers who were able to effect change not only in their lives but in others' as well.

Beatriz said:

> I took a biochemistry class last semester and they were just not in tune with the fact that there are many differences [among people]. And they wanted to say that we [whites and underrepresented people] were equal. But they were not treating me as an equal, so there was no equality. And I'm just like: 'This is wrong. You need to rectify what you are doing to make it politically correct and to make sure that you are not offending a large group of people'.

Participants used their acquired sense of self-efficacy to demonstrate their ability to

improve social and educational conditions for themselves and for others, ranging from occupying

leadership roles on campus' organizations to changing professors' expectations on assignments.

Intellectually Stimulating Courses as Change Producers

Three students mentioned that taking intellectually stimulating courses helped them

revise and change their views on a number of issues.

María, when far away from her Paraguayan home, her sheltered life, and a conservative

society, changed her view on gender identities and human rights. As an example, she questioned

her Catholic faith's condemnation of homosexuals, opening up to understanding as 'normal' and

not as deviant people with non hetero-normative sexual orientations. She said:

> I changed the way of thinking about gays. I had a very closed idea about them and in Paraguay I would have never associated with a gay person. And coming here I met Paraguayan gays, and it was like they will admit being like that here and are happy in this place because they are accepted. And thanks to a Women's Studies class and a lecturer on gay issues now I think that they are normal, I can't think of it as a bad thing.

The ability to revisit cultural beliefs and adjust or change them according to new

knowledge was key for María's new way of understanding her culture of origin and her values.

She took a look at her own culture from a different perspective, analyzed it, and effected change.

An example of this process is evident when she said:

In Paraguay they are very homophobic. But I think it is because of the culture. It is a very Catholic country and what other people think matters a lot. So if people are different they hide. Another thing that I learned here is that people can be whatever they want to be. By walking on campus, I can see people with their own style, piercings, weird hair, different styles. But in Paraguay it is one style for all.

For Beatriz, the different issues she learned about in her Women's Studies classes

legitimized her personal values and ways of thinking. She said:

I have changed because when I found Women's Studies I was like: 'Oh, wow! This is what I have always talked about and believed in, and I have never known how to label it.' I remember that the first time I was called a feminist was by my husband, and I had just never thought of that, because I feel like everyone should believe that everyone has the same opportunities and that we need to end oppression and sexism. So that everyone can have the same chance.

Finding that her beliefs were related and validated by existing theories made sense and

reinforced Beatriz's feeling of being intellectually strong. It reaffirmed her sense of self-worth

and refusal to be stereotyped. Further, with her newly discovered sense of intellectual worth,

Beatriz challenged feminist concepts as well:

It is a new way of thinking in the sense that I'm realizing some of the faults of the feminist ideas out there. I have always believed that everyone should have those rights, doesn't matter if they choose or not to be a sex worker or to express their sexuality, or to wear high heels or makeup. Where do you draw the line in a capitalist society? Once I learned all of these things [feminist theories] it just gave me the words to express what I have always felt. In this capitalist society sex workers are playing the game that they were dealt, you bring a different game to the table then we can work, but if you don't change the game.

Yolanda was double majoring in Women' Studies as well. She said that taking classes for

that major made her open her eyes to many stereotypes, especially those that affect Latinas. She

referred specifically to the sexualization of Latinas by the media and how she refused to be

hyper-sexualized as a Latina woman. She also felt welcomed and non-judged as an ethnic

minority in those classes:

I think that even here at school in my Women's Studies classes I think I am much more accepted as a Latina and as a woman, and am much more aware of issues that you may

face, and much more sensitive in the way in which the classes are taught, are articulated towards you, while I know that in my history classes that doesn't happen all the time. They'll say something and some people will blow it off.

Participants indicated clearly that certain courses made them think critically about their own system of values and beliefs, assisting them in reconsidering stereotypical views they had on gender identity, denouncing racist educational programs, and fighting sexist and racist treatment by university personnel. The end result was participants' changing their personal values and sense of self-worth. Critical appraisal of their cultural values and the subsequent change in them also brought a change in how participants' thought about themselves and their ability to effect change in their lives and the lives of others. Participants described how, because of intellectually stimulating courses, they became active thinkers who were able to think independently about their university experiences and gained further awareness of their intellectual capacity. Participants stated that they were able to think critically and find alternative ways to effect change around them, either in the behavior of a professor teaching a course or the community around them while becoming more educated and sensitive to issues of race, class, and gender. Participants' newly acquired sense of self-efficacy affirmed their sense of personal self-worth, ability, and desire to produce change.

Tenacity to Succeed

Strong sense of will, desire to succeed, and tenacity to reach high academic goals were themes present in all of the participants' discourses. All five participants, in unequivocal ways, asserted their desire to succeed and described the ways in which they would do so.

Participants in this study inhabited two different worlds: One belonging to the family realm and another to the academic realm. Participants indicated that both worlds were very different from each other at times and that each world had a set of values opposite to the other. In

spite of inhabiting different realities, participants demonstrated a full-force tenacity to succeed in academia in particular and life in general. Examples of participants' tenacity in differing values worlds are many. Even though she did not have to deal with open racism due to looking white, Anna endured strong criticism from peers, family members, and university in general when she got pregnant as a freshman in college. Rather than stopping her from advancing, Anna propelled herself with the support of her husband and parents into a journey of academic and life advancement. She demonstrated to herself, her family, and her professors that she was able to succeed in her personal and professional life, in spite of obstacles. She fought Latino cultural female gender stereotypes and said that she "probably defies every single one of them."

Beatriz's desire to obtain her J.D. was fueled by, among other reasons, wanting to end unequal conditions for women in society. She knew that the best way to effect change was to engage those who are seemingly so different from women in the gender spectrum: Men. Beatriz's father was the strong figure in her life, the man who shaped for her by example how essential it is for people to be treated equally in a just society.

María, the only daughter of wealthy parents who had two brothers, was not expected to move away from home, much less to a country that was "too dangerous for women" according to her father. Her tenacity to build bridges between her parents' values and her own paid off, and they allowed María to move away from home. She came to study in a very different environment, but her motto was to "ask everyone what are the key things to do to succeed in college in the U.S."

Evidence of participants' tenacity was not so much obvious because of what they said, but because of the journey that every single Latina followed before and during college. The *ganas* (desire) to succeed, the emotional and intellectual investment in their present and future,

the daily hard work, the careful planning of their futures, the almost desperation to pay back their parents' life-long efforts with their academic successes, and the generation of a strong support network are ever-present elements in all of their life narratives and answers to the semi-structured interview questions.

Fathers as Feminist Gender Role Models

Four out of five participants mentioned several times and described in great detail how important their fathers were in their decision to attend and graduate from college. Contrary to traditional Latino gender role models, participants identified many instances when their fathers modeled alternative gender roles for them not only by being involved in the day-to-day homemaking and supporting their spouses with their college pursuance and professional interests, but also by instilling in their daughters a strong sense of high achievement and independence and the need for them to be self-sufficient and independent financially.

Some participants described their fathers as "feminists" because they not only believed in gender equality but acted accordingly, modeling non-traditional Latino gender roles for their families and teaching their daughters to expect the same from their partners. Participants' fathers were highly involved in their daily lives since their birth and supported them strongly in concert with having high expectations. These fathers pushed their daughters to become highly educated, independent from their families and partners, defy Latino female traditional gender roles, be financially independent, and delay marriage and child bearing until later in life.

Summary

In this chapter, I reported the results of the case study of the lived experiences of five Latina undergraduate students at MSU and interpreted the data. Five participants' demographic data were presented and continued with a detailed personal depiction of each participant in a

narrative format. Emerging themes were identified as they aligned with Cultural Congruity

Theory (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996.)

Findings exposed the importance that participants' attribute to their life and college

experiences and how their experiences influence their college persistence. The findings revealed

the racism and sexism embedded in mainstream white culture and Latino culture and how, for

Latinas, striving for excellence is how they resisted oppression and stereotypes. The results

revealed the connection between life experiences, gender identity, and college persistence.

Table 9 presented the five participants' demographic data to allow for clear comparison.

The table included the following descriptive demographics: (a) self-identification, (b) birthplace,

(c) bilingualism, (d) family members, (e) birth order, (f) parents' attained educational level, (g)

marital status, (h) children, (i) colleges attended, (j) undergraduate status, (k) MSU GPA, (l)

college major and minor, (m) working while studying, and (n) grants, loans, and scholarships

received. A personal depiction of each participant was offered in a narrative format. Each

personal depiction included a synthesis from each participant's demographic questionnaire, life

narrative, semi-structured interview, and my observations.

The research questions and emerging themes were aligned with the Cultural Congruity

themes in the findings from the analysis. Table 10 represents this in a clear and concise manner.

Research question 1 asked**:** What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their

ability to persist academically? This question represented the Cultural Congruity theme, "Need

to change identity and cultural fit." Two emerging themes were aligned with Research Question

1: (1) stereotypes and racism and (2) obstacles. Research Question 2 asked about what socio-

cultural and gender role expectations at home and in college affect Latinas' perception of their

academic persistence. This research question represented the Cultural Congruity theme, "family

and college values," and the two emerging themes were (1) caring relationships and high expectations and (2) involvement and giving back. Research Question 3 asked what Latinas' college experiences influenced their gender and ethnic identity. This question represented the Cultural Congruity theme, "ability to communicate about college experiences" with two emerging themes: (1) integration and determination and (2) resistance and academic effectiveness.

During data analysis, four additional themes emerged and were organized under "Education as Personal Uplift and Change." These additional emerging themes were: Redefinition of self by self-efficacy, intellectually stimulating courses as change producers, tenacity to succeed, and fathers as feminist gender role models. These themes resonated strongly in participants' life narratives and highlighted the changing effect that intellectual exchange had on them.

Cultural Congruity Theory was used to analyze and interpret participants' data because it contextualized the understanding of Latinas' culture of origin and its value in relation to the cultural values upheld by the university (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996). Cultural Congruity assisted in identifying cultural values in college that were perceived as foreign by the participants, as well as those similar to the cultural norms of their homes. The participants' narratives of their lives before and during college were their way to tell their stories in their own words that refuted the gender and ethnic stereotypes that they confronted at MSU. Latinas' telling of their stories (instead of a third person telling those stories) subverted the institutional discourses about Latina women in education. By telling their own stories, Latinas generated a space where they could re-define themselves and their lives with a strong sense of self-efficacy. As an expression of resistance to stereotypes and academic persistence, Latinas took

intellectually stimulating courses that produced personal change and demonstrated a sheer sense

of tenacity to succeed.

Chapter 5 - DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter includes: (1) discussion of the findings, (2) recommendations for practice, and (3) recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this study was to explore how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect undergraduate Latina students' perception of their college persistence in a predominately White, Research Extensive Midwestern State University. It was designed to gain access to five undergraduate Latinas students' lives and college experiences, their interpretation of their experiences, and learn how these experiences affected their academic persistence.

In this study, I asked three research questions:

1. What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically? (Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005)

2. What socio-cultural and gender role expectations, at home and in college affect Latinas' perception of their academic persistence? (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Nora et al., 2006)

3. What college experiences of Latinas influence their gender and ethnic identity? (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006)

This study used a case study approach because it allowed contextual conditions and in-depth understanding of the cases (Yin, 2003). Cultural congruity provided the theoretical framework for data analysis and interpretation. Participant selection criteria was based on purposive and criterion sampling. Purposive sampling allowed for searching for specific traits in participants that provided rich information while ensuring addressing key research themes, such as academic persistence and cultural congruity. Criterion sampling worked best when all

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participants selected experienced the phenomenon being studied (Polkinghorne, 2005). Five Latina participants were selected because they: (a) identified themselves as women, (b) identified themselves as Latinas, and (c) were undergraduate students at Midwestern State University.

The five potential participants were approached via e-mail with an invitation that stated the purpose of the study, the participant's role, and participants' expectations from the research. All five participants agreed to be part of the study. Participants selected a pseudonym to safeguard their identities and signed a consent form. Two sources were used to collect data from each participant to answer the research questions: A demographic questionnaire and two face-to-face interviews. Participants received the demographic questionnaire via e-mail to be completed prior to the first interview. Later, each participant received via e-mail a document with the interview protocol, which included the open-ended life narrative and the interview questions. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times at the same convenient location. The first face-to-face interview was about 60 minutes long where each participant provided her open-ended life narrative. The second interview was equally long where each participant answered a semi-structured questionnaire. Both interviews were worded carefully and crafted, and provided understanding of how participants' life stories and college experiences influenced their college persistence. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and sent to participants to member-check for accuracy. Participants had the option to change/omit any part of the transcribed interviews, but none of them elected to do so. All five participants were from two-parent homes; two participants were married; and one of them had two children. All participants were in good academic standing and two of them were graduating at the end of the semester when the interviews took place. Four participants were bilingual Spanish/English and one spoke three languages (Italian/Spanish/English).

