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A STUDY OF FAMILIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTED
TO DEGREE ATTAINMENT FOR NINE SOUTH TEXAS LATINAS

by

MARIA M. MENDEZ, MSN, RN, FNP-BC

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2020

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2020

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I had no idea when I started this journey just how arduous my doctoral pursuit would be. I felt the intensity of the doctoral program, but my achievement would not have been possible without the help of several individuals. I thank God for blessing me with the ability to earn my doctoral degree by granting me the strength to achieve my dream.

I would like to thank my committee: my chair Dr. Sharon Herbers, Dr. De Los Santos, and Dr. Martinez. Thank you for your guidance, patience, and support.

Dr. Herbers, I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness, honesty, faith, and encouragement during times when life got so difficult that I thought I could no longer continue. Thank you for helping me remain true to my faith and believing in my ability to achieve earning my doctorate. You pushed me to remain focused on my work and displayed incredible kindness as you made me believe that my degree was possible. You became a master at reeling me back in when my research ran amok! Your comments always made me laugh, but you were always right. Your support increased my confidence, which positively influenced me personally and professionally. I will never forget you; you are a special soul. I don't know how I could ever repay your kindness.

I wish to thank the selfless women who shared their powerful stories with me. They became my teachers by showing me different perspectives about living life as Latinas and how they achieved success by capitalizing on facilitating factors and overcoming barriers. I learned so much from them and am grateful and humbled that they allowed me to share in part of their lives. I learned that adversity does not need be a deterrent and that with God at the helm, all is

possible. I am a stronger Latina as a result of researching what I learned from their incredible stories.

To my loyal and loving friend, Dr. Cecilia Pacheco, thank you for your friendship, for always believing in me, and for encouraging me even on days of complete exhaustion. You managed to lighten the mood so that we ended up laughing. Laughter is the best medicine! Your friendship means the world to me.

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DEDICATION

It is with tremendous pride that I dedicate this monumental achievement to the love of my life, my husband Rodolfo Mendez, who lovingly stood by me through it all. Good and bad, he personified the true meaning of caballerismo and familismo. His support, respect, and familial honor made all the difference. He is truly the “wind beneath my wings,” and I don’t know what I did to deserve him but feel blessed and honored to have shared this journey with him.

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It is because of the encouragement, support, and love received from this amazing family that I was able to fulfill my dream of becoming Dr. Mendez. Words cannot possibly express the gratitude I feel and sincerely thank you all for your unwavering love and support.

A STUDY OF FAMILIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO DEGREE ATTAINMENT FOR NINE SOUTH TEXAS LATINAS

Maria M. Mendez, PhD

University of the Incarnate Word, 2020

This study thematically analyzed participant interviews with nine Latinas who had completed their terminal degrees. The intersectionality of culture, ethnicity, and gender greatly affected their educational journey. It is critical to explore and understand facilitative and detrimental factors that affect Latina degree attainment.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore cultural and social influences and factors that contributed to degree attainment for nine south Texas Latinas and to explore the families' role in supporting or hindering their educational achievement. Participants identified influences based on different aspects of their culture, gender, and ethnicity that led them to draw on their personal strengths to achieve their degrees. They used factors such as coping, self-efficacy, adaptation, confidence, persistence, resilience, and readiness that were intrinsic, motivational, and what facilitated their doctoral persistence. Latino culture as the foundation of identity development led the Latinas to analyze the effects of intersectionality and to decide if they wanted to change themselves to achieve their degree.

Higher education is not an individual process; it involves the students, as well as sound support teams. Those working with Latinas need to understand the importance of family support. Support systems emerged as essential to the Latinas' success, with their mothers as the most prominent influences followed by their spouses, hidden figures who became significant

resources. It is vital to identify potential support resources to facilitate terminal degree attainment for Latinas who remain underrepresented in doctoral degree attainment.

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Preface

It was a beautiful morning, surely about 4:00 a.m.; it was dark outside, and another typical day was about to begin. I was told to go take care of my brothers and sisters and get that stupid idea of going to school out of my head. I was not going to school because I was to stay behind to clean the house and to take care of kids. I was also responsible to prepare lunches for the field workers, mostly men. A Latina's place is in the home; there was no need for formal education. After all, who needs an education to clean house and prepare meals?

I recall climbing onto the milk crate and beginning to roll out tortillas in preparation for lunch for the field hands. I had to hurry, because I had to clean house and to get the younger children ready start the day by getting them ready for school. Afterward, I had to go to the fields to pick cotton and hoe weeds. I struggled as I prepared the food, because the kitchen counter and stove were too high for me to reach. I was too small to reach the counter. I quickly wiped away tears so that no one would see how disappointed I was over not going to school. They did not understand—I did not understand—I was five.