Because of the amount and complexity of the data collected and because data analysis can be difficult in qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994), I followed Creswell's (2013) recommendations for qualitative methods of data analysis and interpretation. I organized my data following four methods: (1) categorical aggregation, (2) direct interpretation, (3) establishment of patterns, and (4) naturalistic generalizations for the data analysis. I began the process by moving in an analytic circle rather than a fixed linear approach, employing a coding-recoding strategy. I searched the data for a collection of instances, expecting to find relevant emerging themes. As a second step I drew meaning from each instance without looking for other instances, pulling data apart first and then pulling it back together in a meaningful way. Third, I established patterns, searching for similarities and/or correspondences between two or more categories, streamlining major themes. Establishing patterns generated a matrix that helped hypothesize the relationships among the categories. Finally, I generated naturalistic generalizations, ending with an account or narrative that represented several aspects of analysis.

Findings were presented in Chapter 4. Following are the discussion of the findings, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

Latina women are the youngest, largest, and fastest growing group of ethnically underrepresented women in the U.S.A. and have the lowest college completion rate among all racial and ethnic female groups in the country (Castellanos, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Because a college degree is an important factor for people's potential socioeconomic advancement in the U.S.A., Latinas' low college completion rate places them and their families at a social and economic disadvantage (Bañuelos, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Nora, 2003; Orozco, 2007). Understanding the different factors that affect Latinas' college

persistence involves taking into consideration a complex combination of educational, institutional, historical, political, and socio-cultural factors that are related intimately to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and power (Díaz-Greenberg, 2003; Parra, 2007). There is scarce data on how the interrelationships among these factors affect Latina women. Little research has been done on Latinas' experiences in college and the personal impact that these experiences have in relation to the cultural congruity between the home culture and the culture of the universities they attend (Gloria et al., 2005). Further, limited attention has been given to the personal understanding that Latina women have of their obstacles to persist in college, their own responses to these obstacles, and the coping strategies that they employ to bring together the university's cultural values with their own family cultural values (Gloria et al., 2005). Therefore, more research is needed to understand the key factors that affect undergraduate Latina students' college persistence.

Because Latinas in college go through personal experiences that are determined by their gender, race, ethnicity, and class (Gloria et al., 2005), oral stories and narratives are a direct and powerful way to learn about Latinas' personal experiences negotiating home and college cultures. Following Anzaldúa's (1987) call for theorizing the lives of Chicanas/Latinas based upon their own experiences and personal accounts of those experiences, some studies formulated theories based upon Latinas' voices, narratives, and testimonies (Bañuelos, 2006; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). These studies provided needed insight on the importance of knowing how Latinas understand, negotiate, and navigate the cultures of their home and the university they attend. They indicated how Latinas' personal stories and narratives questioned educational stereotypes and how they positioned themselves as producers of experiential and academic knowledge that challenged formal (academic) and informal

(home/community) knowledge (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Holling, 2006). Thus, Latinas' life narratives fill a void within the dominant university culture and generate alternative ways to understand their lived experiences while producing a new body of knowledge that is gender, race, and class specific (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2006; DeMirjyn, 2005). Latinas' life narratives allow researchers to access and analyze critically lived experiences while recognizing the ideologies and beliefs that are shaped by their life experiences (Holling, 2006).

This study accessed five undergraduate Latina college students' experiences through their life narratives and answers to an open-ended questionnaire. Latinas openly and directly discussed their experiences in college, family values, college values, and fit or misfit between those values. This discussion is structured: (1) following the themes that emerged from each of the three research questions and (2) the four additional emerging themes that surfaced from the data.

Research Question 1: What college experiences of Latinas affect their perception of their ability to persist academically?

Participants talked at length about the positive experiences they had with caring adults, high expectations from faculty and family members, and non-conforming gender role expectations from parents and university personnel. At the same time, all five participants indicated that in college and at home they encountered stereotypes, racism, and obstacles that influenced their college experiences. Stereotypes and racism are obstacles for Latinas in college, but they have such prevalence in participants' narratives that they deserve to be considered separately from other obstacles.

Stereotypes and Racism

Stereotypical views of Latina women in institutions of higher education are well documented in the literature reviewed in this study. Cultural deficit paradigms, low academic

performance, gender, Latino gender roles, early motherhood, low English proficiency, bilingualism, race, and low socioeconomic status are factors traditionally cited that hinder Latinas' ability to obtain a college degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Castellanos & Gloria, 2003; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 1996, Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2006; González, 2002).

In order to be successful and persist in college, Latinas have to learn how to understand, navigate, and adapt to the institutional rules and expectations (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Gándara & Contreras, 2010). At the same time, it is important for Latinas to know that their home culture is recognized and accepted by the university they attend (Gándara & Contreras, 2010, Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006; Nora et al., 2006). A good quality fit between home culture and the culture of the university, including perceptions of social support, validation of Latino culture, availability of role models on campus, and peer group are deciding factors in Latinas' academic persistence (Gloria et al., 1999; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; Gloria et al., 2005).

Participants encountered not only gender and ethnic bias in college, but also gender stereotyping and oppression as women from their families and communities. Because of Latino family values, Latinas are expected to enact certain cultural gender role expectations, which range from taking care of family members to the financial well-being of their families (Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Harris Canul, 2003; Orozco, 2003, 2007; Parra, 2007).

The result of these converging gender role stereotypes is Latinas' exposure and vulnerability to what is called "stereotype threat" (Gándara & Contreras, 2010), which constitutes a menace to the academic achievement and self esteem of underrepresented students (Gloria, Castellanos, & Godinez, 2005; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

Participants' academic college persistence was influenced directly by Latino cultural values and the values of the dominant culture of the university they attend. Participants discussed the constricting stereotypical gender roles imposed on Latina women by their families and communities, and by university personnel as clear roadblocks to asserting their identities and plans for the future, including college attendance and graduation. Participants were expected to be good Latina women and follow gender and racial expectations, e.g., being submissive to authority, prioritizing family over academia, and not having an interest in pursuing a professional career (Fry, 2009; Gupton, Castelo-Rodríguez, Martínez, & Quintanar, 2009; Torres, 2003). These gender and racial expectations were in direct contradiction with expectations held by participants' parents and some faculty members such as being independent, prioritizing education over family, and being academically successful.

Gender stereotyping and imposition of limiting expectations were discussed by participants (Castellanos & Gloria, 2003; Gloria et al., 2005; Gutpon et al., 2009; Nora et al., 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2009; Torres, 2003). María mentioned how her father told her, in strong and unequivocal terms, that being female influenced her desire negatively to move to the U.S.A. to study, contrary to what her brothers did. Sam was told by members of her extended family that she should not move too far away from her family, since she had to take care of them. Boyfriends also were a source of gender role stereotyping, imposing on a participant to do all house chores because she was female. In a few cases, family members imposed upon participants religious views and traditional gender roles regarding pregnancy and family caretaking. *Marianismo* values of women's abnegation and denial of themselves in several instances indicated that these values remain strong in the culture (Arbona

& Nora, 2007; Cuádraz, 2005; Gil & Inoa-Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Harris Canul, 2003; Orozco, 2007).

Participants confronted gender role stereotypes held by university personnel: Lack of consideration for undergraduate Latina mothers; belief in low academic potential of Latinas in college; classism and racism embedded in the university culture; and lack of campus involvement opportunities. Anna complained about the lack of services offered by the university to non-traditional students: Yolanda criticized the lack of cultural awareness that her professor and peers had; and Beatriz lamented the wrong understanding of the value of bilingualism by her professors and peers. These stereotypes influenced participants' college experiences negatively (Araujo, 2009; Bañuelos, 2006; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cardoza, 1991; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2010). From misunderstandings about home culture regarding monetary compensation for a favor, to the color of their skins not reflecting their race, to assuming that all Latina women have children, participants endured a myriad of inaccurate assumptions and false stereotypes regarding who they were and their interest and ability to persist in college. Participants were critical of the racism and stereotyping that they were subjected to and lamented the lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge about Latinos that their professors and classmates had.

For participants, stereotypes based upon gender, race, and class were ever-present obstacles during their undergraduate experience. Rigid gender roles and expectations about supporting the family monetarily, living near the family to care for family members, taking care of domestic chores, not being academically-oriented, and having dependent children were mentioned by all participants. That these stereotypes were imposed by family members and university personnel constituted a difficult obstacle for them to manage. The culture of the home

and the culture of the university worked together against the participants to persist academically (Cummins, 1986; Orozco, 2007; Rendón, 1992; Unger-Palmer, 2003). In order to persist academically, participants felt that they had to prove themselves as non-representative of the negative gender and racial stereotypes in both their home culture and the culture of the university, thus facing complex burdens because of their gender, ethnicity, and race (Gloria et al., 1999; Gloria et al., 2005; Rodríguez et al., 2000). Beatriz had to show her professor that she was capable of quality work; Anna had to demonstrate that she was able to do class work in spite of being a young mother; and Yolanda needed to provide evidence that she was Latina because her skin was too white.

Despite enduring varied stereotypes, racism, and obstacles, participants developed positive and creative adaptations, sometimes redefining themselves, holding onto their cultural heritage, and establishing positive networks of support. Therefore, these stereotypes and obstacles were highly effective in fostering academic persistence and sense of self-efficacy (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gloria et al., 2005).

Obstacles

Participants discussed different kinds of obstacles that they encountered in college. For analysis purposes they were divided into: (1) life situation obstacles and (2) campus culture obstacles.

Life situation obstacles were present frequently for the participants while in college. Because Latinas' lives are tied inherently to their families', problems in their family lives intersect with their academic lives (Gil & Inoa-Vázquez, 1996; Gloria et al., 2005). These obstacles took different forms: Being unable to attend the institution of choice because of parents' stereotypical views of the U.S.A. culture, enduring abusive relationships with their partners, having partners deployed overseas, feeling lonely and being away from family help, and lacking financial support to pursue a degree (María, Beatriz, Anna, Yolanda, and Sam).

In college, Latinas encounter gender and ethnic obstacles that are related directly to the dominant cultural paradigm that considers it natural and expected to use a White, male, middle class U.S.A. norm to determine what values are right and which ones are not (Araujo, 2009; Bañuelos, 2006; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cuádraz, 2004; Cummins, 1986; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, Unger-Palmer, 2003). Moreover, these values upheld by the university generate educational and supportive practices that devalue Latino and female culture (Cummins, 1986; Unger-Palmer, 2003). Campus obstacles cited by participants were related to the lack of cultural knowledge and understanding that students and faculty members had of Latino culture (Beatriz, Yolanda, Anna).

Participants identified being viewed by faculty members and peers as culturally backward and lacking ambition and understanding of college culture (Díaz-Greenberg, 2003; González, 2005; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Nora et al., 2006). Participants' bilingualism in most

cases (Yolanda, Beatriz, María, Sam) was viewed as lacking English competency instead of valued as a double cultural and language competency. Non-traditional students felt uninvited and underserved on campus due to the lack of resources to assist them with equity through, for example, financially-sensitive child care, tailored financial services, flexible and distance class offerings. This deficit thinking promotes cultural stereotypes and translates into clear and often invisible obstacles that Latina students have to overcome.

Research Question 2: What socio-cultural and gender role expectations at home and in college affect Latinas' perception of their academic persistence?

Socio-cultural and gender role expectations at home and in college affected Latinas' perception of their academic persistence. From data analysis, the two emerging themes were: (1) Caring relationships and high expectations, and (2) involvement and giving back.

Caring Relationships and High Expectations

Some studies of college resilience and persistence in teacher education programs of Latina college students found that caring relationships are protective and influential factors in the educational success of Latinas, and that they benefited greatly when caring relationships were positive and supportive (Benard, 2004; Ginorio & Houston, 2001; Rodríguez Morales, 2011). In this study, caring and supportive relationships verified that the cultural background knowledge that Latinas brought with them to college was essential for using their own cultural ways of knowing positively (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Holling, 2006).

Family members and university personnel played an important role supporting students to succeed academically (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Cuádraz, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Hurtado, 1994). Adults who established caring relationships with students often served as role

models, guides, support networks, and mentors who made positive connections with participants (Benard, 2004). High expectations from caring family members, school counselors, and university personnel motivated all participants to push themselves further and excel academically and in life, to become independent, and to understand themselves as intellectually worthy. All participants mentioned how meaningful it was for them that adults around them acted in caring and supportive ways while pushing them to excel. This was clear throughout the interviews where all participants mentioned at least one person who was a true motivator for them.

For participants, it was the trust and loving investment from caring adults that gave them a strong sense of self-efficacy. Caring relationships highlighted the importance of positive relationships between home values and college values (Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), but went beyond that: Caring adults expected participants to act differently from the norm that states that Latina women are expected to be submissive and self-giving (Castellanos & Gloria, 2003; Gloria, 1997; Gloria et al., 2005; Hurtado, 2003; Orozco, 2007). Some adults (such as parents and spouses) modeled diverging gender and ethnic roles and all of the caring adults required the participants not to give into stereotypes and achieve what they wanted (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Caring faculty members and college staff who advised and guided participants; the participants' parents, spouses, and children taught and required the participants to occupy gender roles divergent from the norm. Participants were asked, advised, and supported to be self-reliant, independent, producers of knowledge and successful in academia (Holling, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Gándara & Contreras, 2010). It is important to note, as mentioned by Rodríguez Morales (2011), that "caring relationships with significant individuals in their lives had a strong countering effect

against the threat of opposing negative relationships as well as against the larger-scale, social and institutional threats" (p. 164).

For participants, the support from mothers and fathers was the most important element in their desire and motivation to succeed academically. It is interesting to note that although mothers were an important source of support for Latinas, all participants indicated that their fathers were the ones directing them to behave and act in opposition to traditional Latino culture gender role expectations (Bañuelos, 2006; Castellanos & Gloria, 2003; Castillo et al., 2006; Choi-Pearson & Gloria, 1995; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005; Rodríguez et al., 2000).

Involvement and Giving Back

Historically, people from underrepresented groups have gravitated toward using their social and communal capital to attain justice for themselves and for others (Yosso, 2005). Gloria and colleagues (2005) stated that one of the main core cultural values for Latinos was *comunidad* (community). The value of *comunidad* is the caring for and responsibility of community. That value was meaningful for Latinas in this study because it stressed the importance of interpersonal relationships, in terms of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity inherent to familial relationships (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The sense of *comunidad* ensured that the participants felt connected with each other, with other individuals and groups, and were involved in groups for social change on campus. *Comunidad*, thus, allowed Latinas to relate to and be involved in their environment in ways that were comforting and supportive (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

Participants recognized the need to give back to their communities to empower others to resist multilayered oppressions while providing support to them. By attaining degrees that allowed them to serve their communities, participants elected to offer themselves as alternative

positive role models outside of the White cultural norm (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Bañuelos, 2006; Bourdieu, 1986; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Yosso, 2005).

Because of the way in which Latinas are socialized, it is more difficult for them than for males to assert their authority or consider themselves as authoritative figures (Belenky et. al., 1997). Belenky and colleagues (1997) also found that females find that most valuable lessons in life do not stem necessarily from academic work but from their relationships with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvement. In this study, participants discussed at length how their experiential knowledge coupled with their cultural knowledge informed their decisions, helped them navigate college and the experiences they had, and taught them how to relate to others to persist and succeed academically.

In his theory of Social Departure, Tinto (1993) provided an important perspective for understanding student integration related to college persistence: If students are not integrated into the college culture sufficiently and/or their values differ substantially from the educational institution, they are more prone to withdraw (Christie & Dinham, 1990; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Cultural Congruity Theory (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) goes further and provides a more in-depth and complex grasp on students' academic persistence. It takes into consideration a key element for student persistence, which is the fit between students' cultural values and the values of the college they attend. Participants' active involvement in campus life and activities coupled with their determination to give back to their families, significant others, and communities, indicated participants' positive level of college adjustment, psychological well-being, and persistence in their decision-making processes. Their ability to find a connection between their home and college values, their positive communication with peers and faculty, and

their sense of self-efficacy all combined to ensure a quality learning environment that promoted cultural congruity for participants (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996).

Research Question 3: What college experiences of Latinas influence their gender and ethnic identity?

Integration and Determination

The importance of college students' perception of their integration into their university's academic and social environment is crucial to their determination to succeed in college (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996). This perception assists students in coping better in academia when they use a positive, planned, and active approach (Gloria et al., 2005). This perception of cultural and social integration in college is significant for individuals because ethnic and gender identities are developed within a specific socio-cultural environment that determines their personal and cultural values. Therefore, the fit between Latinas' cultures of origin and the culture of the university influences positively the development of gender and ethnic identities.

Anzaldúa (1987) stressed the importance that developing a non-conflictive ethnic identity has for Latinas/Chicanas. Furthermore, when Latinas uphold their cultural identities while adapting to the dominant white culture, they develop a third identity that is characterized by flexibility and fluidity. Therefore, living in between two cultures by developing a tolerance to contradictions while embracing ambiguity is a key aspect for Latinas' identity development.

Because identity formation occurs at the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and class, it enables Latinas to negotiate successfully their college experiences (Araujo, 2009). Delgado Bernal (2006) found that a Mestiza ethnic and gender identity includes the student's bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spiritualities. The author stated

that when confronted with challenges and obstacles in higher education, Latinas draw from their Mestiza identities in ways that helped them survive and succeed in unknown educational settings. Further, in their study Hurtado et al. (1997) found that for Latino students, maintaining family relationships while in college is an essential aspect of the transition to college. Latinos' involvement in social and community organizations suggest the importance of links with non-academic organizations that enhance students' integration into mainstream culture and their ability to develop their own ethnic identity in a safe environment (Hurtado et al., 1997).

The knowledge acquired at home provided Latinas with strategies of resistance against oppression that challenge the educational norms of higher education and the dominant perceptions about these students (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Hurtado (2003) affirms that Latinas' ability to navigate and adapt to Latino and white cultures and their values constitute a major resource for their academic persistence. Adapting to different cultures attests to the ability to learn from their experiences and be flexible enough to accommodate a new educational environment. In the case of college experiences and the formation of Latinas' ethnic identities, education helped participants to develop a new social consciousness by providing a wide exposure to a variety of frameworks for examining their life experiences and attitudes, those of their families, and those of the dominant culture (Hurtado, 2003).

For participants, the importance of feeling culturally integrated at their university translated into a strong sense of determination and purpose, affirming their sense of gender and ethnic identity. In their adaptation to the college culture, it was crucial for participants to know that their home cultures and values were accepted, respected, and embraced at the institution (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria et al., 2005; Holling, 2006; Nora et al., 2006). If these values were not accepted, participants defended them when necessary and

brought together both cultural values into a successful mix that supported their sense of gender and ethnic identity (Beatriz, Yolanda, Anna, María, and Sam).

By being involved academically and socially in college and having their cultural values accepted and embraced by caring adults at home and in college, participants sought to improve their lives and the lives of others around them (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Bañuelos, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gloria, 1999; Orozco, 2007). Their determination shaped their identity positively as academically successful undergraduate Latina women. Participants' sense of determination was shown in different ways: Working toward getting the best possible grades (Sam, María), becoming assertive (Beatriz, Yolanda, Anna), denouncing racism and rebelling against stereotypes (Beatriz, Yolanda, Anna), strengthening their own Latino heritage (Anna, Yolanda), participating in student groups (Sam, María), and making themselves known on campus (Beatriz, Yolanda, Sam).

Some college experiences that shaped participants' gender and ethnic experiences were negative ones, which were academic challenges for them. For example, when a professor required a paper in a short period of time and was inflexible about the deadline, Beatriz negotiated with him so he changed the assignment's deadline for all students. Or, when another professor did not expect Anna to do well in his class because he said that Latinas were unmotivated to succeed academically. His opinion propelled the participant to excel in his class asking for no exceptions or favors. Other participants' experiences were positive ones: Anna recalled a professor who recognized her as a non-traditional student and made arrangements in his class to make her feel welcome because she was pregnant and in need of a comfortable sitting arrangement. Yolanda spoke about a group of professors in her Women's Studies secondary major who made her feel part of the university culture by consistently including in different

syllabi and classes the work of culturally diverse authors and materials on Latinos, racial oppression, and gender roles.

Whether positive or negative, participants used their college experiences to reshape their ethnic and gender identities, developed a tolerance for ambiguity, and created spaces where they could grow as Latina women (Anzaldúa, 1987; Araujo, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Hurtado, 2003; Gloria et al., 1999; Gloria et al., 2005). They challenged stereotypes and proved their sense of self-efficacy. Academic challenges and unfair treatment by university personnel drove participants to defy submissive gender stereotypes and underachieving cultural stereotypes. Participants acquired, proved, and defended their gender and ethnic identities as valid and active knowledge producers, and as creative developers of their minds and intellects (Anzaldúa, 1987, Araujo, 2009; Belenky et al., 1997; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Hurtado, 2003).

Resistance and Academic Effectiveness

Stereotypical views of Latino female gender roles by mainstream white culture are commonly monolithically aligned along the lines of subdued women, uneducated "by choice," and who prioritize staying at home over education (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Cuádraz, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Gloria et al., 2005; Villalpando, 2010). Differently from stereotypical views, even if their own mothers were housewives or if they themselves became pregnant while in college, all participants in this study defied the stereotypes while being supported by their family members and caring university individuals. In all cases, participants' main driving force to be successful academically was to give back to their families and repay their life-long efforts. But a second driving force was to prove the dominant culture's beliefs of Latina women wrong. "Proving them wrong" was participants' other motivation to confront negative portrayals of Latinas in college while

providing faculty members and peers with an alternative cultural representation of Latinas as intellectually effective (Yosso, 2000). "Proving them wrong" was a clear and strong strategy that all participants used to resist and debunk dominant culture's stereotypes and views on Latinas. Participants' resistance to stereotypical views of Latinas by faculty and peers was primarily achieved by excelling academically. This form of resistance also proved effective in that it influenced their achievements in positive ways (Rodríguez Morales, 2011.)

Gloria and colleagues (2005) stated that a good quality fit between the culture of the home and the culture of the college attended could be a deciding factor in Latinas' ability to persist in college and graduate. Bañuelos (2006) asserted that in the case of Latinos, the cultural congruity between home and college provides a sense of belonging that validates their own identities as effective thinkers and cultural producers (Hurtado, 1994). Latinas' strong ethnic identity strengthens their academic persistence and graduation (Holleran & Walker, 2003; Orozco, 2007). Participants demonstrated that cultural congruity between home and college, a confident feeling of belonging in college, and a strong sense of ethnic identity positively influenced their academic persistence and graduation.

Importantly, Delgado Bernal (2006) emphasized the significance that feminist "pedagogies of the home" have for Latina students in college. These pedagogies are culturally specific ways of knowing for Latinas that extend well beyond formal education and are critical for their survival in college (Elenes et al., 2000). Accordingly, participants conveyed in many enlightening ways how their mothers and fathers helped them not only to survive but also to succeed in college by providing emotional support together with an understanding of certain situations and explanations of why things happen within culturally specific ways of teaching and learning. This culturally-specific knowledge and framework passed to Latinas were used to

interpret and act in specific college situations and were critical to participants' sense of academic effectiveness and, therefore, college persistence.

For participants, academic effectiveness was their way to resist and defy racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Elenes et al., 2000; Hurtado, 2003). By being academically successful, participants went against dominant society's stereotypes and asserted their intellectual capabilities and ethnic identities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hurtado, 2003; Torres, 2003). Being academically effective meant for participants the ability to attain high grades, establish positive relationships with faculty and peers, produce high quality work, being independent, and show parents that their sacrifices were worth it (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Holleran & Waller, 2003; Torres, 2003). For three of the participants, academic excellence also translated as attaining the highest possible degree in their areas of study (i.e., J.D. or Ph.D.). For all five participants, being able to "fit in" at the university (even if only academically) gave them a sense of belonging in academia as effective knowledge producers (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Hurtado, 2003). All participants expressed, in different terms but with unequivocal meaning, their determination to attain high academic achievement as well as the pride they felt for being successful academically. For them, effectiveness was translated directly as academic success (Delgado Bernal, 2006; DeMirjyn 2005; Gándara & Osugi, 1994; Holleran & Waller, 2003; Orozco, 2007; Torres, 2003). In their own ways, participants had clear plans and brought them to fruition with the support of their families. Participants' goals in college were to: Obtain good grades, graduate, make friends, keep strong bonds with family and making them proud, and to be accepted into graduate programs.