I was only four when I learned that, perhaps, formal education was not in my foreseeable future. I was five when I learned that it was the definitive plan that I would not be receiving a formal education. They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and perhaps being kept from school was the element that fueled the fire for seeking formal education and produced an affinity for learning. It was certainly what sparked my interest in this study. Education is food for the soul. It is a journey; an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual rite of passage; and lastly, a privilege.

Chapter 1: Latinos and Education

Context of the Study

Education is perceived as the gateway to a prosperous future that provides family security and financial stability (Gandara, 2015). Education affords better jobs with increased salaries, health care coverage, and savings plans that will provide postretirement. Increased revenue enables people to live in better homes and neighborhoods with quality schools that prepare students for college. Educated individuals have been found to avoid negative behaviors such as smoking and to have improved nutrition, which, in turn, leads to healthy living states. They also have more time and money for leisure activities (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013).

As with most issues, the first step in correcting a problem is to appreciate and recognize that the problem exists (Escobedo, 1980). Underrepresentation of Latinas in education has been an issue that has been addressed, but until the last few decades, corrective measures have often failed to produce favorable outcomes. Perchance the underrepresentation that overshadows Latinas is due to factors hindering degree attainment that are not clearly understood. Latina culture is foundational and a point of reference on which participants built their lives. The culture is deeply rooted in a way of life that values family above all else and measures success by the strength of those family ties (Chavez, 1991). Understanding Latino cultural values reveals how culture affects socialization and, consequently, education. Latinas are often subject to discriminatory double jeopardy due to ethnicity and gender. They are historically perceived as the domestic partner whose main purpose is to tend to home and family. Latinas deviating from expectations often have to choose between home and family or pursuing their education (De Leon, 1996).

The focus of this study are Latinas as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) who are individuals of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino ethnicity listed in the 2019 U.S. Census under the

categories of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, or those who identify themselves as “another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.” The term Hispanic is used when referring to individuals with ancestry from a Spanish-speaking country or those of Spanish or Mexican American culture or descent. Other terms that are used interchangeably are Latina(o), Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana(o), and Spanish. For the purpose of this research study, the term Latina is my choice of designation when referring to Hispanic females.

The Latino population is the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States. While Latino college enrollment is increasing, and dropout rates are decreasing, Latinas continue to trail behind Whites in college education and degree attainment. Latina degree attainment is half of White students, and the trend has continued since 2000 (Barshay, 2018; Harris & Tienda, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2019). The focus of this study is on Latinas who attained their doctoral degrees. For the sake of understanding the magnitude of the accomplishment of the Latinas in this study, an overview of the status of Latino education is presented.

Reasons for low Latina academic achievement are multifactorial. Recognized as being disproportionately poor, Latinas have the highest poverty rate at 28.1% (45 million Americans), with one out of every eight Latinas living in poverty (Krogstad, 2014a). Gandara (2015) noted that poverty, in addition to social issues, and other financial constraints often led to failure to attain their degrees. The opportunity to follow their own interpretation of success was what drove the pursuit of higher education for the Latinas in this study.

Research indicates the inclination toward not pursuing higher education for Latino students may have started long before enrolling in college became a life decision. As early as K–12, students from less affluent backgrounds face disadvantages and challenges such as attending

less prosperous schools lacking resources, financial hardship, and/or having family who do not support their goals (National Education Association, n.d.). It is important to encourage a transition immediately post high school as studies show enrolling in college directly post-high school graduation significantly increases the rate of college education completion (King, 2006).

Students who do not have the means or familiarity with the processes to access resources as they transition through the different levels of academia continue to face accumulative obstacles that those familiar with the system may not encounter. For those who pursue their doctorate, the academic demands of the doctoral program, combined with the lack of supportive resources, challenge their resolve. Although the participants in this study attained their terminal degree, additional factors, such as being working adult students supporting their families, hinders Latinas from fully focusing on academics (Barshay, 2018).

West (2014) cited added reasons for poor academic outcomes, including lack of faculty understanding of matters that affect minorities, unclear faculty expectations, lack of peer and family support, racism, and loss of interest in continuing the doctoral program. Wells also concurred that financial burden was a significant factor. Consequently, a disproportionate number of minority doctoral students do not complete their terminal degrees or drop out of the doctoral program after years of study. It is crucial to understand what is needed by Latinas pursuing higher education by exploring experiences and factors that affect their educational journey to help identify what facilitates their educational pursuit.