Education as Personal Uplift and Change

Data analysis yielded four additional emerging themes. Each additional emerging theme articulated how, for this study's participants, education was understood as a vehicle for personal uplift and change. Education for Latinas in college is an important factor to redefine themselves within a cultural environment different from their own, to change beliefs and cultural paradigms, and to improve their lives while heightening their sense of self-efficacy. The four additional emerging themes were: (1) redefinition of self by self-efficacy, (2) intellectually stimulating courses as change producers, (3) tenacity to succeed, and (4) fathers as feminist gender roles models.

Redefinition of self by self-efficacy. Studies have shown that Latinas' strong ethnic identity is linked to school engagement, intrinsic motivation, and a belief in the value of education (Holleran & Walker, 2003; Orozco, 2007). Gándara and Osugi (1994) asserted that academic achievement is an expression of self-consciousness for Latina women and that their academic achievement is the result of a successful confluence between their family culture and that of the college they attend. Gándara (1982) stated further that successful Latinas in college were "able to make the jump into the mainstream without alienating the communities from which they came" (p. 77). The sense of belonging to the mainstream white culture while including their own cultural values and ethnic identities allows Latinas to identify with both groups and, therefore, develop fluid and flexible identities at the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, and class. Latinas' fluid identities allow them to inhabit the "Borderlands," enabling them to negotiate their experiences as Latinas within the dominant White culture in higher education successfully (Anzaldúa, 1987; Araujo, 2009). Latinas' ability to inhabit the "Borderlands" has

numerous positive consequences for behavior in college and academic persistence (Anzaldúa, 1987; Araujo, 2009; Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Gándara, 1982; Montoya, 1998).

Self-efficacy was participants' site for resisting and refuting stereotypical views of women in general and of Latinas in particular (Montoya, 1998). The sense of being cognitively and affectively contained influences Latinas' evaluation of their role in relation to the group's affective responses (Hurtado et al., 1997). Caring faculty members who believe in Latinas as intellectually capable individuals provide another layer of support and reinforcement, supporting Latinas' behavioral modification when redefining their sense of self-efficacy in college as knowledge producers and effective change makers.

Participants' diverse cultural and experiential understandings in college served as a catalyst for their sense of self-efficacy. It was not only their desire to prove mainstream culture wrong that drove participants to academic success: It was their newly found understanding of themselves as creators of knowledge and social change within mainstream and family culture (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Montoya, 1998; Rodríguez Morales, 2011).

Throughout their college experiences, participants refashioned, reinvented, and reformed their personal identity and recognized themselves as subjects who possessed and produced formal and informal knowledge. Their overall college experiences legitimized and validated their personal experiences. Participants' newly acquired sense of self-efficacy affirmed their sense of personal self-worth, ability, and investment in producing social change (Anzaldúa, 1987; Araujo, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gándara and Osugi, 1994; Hurtado, 2003; Moraga, 1983; Rodríguez Morales, 2011).

Intellectually stimulating courses as change producers. Delgado Bernal (2006) affirmed that the knowledge acquired at home provided Latinas with strategies of resistance

against oppression that challenged the educational norms of higher education and the dominant perceptions about themselves. Latinas' ability to navigate and adapt to Latino and white cultures and their differing values, coupled with a tolerance for cultural contradictions and ambiguity (Anzaldúa, 1987), and the development of Mestiza fluid identities constitute a major resource for Latinas (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hurtado, 2003). Participants' ability to inhabit different cultures with sometimes opposing values opened their possibilities to revisit their previous knowledge and beliefs and change them according to newly acquired knowledge. As Latinas, participants' fluidity of their Mestiza identities and ability to juggle their multicultural identities allowed them to navigate their college culture successfully while embracing their home culture values (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hurtado, 2003).

Being exposed to new and different ideas introduced by intellectually stimulating courses proved to further participants' understanding of themselves as change producers as well as to allow them to revisit their cultural knowledge and beliefs and generate new ones (Belenky et al., 1997; Delgado Bernal, 2006; DeMirjyn, 2005; Holling, 2006; Moraga, 1986; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Their ability to revisit old beliefs and adjust or change them according to newly gained knowledge shed new light upon their culture of origin and mainstream white culture as well. Finding that some of their beliefs were validated by existing literature and theories by authors such as Anzaldúa (1987), Montoya (1998), and Moraga (1986) reinforced participants' feeling of being intellectually strong, reaffirmed their sense of self-efficacy, and strengthened their refusal to be stereotyped.

These intellectually stimulating courses assisted participants in re-evaluating stereotypical views on gender and ethnic identity, denounce racist, sexist, and classist theories and practices, and fight sexist and racist treatment in college and in their culture of origin.

Further, by being able to appraise their cultural values critically and change them as necessary, participants changed their view on themselves and their ability to effect change in their lives and the lives of others. Education was transformative for participants in acquiring and producing new academic and social knowledge (Delgado, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Holling, 2006; Hurtado, 2003; Moraga, 1983). Therefore, because of intellectually stimulating courses, participants asserted themselves as active thinkers who independently appraised their college experiences while gaining further awareness of their intellectual abilities.

Tenacity to Succeed. Participants' tenacity to succeed was evident not only in their desire and efforts to excel academically, but also in translating their success into improving the living conditions of oppressed groups. All participants mentioned how important it was for them to give voice to those who didn't have one like them. Unequal conditions of underrepresented women in society and oppression toward groups that were discriminated because of their gender, class, race, and sexual orientation fueled participants' determination to succeed.

Anzaldúa (1987) stated that Latinas are *Mestizas* who live in-between different worlds and that inhabiting these worlds makes them stronger. Latinas inhabit *The Borderlands/La Frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1987), which gives them the strength to be successful in value-differing environments. Their families' values are *comunidad* y *familismo*, whereas in college values are independence and individuality. Yet, participants in college embraced both sets of values and made sense of them. This crucial ability of inhabiting different cultures while caring about their communities provided participants with unique abilities to succeed and offer others equitable support. Participants' desire to succeed was not merely attainable by obtaining good grades and graduate from college: It went beyond and encompassed social change for socially just

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conditions for all (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Holleran & Waller, 2003; Holling, 2006; Orozco, 2007).

Fathers as Feminist Gender Role Models. As a fourth emerging theme, participants conveyed that their fathers were the ones who instilled and reinforced in them a strong tenacity to succeed and be independent. Contrary to existing literature on traditional Latino gender roles, participants described in detail and at length how their fathers modeled alternative gender roles for them throughout their lives. They did so by being involved not only in the day-to-day homemaking while supporting their spouses in their aspirations and college degree attainment, but also by instilling in their daughters a strong sense of tenacity, independence, and high achievement in life.

Some participants described their fathers as "feminists," because their fathers believed in gender equality and acted accordingly, modeling non-traditional Latino gender roles for their families and teaching their daughters to expect the same from their partners. These fathers pushed and supported their daughters to become highly educated, be independent from their families, defy Latino female traditional gender roles, and be financially independent and savvy.

Participants' newly acquired knowledge and perspective of their home culture and the knowledge gained by taking intellectually stimulating courses assisted them in generating an explanation for their fathers' expectations of non-traditional gender roles. Participants believed that because their fathers were raised by single and struggling mothers, fathers experienced first-hand the gender and racial oppressions that Latinas endure in their own culture and in the mainstream culture. These direct oppressive experiences lived by participants' fathers changed these men's views on female gender role expectations for their daughters. Although they did not

attend college, participants' fathers involved their daughters in a "culture of possibility" where they position college as within reach for their daughters (Gándara, 1995, p.112).

Recommendations for Practice

The first recommendation for practice is verified by the experiences of all participants: To erase the ingrained deficit paradigm based on gender, ethnicity, race, cultural origin, low-socioeconomic status, bilingualism, and language in our universities (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Gil & Inoa Vázquez, 1996; Ginorio & Houston, 2000; Oakes, 2005; Orozco, 2003, 2007; Taylor, 2009; Trueba, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). Demographic changes in the whole nation, specifically in states with the new immigration, have changed the educational paradigm forever. Historically, the educational model at most universities predominately served white, male, straight, traditional, middle to upper class students. Because the new demographic reality cannot be ignored, new educational paradigms are (slowly) emerging, fostering an increase in the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education.

Latinas are one of the many groups of students who are "flying under the radar" in our universities because their realities and needs are invisible to the institutions of higher education. Latinas are under-served at universities where the educational models are white-dominant centered, sexist, racist, classist, stereotype-laden, and dated. This oppressive system was made evident when participants mentioned the overall lack of knowledge, stereotypical views, and indifference that university personnel, professors, and students exhibited toward Latino culture and Latinas, the lack of Latino authors among courses' materials, the small number of Latino faculty and staff on campus, and the inadequate services for non-traditional and underrepresented students. Participants who also were non-traditional students indicated that the services provided

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by the university were scarce and inadequate, making their college experience lonely and ostracizing.

The recommendation is a call for educational stakeholders to recognize, understand, learn about, and organically incorporate the importance of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race and class when reforming university education, services offered, spaces for student/faculty interactions, and curricula development. It is an imperative for changing the current university educational culture model to serve underrepresented students equitably.

The second recommendation for practice is to listen to and understand the importance of how Latinas make sense of and live their college experiences. Participants' stories provided understanding of how they made sense of their experiences in college, which were at the margins of mainstream college culture. Participants' sharing of their lived stories and college experiences constitutes an optimum way to understand their responses to racism, sexism, and classism. It also offers understanding regarding what sustains Latina women in college to persist academically. For Latinas, being "successful" in college meant having excelling grades, establishing positive and productive relationships with professors and peers, participating in the university's social structure, and responding well to high expectations.

Participants highlighted how much they depend on the help and caring support from family, faculty, and staff for their success. Therefore, it is critical to understand and act upon the impact that caring adults with high expectations have for Latinas' college persistence. Participants made evident that caring and supporting parents, spouses, children, faculty members, and university personnel were most helpful when they also had high expectations for them. Although the challenges that participants and their families endured operated as a catalyst

for participants' desire and determination to persist academically, current educational paradigms cannot rely on using this as an excuse to sustain an oppressive educational system.

The third recommendation is for university administration and faculty members to learn about and embrace the positive and enriching effect that bilingualism/multilingualism and multiculturalism have in our communities and institutions of higher education. Individualistic and white-dominant approaches to education for underrepresented students generate students who feel isolated and ostracized.

One of the strongest allies to academic perseverance for Latina women was the pride they had for their cultural heritage and the "know how" provided by the feminist pedagogies in their homes. Further, Latinas' ability to inhabit different cultures and taking the most out of each was one of the strongest adaptation and survival skills that participants had. Conversely, isolating Latina students in college from their families and devaluing their cultures of origin interfere negatively with their ability to persist in college. Further, isolating and oppressing Latinas mean that instead of facilitating them excelling in academics and working toward higher academic degrees and better jobs, they have to use their valuable energy in defying and battling gender, ethnic, and class oppressions.

The fourth recommendation is to ensure that all students have access to an equitable education by changing cultural and educational practices that are detrimental to underrepresented students. Educators need to become knowledgeable of the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, and class and be aware of how these factors could act against Latinas' persistence in college. Furthermore, university personnel need to know about the inequity in comparing the lives of dominant culture students with those who are from underrepresented backgrounds. The beauty of

having diverse and successful students on campus benefit students, professors, and the community.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the findings in this research are meaningful for understanding how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' undergraduate college experience, further research is needed to explore in depth possible gender role changes within the Latino culture, the experiences that male Latino students have in college, and the sets of beliefs and practices of white university students and personnel have toward Latinas, while centering the research at the intersection of race, gender, and class.

The need remains to study further the protective effects that caring relationships have upon Latinas in college, since caring relationships are at the center of Latinas' psychological, emotional, and educational well-being. As was found in this study, caring relationships are central for Latinas' academic persistence. The existence or lack of caring relationships influence directly Latinas' college experiences as supportive or negative, and, therefore, are paramount for their sense of self-efficacy and advancement in college.

The first recommendation for future research is that further studies need to be conducted on the supportive relationship between fathers and daughters attending institutions of higher education. While in college, participants were especially supported their fathers, who instructed and helped them defy Latino cultural norms. Fathers assisted them further in negotiating and resolving cultural conflicts to persist and excel academically.

The second recommendation relates to the first one: Further research needs to be done interrogating gender role paradigm changes within Latino culture. Participants discussed at length and made specific references to Latino fathers recommending and supporting their

daughters to go against traditional Latino gender roles for women. Fathers instructed and supported their daughters to defy traditional Latino female gender roles such as "*marianismo,*" by guiding them to become highly educated, live successful lives, and be financially independent and savvy.

The third recommendation is to explore further the sets of beliefs and practices of white university administrators, professors, staff, and students toward Latinas pursuing an education, centering the research at the intersection of race, gender, and class. This exploration must continue to research the beliefs and values that the white, male, middle class dominant group has embedded in institutions of higher education and may provide effective and lasting strategies to change the existing oppressive educational paradigm.

A fourth recommendation is to conduct a mixed-methods study with a larger number of Latino students to explore gender and class differences in college adjustment, utilizing the Cultural Congruity Scale, semi-structured questionnaires, and life story narratives.

The final recommendation is to conduct research in a study similar to this one about the college experiences of Latino males to compare them with Latinas' college experiences to explore similarities and differences between them.

This study was significant considering that the largest group of underrepresented women in our society is also the least educated. Latinas face burdensome roadblocks on their way to obtaining a college degree because of their gender, ethnicity, and race, which affects their college experiences and educational achievements (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Because most research concentrated on understanding Latinas' educational experiences from a cultural deficit perspective, this research sought the personal understanding that Latinas have of these challenges and their responses and coping strategies (Rodríguez et al., 2000). It is imperative to understand

Latinas' educational experiences from ethnic, cultural, and gender points of view utilizing Latinas' personal narratives of their college experiences (Gándara & Osugi, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2000).

Research and data are lacking on Latinas' own accounts of their college experiences and strategies they utilize to persist in college. In this study, Cultural Congruity was an informative theoretical framework and life narratives provided a privileged access point to understand how Latinas in college integrate their gender, ethnicity, race, and class in generating spaces of self-definition and efficacy (DeMirjyn, 2005; Holling, 2006).

Past and present research focusing on Latinos and education, Cultural Congruity, and Latina/Chicana feminisms are essential to confront the embedded and invisible oppressive culture in our institutions of higher education. Dismantling a hegemonic system that is systemically hierarchical and oppressive in nature to underrepresented students is a human and moral imperative. This study is one more contribution toward educational equity and social justice.

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Appendix A - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Prior to face-to-face interviews

The participants will be briefed on the following prior to the interviews:

1.   The purpose of the research

    I.   To learn about the experience of undergraduate Latina students in college.

2.   The procedures of the research

    I.   Primary sources of data collection

        i.   Demographic questionnaire

        ii.   Two face-to-face interviews

    II.   Member checking

        i.   Participants have the opportunity to review transcripts, make additions,

           and/or modifications to ensure that they said what they meant to say.

        ii.   Initial coding of transcripts

3.   The risks, if any, and benefits of research

    I.   Risks

        i.   None to participants

    II. Benefits of research

        i.   Contribution to limited research on the lived experiences of Latina

           undergraduate students in college

        ii.   Opportunity for educators to understand how better serve undergraduate

           Latina students in college

4.   The voluntary decision to withdraw from the research at any time

5.   The procedures used to identify and protect confidentiality

        I.   Anonymity will be provided to protect confidentiality by using pseudonyms

6.   The procedure to obtain written consent

        I.   Both researcher and participant sign two copies of the consent form, one for

                researcher and another one for participant. The participant will be given another

                copy of the interview questions for reference during the interview.

Conclusion of Interview

At the conclusion of the first face-to-face interview:

1. Thank participant

2. Schedule second meeting

3. Immediately after interview in private place

        I.   Record field notes

        II.   Complete observation check list

4. Listen to participant interview

5. Check in with peer debriefer to update on progress of study

Appendix B - DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

(Modified version from Orozco, 2007)

PRIOR TO INTERVIEW

**Participant's pseudonym (*Pseudónimo de la participante):*
Date (*Fecha):*
How do you self-identify? (*Cómo te identificas a tí misma?)***

Demographic data *(información demográfica)*

1. Ethnicity/race *(Etnia/raza)*:

2. Age *(Edad)*:

3. Birth place *(Lugar de nacimiento)*:

4. Who are your family members? *(Quiénes son los miembros de tu familia?)*

5. What is the educational level of your mother? *(Hasta dónde llegó tu mamá en sus estudios?)*

6. What is the educational level of your father? *(Hasta dónde llegó tu papá en sus estudios?)*

7. What number of sibling are you? *(Qué número de hermano eres?)*

8. Languages spoken *(Qué idiomas hablas?)*:

9. Length of time living in Kansas *(Tiempo de residencia en Kansas)*:

10. Where is your family from originally? *(De dónde es originaria tu familia?)*

11. Are you married? *(Estás casada?)*   YES   NO

12. Do you have children? *(Tienes hijos?)*   YES   NO

13. If so, how many? What are their ages? *(Si tienes hijos, cuántos y de qué edades?)*

14. Are you in the military? *(Eres miembro de las fuerzas armadas?)*

15. Is your spouse in the military? *(Tu esposo es miembro de las fuerzas armadas?)*

16. Did you graduate from a K-12 public school in Kansas? YES   NO

(Te has graduado de una escuela primaria o secundaria en Kansas?)

17. Is Kansas State University the first college you attended?   YES   NO
(Es Kansas State University la primera Universidad a la que vas?)

18. If you answered "NO" to question #17: Which institution/s did you attend –and for how long- before coming to this university?
(Si has contestado "no" a la pregunta #17, a qué otra/s institución/es y por cuánto tiempo has ido?)

19. Reason/s for attending this university *(Cuáles fueron tus razones para venir a KSU)?*

20. You are *(Tú eres):*
   Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

21. Academic grade point average at KSU *(Promedio en KSU):*

22. Major/s – minor/s *(Area de concentración académica primaria y secundaria):*

23. Are you working while in college? *(Trabajas mientras vas a la Universidad?):*

24. If you answered "YES" to question #23: Where do you work and how many hours do you work per week? *(Si tu respuesta fue "SI" a la pregunta #23, dónde trabajas, y cuántas horas trabajas por semana?)*

25. Do you receive grants, loans and/or scholarships to pay for your college education? *(Recibes subsidies, préstamos, y/o becas para pagar la universidad?)*

26. Who do you live with while in college? *(Con quén/es vives mientras vas a la Universidad?)*

27. Expected date of graduation *(Fecha estimada de graduación):*

28. What are you interested in doing after graduating from college? *(Qué quieres hacer una vez graduada?)*

Appendix C - OPEN-ENDED LIFE NARRATIVE

Before we begin, there are a few interview procedural concerns that I want to make sure that you are aware of.

First, you need to know that your participation in this interview is fully voluntary and that you can withdraw from it at any time without penalty. Second, you may refrain from answering any questions at any time. Third, you are selecting a pseudonym to protect your identity, therefore you will not be identified by name in any report that may develop after the interviews. Even though your responses may be included in professional presentations or journal articles, you will not be identified by name. Fourth, the open-ended life narrative and interview questions will be audiotaped to capture your exact answer to the questions, but your identity will be kept confidential. Lastly, I will try to maintain the interview to less than 90 minutes to respect your time.

First interview: Life Narrative (about 90 minutes long)
(Anzaldúa, 1999; Holling, 2006; Moraga, 1983; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)

Date:
Participant's pseudonym:
Time of interview: Begins: Ends:

1. Please tell me about yourself, your life. *Cuéntame de tí, acerca de tu vida.*

    (Prompts: Where are you from originally? *Cuál es tu lugar de origen?*
                     Where did you grow up? *Dónde creciste?*
                     Tell me about your family. *Cuéntame sobre tu familia.*
                     If you were to tell me your life story, where would you begin? What will you include? *Cuéntame la historia de tu vida. Por dónde comenzarías? Qué incluirías en ella?)*

Appendix D - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Second Interview: Semi-structured questionnaire (about 90 minutes long)
Designed in accordance with CC identified themes (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996)

Date:
Participant's pseudonym:
Time of interview: Begins: **Ends:**

1. Tell me about your experiences at the university you are attending. How welcome do
 you feel given your ethnicity and your gender?
*Cuéntame acerca de tus experiencias en esta universidad. Te sientes a gusto como
mujer y como Latina?*

2. Since you came to college, how have you changed as a Latina woman in the way you act,
think and talk? Why?
*Desde que llegaste a esta universidad, cómo has cambiado como mujer Latina, en la
manera en que piensas, hablas y actúas? Porqué?*

3. In the Latino culture there are many gender expectations for females that people from
other cultures do not understand. What are the gender expectations for women in your
culture? How do you, as a Latina, see these expectations?
*En la cultura Latina hay muchas expectativas culturales para con las mujeres que gente de otras
culturas no entienden. Cuáles son las expectativas culturales acerca de la mujer en la cultura
Latina? Qué piensas tú acerca de dichas expectativas?*

4. How does being a Latina woman influence your experiences in college?
Cómo influye en tu experiencia universitaria el hecho de ser una mujer Latina?

 5. How is your home culture different from the culture at your university? How are they both
similar?
*De qué manera es tu cultura de origen distinta a la cultura de la universidad? Cuáles son
las diferencias entre ambas? Y los parecidos entre ellas?*

 6. Tell me of a time when you experienced a conflict between your home culture and the
culture of your university. How did you resolve such conflict?
*Cuéntame acerca de alguna vez que hayas tenido un conflicto entre tu cultura de
origen y la cultura de tu universidad. Cómo lo resolviste?*

7. Do you view yourself as a successful student? Why?
Tú crees que eres una estudiante exitosa? Porqué?

8. What did your family say about your decision to attend college?
Qué dijo tu familia acerca de tu decisión de ir a la universidad?

9. What do your family members say about college? What do they understand about what you are going through?
Qué dicen tus familiares sobre la Universidad? Cómo entienden ellos tus experiencias en la universidad?

10. What do you think is the understanding that your professors and classmates have of your home culture? Can you talk to them about it?
Qué piensan tus profesores y compañeros de estudios de tu cultura de origen? Hablas con ellos al respecto?

11. As a Latina woman, which obstacles did you find to attend the university?
Como mujer Latina, cuáles fueron los obstáculos que encontraste para poder asistir a la universidad y graduarte?

12. Which were the greatest challenges that you had to face while in college? Could you give me examples? How did you resolve such issues? Who/what helped you to do so?
Describe y ejemplifica cuáles han sido los mayores obstáculos que has encontrado en la universidad. Cómo has superado esas barreras? Quién/qué te ayudó a superarlos?

13. Which experiences helped you in college? Who is part of your support group in college?
Qué experiencias te han ayudado en la universidad? Quién o quiénes forman parte de tu grupo de apoyo en la universidad?

14. Who made a difference in your life so you could attend college? Why and how did they help you?
Quién/es te ayudó/aron para que pudieras ir a la universidad? Cómo y porqué te ha/n ayudado?

15. What else do you want to share that is important for understanding your college experiences?
Hay algo más que necesites contarme que sea importante para comprender tus experiencias en la Universidad?

Appendix E - IRB APPROVAL

KANSAS STATE | University Research Compliance Office
U N I V E R S I T Y

TO: Kay Ann Taylor   Proposal Number: 7044
           Curriculum and Instruction
           Bluemont Hall, 228

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
           Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 2/24/2014

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "How Gender, Ethnicity, and College Experiences Affect Latinas' Undergraduate College Persistence."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for <u>one year</u> from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: 2/24/2014

EXPIRATION DATE: 2/24/2015

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated **"continuing review"** of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is <u>not</u> granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

☒   There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
☐   There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

203 Fairchild Hall, Lower Mezzanine, Manhattan, KS 66506-1103 | 785-532-3224 | fax: 785-532-3278 | k-state.edu/research/comply

Appendix F - E-MAIL OF INVITATION

Dear Student:

I am a doctoral candidate conducting a research study on how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' academic performance and success in college.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study: Each participant's input will assist in further developing an understanding of those college and life experiences that help Latinas graduate from college.

I will be conducting two individual, about 60 minute-long, face-to-face interviews with each participant. Participants will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire prior to the face-to-face interviews. The interview questions will be made available for participants beforehand, so you can familiarize yourself with the items to be discussed before the interviews take place.

This study poses no known risks to either the participants or the researcher. As a participant, your identity will be kept fully confidential and will be protected by the following precautions: (a) each participant will have a pseudonym, (b) consent forms will be stored separately from the interview data; (c) taped recordings, computer disks, and taped transcription materials will be stored in locked file cabinets in the researcher's office on campus; (d) files will only be accessible to the researcher and her dissertation major professor; (e) data files will not be submitted via email; (f) all data will be coded and the sheets with data information will be stored in a secure place, (g) all data will be destroyed three years after the study.

If you are interested in participating in this study and/or if you have further questions, please reply to this e-mail (gabsab@ksu.edu) or contact me by calling (785) 341-9754. As soon as I receive your e-mail, I'll get in touch with you to discuss the details of the study. If you have any concerns, you may contact the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 01 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

I thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this study and look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés – Doctoral Candidate
Women's Studies Department - 101 Leasure Hall
Kansas State University – gabsab@ksu.edu

Appendix G - PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

(Adapted from Esquivel, 2010)

Subject: Consent form to participate in the research study: **How gender, ethnicity and college experiences affect Latinas' undergraduate college persistence**

Dear Student,

This study is designed to learn about how gender, ethnicity, and college experiences affect Latinas' academic performance and college graduation, via Latina students' narratives of their college experiences. It is expected that the students' narratives will reflect cultural and social patterns in their experiences related to issues of gender, ethnicity and academic success, and highlight similarities and differences among lived experiences. For example, I am interested in learning about Latina women's experiences in college, how their home cultures compare with college's culture, students' feelings about being a female and minority student at large Midwestern State University, Latinas' support network, and their positive and negative college experiences and how they affect their graduation goal.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed twice individually. Prior to the interviews, you will be provided with the set of questions that will guide both meetings. Each interview will take between 30 to 60 minutes and will be audio-taped and transcribed for the sole purposes of this doctoral dissertation. Please answer the questions as openly and honestly as possible. You may use English or Spanish (or both languages) during the interviews. Once the interviews are finished, they will be transcribed and you will be asked to review the transcription and make any changes that you consider appropriate.

Your participation and responses will be kept confidential. The collected data will be kept in a secure location during the research period and destroyed after three years -as per IRB

protocol, unless you agree in allowing your responses to be kept on file for future publishing

purposes only. In the event that the results of this study are published and/or presented at

conferences, no personally identifiable information will be shared. If needed, please feel free to

contact the Office of Research and Compliance (203 Fairchild Hall) via phone at 785- 532-3224

or e-mail at comply@ksu.edu.

Your signature at the bottom of this page indicates that you consent to participate in this

study. You may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue the interview process at any time,

as well as to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without any repercussions. Please

remember that all information –including your identity- will be kept confidential.

It is my hope that your participation in this study will shed light onto what makes Latinas

college students successful. Please know that your input offers a unique and valuable

contribution to the growing body of existing literature on the educational experiences of Latinos.

I very much appreciate your interest in participating in this study and thank you for donating

your time and assisting me with my dissertation. Please feel free to contact me if you need to do

so regarding this study.

Best wishes,

Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés, Doctoral Candidate
101 Leasure Hall
Women's Studies Department
College of Arts and Sciences
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506
785-532-5738
gabsab@ksu.edu

Major Professor: Dr. Kay Ann Taylor

Major Professor's Signature   **Date**

_____   _____

By virtue of my signature below, I indicate my consent to participate in the above-described research project:

Participant's Signature   **Date**

_____   _____

Appendix H - FIELD NOTES

Field notes: Beatriz's Life Narrative Interview

Date: 5/14/14

Observations

Before interview:
Beatriz is a very busy student. She has a job on campus where she works about twenty hours per week, is finishing her last semester at MSU, and is preparing to move to Texas in a few days. It is difficult for her to find free time longer than sixty minutes in her schedule for the interviews. We e-mailed each other several times trying to find the right time to meet until we finally arranged the dates.

Beatriz says that she is eager to meet with me in every communication we have. She really tries to find time to meet. We consider meeting on a weekend, but I prefer not to meet on the weekend since that is the only time when Beatriz can relax and pack her belongings. She communicates fast and effectively via e-mail, and prefers e-mail communications to phone calls.

Before we start the interview, I check that the microphone works properly several times and that the voice recorder works fine. I arrange extra copies of the life narrative questions on the desk so Beatriz has them handy in case she wants to take a look at them.

During interview:
What a fighter! This woman is pure energy! Her sense of determination and purpose makes me think of her as a bulldozer. Beatriz arrives at our meeting earlier. She sits down and starts talking about her classes, how she can't believe that she is graduating and leaving MSU in a few days.

She seems to enjoy telling her life story. For me, it is hard at times to follow her speech because Beatriz talks very fast and accompanies her words with plenty of hand gestures. She has vivacious dark eyes and is a delightful woman. She loves her husband, talks highly of him, and considers him his twin soul.

Her parents had a hard life, and she did too. She becomes very still when she remembers her abuse and abuser. Beatriz is concerned about her near future: Her abuser is coming out of jail in a couple of months and she is afraid of his reaction, because it was her testifying in court what sent him to jail. All of a sudden her expression is somber. It is the only time during the interview when she seems to be sad and in a dark place. But that doesn't deter her: She talks about her abuse freely, it is not a secret. I think that she is a strong woman.

When Beatriz talks, it seems as if she is confiding her secrets eagerly. She seems to enjoy remembering her past and how she got to college, and how she is now on her way to law school. At the end of interview, she asks me when is a good time to meet again for her second interview, since the appointment time that we agreed upon earlier doesn't work. She has to cover for a co-worker so she needs to reschedule our next meeting time.

After interview:
I'm exhausted but happy with the results of the life narrative interview. This was my first face-to-face interview with a participant and it went really well. Beatriz was so eager to share with me details of her life with such a passion that she passed it on to me. I make mental notes of how the interview went, and make sure to write it all down before I forget.

Field Notes: Beatriz's Semi-structured Interview

Date: 5/20/14

Observations

Before interview:

I just finished another participant's interview this morning, so I wanted to make sure that I did not get confused about who told me what. To avoid the confusion, I re-read Beatriz's life narrative to further understand her life story and better contextualize her answers. That helps me with knowing what to follow up on.

I know that Beatriz is very busy and perhaps nervous because she is moving away a week after this interview. I wonder also how would her state of mind influence this interview. I need to make sure that she feels comfortable. I also need to remind her that I am going to send her an email with both her interviews' transcriptions a week after this interview is over, so she may add or erase whatever she feels needs to be changed.

I check that the microphone works properly several times and that the voice recorder works fine. I arrange extra copies of the semi-structured interview questionnaire on the desk so Beatriz has them handy in case she wants to take a look at them.

During interview:

Beatriz arrived early! Oh my! I do not want to look unprofessional, but she catches me moving chairs, plugging the tape recorder, organizing the papers with the interview questions in my hand, and making sure that the tape recorder worked properly. I am really glad to have arrived early to the interview room, otherwise Beatriz would have had to wait for me in the hallway. Before starting the interview, I need to make a couple of adjustments to the microphone and make sure that the tape recorder is working properly.

Beatriz is apologetic about her early arrival, but very engaging and smiling constantly. Her attitude puts me at ease, and my fears about her going to be tense and in a hurry disappear.

Beatriz says that it is nice that I can speak the two languages that she speaks. Her casual conversation before we started the interview was in Spanish and a little bit on English, but when the questions start (even though she knows that she may answer in either language) she decides to speak in English. Beatriz says that she has read the questions before coming to this second interview, and without any hesitation she starts to talk freely. I notice that, as she speaks, she is mentally going through the semi-structured questions as she answers them to me, so I allow her to speak. I interrupt Beatriz only when clarification is needed.

Beatriz speaks very fast, gesticulating and using different tones of voice depending on the subject she is talking about. She was not happy at all with the way in which her former boss mistreated her at the university: Her tone of voice is firm, her facial expression is serious, and her eyebrows move up and down all the time.

I am amazed at this woman full of energy that is in front of me. Does she ever have any self-doubts?

After interview:

Beatriz conveys that she does not need to make any changes to her interviews. I am amazed at the level of self-determination that Beatriz exhibited during the interviews. I think that

was she talked about during her interviews is a good depiction of her life, and it is clear to me what she and her family had to go through in their immigration to the U.S.A.. Would she have told me a different story if I weren't a Latina woman myself?

I cross paths on campus with Beatriz a week after the interviews. She seems to be in a hurry, but takes her time to come talk to me. She says that she is moving soon and that she enjoyed our conversations. I wish her good luck in her new life, thank her for her contribution to this study, and congratulate her on her graduation.

Field Notes: Yolanda's Life Narrative Interview

Date: 5/16/14

Observations

Before interview:
Yolanda has answered my e-mails and requests for and interview right away and eagerly. She has a polite demeanor, is very engaging in her conversation, and switches from Spanish to English often. Her e-mail communication with me is in both languages, perhaps because she knows I'm bilingual as well?

Something went wrong with the tape recorder during my first meeting with her for the first life narrative interview (5/15/14), so we had to arrange a later time to meet. She is very gracious about it, and says that it was not a problem for her rescheduling the meeting time. This second time we are meeting I am trying the voice recorder many times to make sure it functions well. I do not leave anything to chance: I am also using a second voice recorder to ensure that the interview is recorded properly. I briefly interrupt Yolanda a couple of times during our pre-interview conversation to make sure that the recording devices are working well. I arrange extra copies of the life narrative questions on the desk so Yolanda has them handy in case that she wants to take a look at them.

Yolanda is incredibly polite and well spoken. She filled out her demographic questionnaire as soon as I sent it to her, and returned it to me on the very same day. She seems to be very efficient, and says that when she makes appointments she likes to arrive on time for them.

During interview:
Yolanda is a pleasant woman. She has dark and curly hair, beautiful dark eyes that are very expressive. She uses her hands to emphasize what she is saying, and comes out as a very natural and friendly person. Her answers are direct and usually provides good background information so her interlocutor understands the context of what she is talking about.

She uses a high-pitched voice whenever she discusses something that is annoying to her. At other times when she talks about home and her parents, her voice is sweet and natural. Yolanda is a very focused woman with clear goals in life.

She really longs to go back and visit Mexico and her extended family living there. She clearly does not agree with the women in her family who do not pursue careers after getting their college degrees, she says that she does not feel any sympathy for them. She nods her head frequently, marking the phrases that she wants to emphasize.

After interview:
After we finish the life narrative, I stay in the room to write my notes. I double-check with Yolanda the date and time for our next interview and agree on meeting at the same place. I think that I have so much background on her life that the open-ended questionnaire is going to yield even better data for this study. Yolanda is an easy-to-agree-with kind of person, and I leave this interview with a smile on my face, because I think that it went very well.

Field Notes: Yolanda's Semi-structured Interview

Date: 5/20/14

Observations

Before interview:

Today I am conducting two interviews back-to-back. It is difficult to find common times that work for everybody. This study's participants are busy women. I want to make sure that I devote enough time to both my participants today. It worries me that I may confuse their responses because the interviews are one after the other, but there is no other way to arrange the meetings.

I check that the microphone works properly and that the voice recorder works fine as well. I arrange extra copies of the semi-structured interview questions on the desk so Yolanda has them handy in case that she wants to take a look at them.

Yolanda is applying to graduate schools. While we relax before starting the interview, we converse for a short while about her chances of getting into the school she wants to attend. She has not heard from that specific school yet and says that she is nervous about not being able to get in. Her smile and relaxed demeanor seem to convey the opposite: She appears to be very self-assured that she will start her graduate school program where she wants to go.

During interview:

She has to go to work after this interview, so I want to make sure that I allow her to talk as much as she wants while keeping an eye on going through all the questions and ending the interview on time so Yolanda does not arrive late to her on campus job.

Yolanda is relaxed and easy-going. She takes her time to answer the questions and says that she has read them before our meeting. Yolanda uses a high-pitch tone of voice when she talks about discriminatory situations that she had to face on campus. Her eyes are wide open and her face has a very serious expression when she tells me about her negative experience with a faculty member. Yolanda talks openly and seems to be a mature woman with clear ideas of what is morally right and wrong. She has no problems in making sure that I know what her points of view are in regards to what is morally acceptable in our society.

Yolanda is proud of her parents. She adores them and is very close to both of them. She talks about that repeatedly throughout her interview: It seems to me that she wants to make sure that I am very aware of it. I do not want to check once again the voice recorder, but trust that it is capturing every word that Yolanda says, because I am enjoying this interview very much: Yolanda is a woman with a strong voice and clear ideas.

After interview:

Yolanda is a great interviewee and excellent communicator. She is clear, concise, and yet provides interesting details to her narrative and examples to what she says. It is comforting to know that I did not get confused between the two interviews (Yolanda's and Beatriz's).

As she gets ready to leave the interview room, I wish Yolanda good luck in her new life, and congratulate her on her graduation. I also remind her that I am going to send her the transcribed interviews to her, so she can revise, add, or erase anything that she wants to. Yolanda

asks me to do it ASAP since she is getting ready to leave town (I sent her the transcribed interviews after a couple of days and she replied saying that she did not want to modify the transcribed materials.)

I am satisfied with the way in which the interviews are going so far. The life narrative interview is a nice introduction to the participants' lives, and they go hand in hand with the second interview's semi-structured questions. I am looking forward to the next interview.

Field Notes: Anna's Life Narrative Interview

Date: 5/22/14

Observations

Before interview:
Anna is the oldest of all participants. She has two children, a military husband that just came back from deployment abroad, and a semester to wrap up. I want to make sure that I do everything before the interview efficiently so Anna does not waste her precious minutes. I review mentally what to do and to say to her. I am happy to say that I feel much more prepared for this interview after having conducted four interviews already.

I make a mental note that I needed to remind Anna that I am going to send her an e-mail with both of her transcribed interviews for her revision after we finalize her second interview.

I check that the microphone works properly and that the voice recorder works fine several times. I arrange extra copies of the life narrative questions on the desk so Anna has them handy in case she wants to take a look at them.

Anna texts me before interview, she wants to make sure that we are meeting at the designated place. Says that she does not want to be late for our appointment.

During interview:
Anna gets to the interview room a little earlier than agreed. Great! We chat while I make sure that the voice recorder works fine. It is a very warm day, and Anna mentions how comfortable is the temperature in the interview room. Anna is hauling a large backpack, it is clearly very heavy, and in it she has all that is needed for the whole day on campus. She says that she had a busy day so far, and wants to make sure that we are finished in an hour so she is on time to pick up her children from day care.

At the beginning of the life narrative, Anna repeats several times that she does not speak Spanish, and even though she tried to learn it in college it did not work for her. I felt that I needed to assure Anna that not being able to speak Spanish was not an issue.

Anna is engaging and very serious about this commitment. She seems somehow nervous at the beginning of the interview. She talks very fast and does not smile much. Later, because of her way to look into space when telling her story, I realize that she is making a mental and emotional effort to recall her past and connect it to her present. She does not seem to welcome interruptions while telling her life story. She simply wants to tell the whole story, without having to stop. I let her talk freely. She goes on, talking about her parents, her husband, her pregnancies, her decision to come to MSU, and her two children. Anna describes enthusiastically how her and her husband decided to have the baby and get married later, against her father's wishes. She sweetly smiles when she says that, after all, her father had to accept their decision and that's it.

She enjoys describing her passage from her family of origin to the family she created, and she is relaxed, smiles a lot, and looks directly at me in the eyes. She tells me that she makes sure that she tries to pass onto her children a number of important values emanating from the different cultures that Anna comes from (Mexican-American, French, and U.S.A.)

Toward the end of the life narrative, Anna seems very relaxed. She is equally interested in telling me her life story as she was when we started the interview, but she makes more pauses during her narrative, smiles more, makes longer eye contact.

Anna and I notice that she has been talking almost non-stop for sixty minutes. She has to go now to pick up her children. She stands up quickly and I make sure that we confirm our appointment for her second face-to-face interview before she leaves.

After interview:

After listening to her story, I wonder about the incredibly complex worlds that our students inhabit and how important it is to listen to them in order to understand their personalities. I feel a strong sense of respect for this woman as a student, mother, spouse, daughter, and worker. I am really glad that she is part of this study, because she was excellent explaining the deep complexity of Latina women's lives.

Anna left already. Her interview yielded a lot of information for one meeting. I am so much into her story that it is taking me a few minutes to settle my ideas. I start gathering the documents and voice recorder after ten minutes. Her story adds depth to the other participants' stories. Being a mother and a non-traditional student makes me think that this woman is even busier that the other participants. It makes me think of non-traditional students and how different their life paths are from traditional ones. I think that she presented a clear depiction of how her life was in and out of college, so much that I am feeling the need to help her out.

I am truly looking forward to meeting with her again.

Field Notes: Anna's Semi-structured Interview

Date: 5/26/14

Observations

Before interview:

I re-read Anna's life narrative before our second interview to better understand her life story and contextualize her answers better. That helps me as well with knowing what to follow up on.

I make mental notes of asking Anna certain questions in depth. I want to ask her about the following:

1.   She spoke about her mother and father, and I want for her to elaborate specifically on how each parent supported and still supports her.
2.   Which specific obstacles she encountered in college.
3.   How is it like to grow up in a multiracial family?
4.   How is it like to be a non-traditional student?

I needed to remind Anna that I am going to send her an email with both her interviews' transcriptions in less than a week, so she can add or erase whatever she feels needs to be changed.

I rearrange the chairs' location. For some reason during her first interview, Anna re-positioned the chairs in a way that hers was not in front of me but, instead, next to me. This time I want to ensure that I can see her facial expressions when we are talking.

I check several times the microphone to see that it works properly and that the voice recorder works fine. I arrange extra copies of the interview questions on the desk so Anna has them handy in case that she wants to take a look at them.

During interview:

While I organize my questions and the paperwork on the desk, I think about how to best engage Anna in answering the questions freely. I make some adjustments to the microphone and make sure that the tape recorder is working properly once more.

When Anna arrives, she is all smiles. She is carrying again a huge backpack. She sets it on the floor, and announces that she "is ready". I understand this as her way of letting me know that she is again on a tight schedule, and that we need to get moving.

Anna starts with a casual conversation about how one of her children is sick and that her family came all the way from another Midwestern town to help her out. She says that is it really nice and helpful to have her family support, and states how difficult it must be for those non-traditional students who do not have the support of their families.

Anna says that she read the questions again before coming to the interview, and that the questions made her think a lot.

After I ask the first question, Anna talks almost freely, and it is interesting to note that she is answering all the questions and more by doing so. So I let her talk. Here and there I ask questions to clarify a point she makes, but pretty much she continues to talk with minimal interruption from me.

Anna takes especially a long time when discussing her experience living abroad in South Korea. Equally important in her discourse is the reference to how her parents pushed her to

resume her studies the day she arrived from South Korea. She smiles at this point, when saying that her mother is her engine, but that her father understands and supports Anna better.

Sometimes it is difficult for me to follow Anna: She speaks very fast and is so enthusiastic that I do not want to interrupt her talking, but I have to ask her to rephrase a couple of times for clarity purposes.

Anna loves talking about her children and husband. I think that they all have a very strong connection. It makes me think of a family with iron ties. "Wow!" I think: She is so young and yet she has lived so much.

At the end of the interview, I remind Anna that I'll send her the two interview transcriptions for her to go over and make changes if necessary. She is OK with it.

After interview:
To my surprise, after finishing the interview, Anna stays in the room longer. She tells me about how her day went, and how coming back home means to her the joy of seeing her children mixed with a lot of chores to do. I am thinking that her day is not over yet by any means. Now she is coming home to be "Mommy", getting extra energy from who knows where, and continuing doing a million things all together. Incredible woman.

After I sent Anna the interviews' transcriptions, she replied right away that nothing needed to be changed.

Field Notes: María's Life Narrative Interview

Date: 5/22/14

Observations

Before interview:

María is the youngest of all participants. Because she is new to MSU, I think that her narrative may include more home and past educational experiences than only those experiences directly related to her life in the U.S.A. I make a mental note to ensure that María has plenty of time to articulate her new educational experiences, during the life narrative interview and later during the semi-structured interview.

I feel nervous for some reason. Perhaps, I am nervous because of María's lack of previous experience participating in a study, or perhaps because she is the youngest participant. For whatever reason, I want to make sure that she feels at ease during both interviews. I need to relax as well, so she feels more comfortable to tell me her life story.

I go over the different steps that I need to follow for her interview once more: I review mentally what to do and to say to her. I know that I want to make her feel comfortable and at ease.

I prepare the voice recorder and microphone, set them on the desk together with the brief list of questions that I'll be asking her this time. I check that the microphone works properly and that the voice recorder works fine several times. I put extra copies of the life narrative questions on the desk so María has them handy in case that she wants to take a look at them. I arrange the chairs around the desk and put away my belongings.

I know that I want to show her professionalism and a warmth attitude. I remind myself that I need to inform María that I will send her an e-mail with both of her transcribed interviews for revision after we finalize both her interviews.

During interview:

María arrives on time to our interview. She seems to be shy and smiles sheepishly while informing me that this is her last thing to do today. She is getting ready to go back to Paraguay when the semester ends, and says that she is truly looking forward to it. She tells me that she feels so happy that she will spend the entire summer at home with her family and friends. She feels confident about getting good grades in all of her classes this semester.

We chat for about 5 minutes while I make sure that the voice recorder works fine and that she feels at ease. This is yet another very warm day in the Midwest, so I adjust the thermostat to a comfortable temperature. María tells me that it is great to be indoors because of the heat wave, and comments on how comfortable the temperature feels in the interview room.

Our casual conversation at the beginning of the interview leads to my question about her life story. María said that, after receiving the interview questions via e-mail, she has thought about her life narrative and the way in which she would tell it to me. I ask her to begin right away because I want to know about her life and her experiences. Although she seems to be shy at the beginning, María engages fast in telling me her story as the interview progresses. She seems somehow nervous when we begin the interview: She moves quite a bit in her chair and smiles frequently while telling her story, especially when she is talking about her parents. I let

her talk freely most of the time, but ask her follow up questions when I need her to go deeper into some unclear parts of her story (e.g. when she talks about her parents separating and sending her to finish high school in the U.S.A., or when she talks about the guidance that her older brother gave her when she came to the university.)

María talks with utmost admiration of her parents. She seems to be very close to both of them. With a strong voice, she describes how she admires her father, and her voice becomes sweeter when talking about her mother. Her tone of voice is most vivacious when she describes her high school days and the strong bond she has with her friends. She only lowers her voice once, and it is when she talks about the process she had to go through when her parents separated. She seems relieved when she tells how her parents kept her uninformed about their separation until after her Quinceañera celebration. She agrees in that her parents made the right choice in taking time separated to think things over and later they decide to stay together as a family.

After fifteen minutes into her life narrative, María seems to relax. She sits across the desk from me, leaning back in her chair, looks at me directly in my eyes, and smiles.
After listening to her story, I think that María conveys how content she is with her life so far because it is salient how she uses very positive words to describe it. She is from upper middle class background and has had a very sheltered and happy life so far. When she describes her high school experiences and then talks about her experiences at MSU, I can only think about how different both experiences are for her and how she is weaving them together for me today.

After interview:

María talked, almost non-stop, for over an hour. I am happy with how the interview went, especially since I expected María to be more reserved than she actually was. I take the voice recorder, microphone, and papers from the desk. I am very content with the results of this interview. I think that her story adds yet another way of experiencing life in college for Latinas, and makes the stories of the other participants more unique. I consider María's story of determination to move so far away from home and to immerse herself and study in a foreign country, and I cannot help but think about my own story. How would I have told my own story so many years ago? I am sure that, after being in the U.S.A. for so long, my story now includes much more than at the beginning. I was a mother and a non-traditional student myself: Will that influence how I interpret María's story?

Field Notes: María's Semi-structured Interview

Date: 5/26/14

Observations

Before interview:
I re-read María's life narrative before our second interview to better understand her life story and contextualize her answers better. That helped me as well with knowing what to follow up on.

I make mental notes of asking María about certain subjects that she brought up during her life narrative if she does not clarify them during this second interview. I want to ask her about:

1. What her mother said to María when she decided to attend Midwestern State University?
2. Which obstacles she encountered in college and how she resolved problems?
3. Who are part of her support network at MSU and how do they help her?
4. How does her home culture compare to college culture? Did she agree with her father when he said that campuses in the U.S.A. were dangerous for women? If so, why?

I need to remind her that I am going to send her an email with both her interviews' transcriptions in less than a week, so she can add or erase whatever she feels needs to be changed.

I make sure that the microphone and the voice recorder are strategically placed and that both work well. I arrange extra copies of the interview questions on the desk so María has them available should she need them.

I sit and wait, while María seems to be a few minutes late for our appointment.

During interview:
María arrives a couple of minutes late to our appointment and hurriedly explains that her class went a little over time and that made her late for our appointment. She apologizes profusely. She seems to be somewhat nervous and also a little shy today. I assure her that we have enough time for this interview and that it was OK for her to get here a little later. While I organize my questions and the paperwork on the desk, I think about how to best engage her in answering the questions freely. María says that in a short week she is going back to Paraguay to see her family, and she will spend whole summer at home. She can't wait, she says, with a broad smile.

When I start asking her the first questions, she answers with short sentences at the beginning. But as the time goes by she relaxes, smiles more, makes better eye contact, and takes more time to elaborate on her answers.

María says that she re-read the questions before coming to the interview, and that they made her think a lot about her values and how her life has changed since she came to the U.S.A. I allow her to talk freely. Here and there I ask questions to clarify some points, but she is talking non-stop. María takes longer when describing her life during high school years. Equally important in her discourse is when she describes the process of changing cultures and making her own decisions about moving to the U.S.A., contrary to her father's desires.

Sometimes it is difficult for me engaging María to provide me with longer and more elaborated answers. Even though her mother tongue is Spanish, she is determined to speak

English in both interviews. Perhaps if she had spoken Spanish with me, her answers would have been more elaborated? But it is her decision, and I continue the interview in the language of her choice.

María seems most engaged when discussing her new views on gays and lesbians. She takes a long time describing and comparing the cultures in Paraguay and in the U.S.A. Her eyes are wide open, she uses her hands a lot to emphasize what she is saying. She is proud when she says that her home culture is homophobic and that she is entering a new atmosphere in the U.S.A. María has a big smile while saying this.

It has been an hour already and she has class and needs to leave. We actually went over all the listed questions, so I tell María that she can add as much as she wants when I send her the transcribed interviews next week. She says that she will be in Paraguay by then, and gives me a big smile.

After interview:

María leaves in a hurry, gives me a hug and apologizes again for arriving late. I tell her not to worry and hug her back. I also wish her safe travels when going back home. It makes me think that I long to go home, but I will do so in over six months. I put all equipment in my bag, write some notes, and organize the paperwork before leaving the room. Once again, this was an enjoyable interview and it produced a good amount of data. I feel content.

Field Notes: Sam's Life Narrative Interview

Date: 5/26/14

Observations

Before interview:

I read my e-mail communications with Sam before we met. I want to have a sense of the person I was about to meet through her writing, words of choice, expressions used when writing.

I know that Sam is a quiet and calm woman, so I make mental notes to myself of letting her speak and to make sure that I tolerate silences before asking further questions. I also make a mental note to remind her that at the end of both interviews I will be sending her an email with both her interviews' transcriptions so she can add or erase whatever she feels needs to be changed.

I make sure that the interview room is inviting, and that chairs, papers, voice recorder, and forms are in order. I check several times to make sure that the microphone works properly and that the voice recorder works fine, I do not want to make any mistakes with the equipment. I arrange extra copies of the interview questions on the desk so Sam has them handy in case she wants to take a look at them.

During interview:

While I organize my questions and the paperwork on the desk, I think about how to best engage Sam in answering the questions freely. I know she is a quiet woman, she tends to think twice before answering a question, so I decide that the best way is to give her ample time to talk to me.

Sam arrives slightly earlier than agreed, and is ready to go. She is meeting with me in between her classes and wants to make sure that we have enough time to do this first interview so there is no time to waste. She is well groomed, her dark hair made in a tight bun, always clean-cut looking as if she had just jumped out of a make up session. She has pale white skin, brown and slanted eyes, and dark hair.

Talking to Sam happens to be easy. She listens intently but her relaxed demeanor makes me think that she feels comfortable in this interview situation. As I inform her about the study once more and present her with the forms to be signed, she continues to smile. Sam is well aware of the interview protocol, sits in her chair, leaning back, and is ready to go.

After I ask Sam about her life story, she slowly but surely starts telling me about her parents, her sister, her decision to transfer to MSU. Words flow out of her mouth with ease. She selects the words carefully, she is precise when she talks. Still, Sam doesn't come out as a controlling person, rather as an accurate one. I let her talk, describe, make the necessary pauses, and I follow her rhythm. Here and there I ask questions to clarify a point she makes, but she talks with minimal interruption from me.

It is important for Sam to be involved in college. That is clear because of how she emphasizes her stories about being involved when she attended a community college. Equally important seems to be for her to let me know that her family is of utmost important to her. She is equally passionate about getting excellent grades. Sam is trying to ease into such a large university, and seems to be happy about being here.

At the end of her life narrative interview, we set up a time to meet next week and I remind her that I will be sending her both transcripts at the end of the second interview so she can make any necessary changes to it.

After interview:

I feel that our first interview went well, and that Sam is a remarkable young woman, decided to make a difference for Latinos anywhere she goes. She is passionate and her calm demeanor is her way to have more time to think about her answers. Sam is precise in her thinking and planning, but seems naturally welcoming and warm.

Field Notes: Sam's Semi-structured Interview

Date: 5/29/14

Observations

Before interview:

I re-read Sam's life narrative before meeting for the semi-structured interview to better understand her life story and contextualize her answers better. Doing so help me as well with knowing what to follow up on.

I make mental notes of asking Sam certain questions in depth. I want to ask her about her experience living in a rural community, her parents' upbringing, her sister's emigration to Australia, and the value of education in Sam's life.

I check several times that the microphone works properly and that the voice recorder works fine. I arrange extra copies of the interview questions on the desk so Sam has them handy in case she wants to take a look at them. These actions are automatic for me by now.

During interview:

I quickly organize my questions and the paperwork on the desk and think about how to best engage Sam this time. I decide that the relaxed approach works best with her, since she takes time to think and answer questions. I adjust to the microphone and make sure that the tape recorder is working properly once again.

Sam arrives 5 minutes early to our appointment and I am glad to be ready for her. As the other participants, Sam is carrying a heavy backpack: She says that she has a full day of classes today. She sets her backpack on the floor, sits straight in her chair and smiles. I understand that this as her way of letting me know that she is ready to start our second interview.

Her answers are well thought of and elaborated. She has a warm and at the same time professional way of behaving. For Sam, her family's support and understanding is of utmost importance. They live five hours away from MSU, but that was never an impediment for Sam to pursue her education. She attended Midwestern Community College located near her family home, but later she transferred to MSU. Her family fully supported her moving away from home. She finds MSU welcoming and full of opportunities: Sam says with a big smile that she has found a place where she can flourish because there is so much to do and so many people to interact with.

After the first question, Sam talks slowly but surely, almost freely, and it is interesting to note that as she speaks she answers almost all of the questions I have for her and more spontaneously. So I allow her to talk. Occasionally I ask some questions for clarification purposes.

Sam takes an especially long time to discuss her community work and how important it is for her to be involved with students' leadership groups on campus. Her goal is to give back to her community, because she received so much from it and there is a lot to do to support Latinos.

I remind Sam at the end of the interview that I'll be sending her the two interview transcriptions so she can go over them and make changes if necessary. She is OK with it. It is time for Sam to go to her next class. She smiles at me and says that she has to go, while she grabs her backpack hurriedly, gives me a hug, wishes me well in my research, and leaves for class.

After interview:

       I am satisfied with how the interview went, smoothly but surely well. I am grateful for all the participants who are busy women in college and they make time to assist me with this study. I think that each participant is so different from the other, but the themes discussed by them are quite similar.

Appendix I - PILOT STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you originally from? Where did you grow up?
   Cuéntame acerca de tí. Cuál es tu lugar de origen? Dónde creciste?

2. How do you identify yourself? Why?
   Cómo te defines a tí misma? Porqué?

3. Tell me about your experiences living in the Midwest.
   Cuéntame tus experiencias viviendo en esta ciudad.

4. Tell me about your experiences in high school. How was life like for you?
   Cuéntame de tus experiencias en la escuela secundaria –prepa. Cómo era tu vida en ese momento?

5. What motivated you to graduate from high school?
   Qué te motivó a graduarte de la escuela secundaria -prepa?

6. Why did you decide to attend college?
   Porqué y cómo decidiste comenzar la universidad?

7. What did your family say about your decision to attend college?
   Qué opinó tu familia acerca de tu decisión de ir a la Universidad?

8. What did you know about college before attending it?
   Antes de ir a la universidad, qué sabías acerca de ella?

9. Tell me about your experiences at the university you are attending.
   Cuéntame de tus experiencias en esta universidad.

10. What is your major? What are you interested in doing after you graduate from college?
    Cuál es tu carrera universitaria? Qué planes tienes luego de graduarte?

11. How does being a Latina woman influence your experiences in college?
    Cómo influye en tu experiencia universitaria el hecho de que seas una mujer Latina?

12. What continues to motivate you to stay and graduate from college?
    Qué es lo que te motiva a graduarte de la Universidad?

13. What are your main goals in college?
    Cuáles son tus metas en la universidad?

14. What are your main goals in life?

Cuáles son tus objetivos de vida?

15. How do you define academic success?
    Qué significa para tí ser académicamente exitosa?

16. Which were the greatest challenges that you had to face to attend college?
    Por favor describe y ejemplifica cuáles han sido los mayores obstáculos que has encontrado en la universidad.

17. What makes you different from other students?
    Qué te hace diferente a otros estudiantes?

18. Which experiences helped you in college?
    Qué experiencias te han ayudado en la universidad?

19. Which experiences negatively influenced your college experience?
    Qué experiencias han obstaculizado tu vida universitaria?

20. Who made a difference in your life so you could attend college? Why and how have they helped you?
    Quién te ayudó en tu vida para que pudieras ir a la universidad? Cómo y porqué te han ayudado?

21. Is your home culture different from the culture at your university? Please elaborate.
    Es tu cultura de origen distinta a la cultura de la universidad? Si lo es, cuáles son las diferencias entre ambas?

22. How do you define gender roles within your culture of origin? And how you, as a Latina woman, handle these expectations?
    En tu cultura de origen, cuáles son los roles esperados de mujeres y hombres? Y tú como mujer Latina, qué piensas y cómo manejas esas expectativas culturales?

23. Have you ever experienced a conflict between your home culture and the culture of the university you are attending? If so, please tell me about it.
    Has tenido alguna vez conflictos entre tu cultura de origen y la cultura de tu universidad? En caso de haberlos tenido, por favor cuéntame acerca de ellos.

24. How did you resolve such conflicts?
    Cómo llegaste a resolver esos conflictos?

25. Which obstacles/barriers to success have you encountered in college?
    Qué obstáculos o barreras has encontrado en la universidad?

26. How did you resolve such issues? Who/what helped you to do so?
    Cómo has sobrepasado esas barreras? Alguien/algo te ayudó a superarlos?

27. What and/or who helped you become a successful student?
    Qué o quién/es te ayudó a ser una estudiante exitosa?

28. Who is part of your support group in college?
    Quién o quiénes forman parte de tu grupo de soporte y ayuda en la universidad?

29. Do you view yourself was a successful student? Why so?
    Tú crees que eres una estudiante exitosa? Porqué?

30. If you were to select one, which experience during your entire educational experience made a difference for you?
    Si tuvieras que selecccionar una, cuál es la experiencia que tuviste en la universidad que más importancia tuvo en tu vida?

31. What piece of advice were you given that helped you in college?
    Cuál fue el consejo que recibiste que más te ayudó en la universidad?

32. What motivates you to succeed academically?
    Qué te motiva a ser académicamente exitosa?

33. Where do you see yourself in the future, about 10 years from now?
    Cómo te imaginas tu vida dentro de diez años?

34. How would you support Latinas to succeed in this university?
    Qué harías para ayudar a estudiantes Latinas en tu universidad?

35. Is it there anything else that you would like to share that we have not discussed?
    Hay alguna otra cosa de la cual quisieras hablar a la que no hayamos hecho mención todavía?