Minority Student College Enrollment

College enrollment for Hispanic students has historically been dismal in comparison to attendance by other ethnic student groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Recent studies indicate Hispanic college student enrollment has doubled in the last 20 years, with college enrollment

being significantly higher for women than for men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). By 2017, overall college enrollment for undergraduate and graduate students had increased, but it was noted that Latinos overall held the lowest rate of college enrollment at 36%, far below other ethnicities and races (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019a). American Association of Community Colleges (2017) noted that Latino students were less likely than their peers to enroll in higher education, and when they did, dropped out of college at a higher rate than non-Latino students (Espinosa, Gaertner, & Orfield, 2015; King, 2006). Espinosa et al., (2015) proposed that colleges and universities were now more diverse than ever. Critical to student recruitment and retention is understanding the impact of diversity by recognizing race and ethnic specific characteristics so that colleges are prepared to provide “race neutral alternatives” (Espinosa et al., 2015, p. 3).

As the Latino population grows in number, so does student eligibility for college enrollment. On the other hand, the population growth and high school graduation numbers do not parallel the number of college graduates (NCES, 2019b). The likelihood of college graduation for Latinos remains less than favorable. It is encouraging that Latino enrollment is rising, but it is doing so at a slow pace, and Latinas following through to completion remains a concern.

Although direct causality has not been established, financial constraints, financial obligations to home and family, and knowledge deficit about the college route preparatory process and repayment are also identified as potential barriers hindering Latinas from pursuing and completing a college education (Liu, 2011). Factors that positively influence degree attainment are contingent on student support, parental education, race and ethnicity, financial support, field of study, education-related debt, and time to degree completion (National Science Foundation, 2018).

Parents with formal degrees positively influence their children's education. Statistics show that students whose parents are not college degreed are 18% less likely to pursue higher education. The rate at which students whose parents have earned the following degrees are predicted to pursue higher education is as follows: (a) if a parent has a bachelor's degree: 26%; (b) advanced degree, 43%; and (c) doctorate, 69% (National Science Foundation, 2018). The higher the level of degree attained by the parent, the greater chance of academic success for future college students. Race and ethnicity are significant considerations when discussing factors that affect future students, because minority doctoral students are less likely to have a family member with a doctoral degree. According to statistics, that decreases the likelihood that students will either pursue or attain a terminal degree.

Financial concern continues to be a pressing issue for all students. Doctoral students usually rely on their own resources, which places an additional financial burden as they continue their education. Their choice of degree for their chosen career is important because some career fields do not provide much financial assistance, leaving students to fund their own education. Debt at end of study can be a factor depending on financial support during the doctoral program. Lastly, the length of time to earn a terminal degree has increased, resulting in students not wanting to pursue an education because of the length of time it takes to earn their degrees (National Science Foundation, 2018). Identification of factors affecting or hindering doctoral degree pursuit and attainment are imperative to identify. Failure to identify potential barriers or facilitating factors that influence the likelihood of pursuing higher education may result in different postgraduate outcomes that include failure to pursue or complete a doctoral degree.

Latinas in Higher Education

The number of women of all races attending college is rising and, in doing so, the number of Latina college enrollment has increased (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012; National Science Foundation, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau News, 2017). The increase in the number of Latinas attending college is consistent with the upward, albeit slow, trend in Latinas earning doctoral degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). College and university enrollment in the US for women continues to surpass that of men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Though data indicate that increasingly more and more women are pursuing their doctoral degrees, their presence is still not equally represented across all disciplines and with all races and gender. This is evident in the doctoral or first-professional degree programs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). With Latinos predicted to become the largest minority population by 2020, Latinas will be the most affected by their low academic achievement (Pew Research Center, 2019). The academic success of Latinas is crucial. Lack of degree attainment will lead to fewer Latinas employed at professional levels in jobs requiring higher degrees which will result in Latinas continuing to be underrepresented.

As Latinas entered academia, a change in culture started that a few decades ago was not the standard. Today, Latinas' social measure of success generally includes that of education and financial independence, whereas before, formal education for Latinas was not necessarily a measure of success as much as their ability to care for their families. The Latinas' identity was and, to a certain extent, still is strongly grounded in familial attachment and caring (De Los Santos, 1998; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Vanoss Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987), sometimes to the point of creating feelings of self-reproach in women for wanting to be more than homemakers (Anzaldua, 1999). Total immersion in home and family dynamics is frequently at

the expense of education and self-fulfillment. Focusing solely on home and family rather than on long-term goals of self-accomplishment and education affected Latinas then and continues to hold true today. As Latinas gain empowerment, their views, as well as society's perception, change and start to recognize the value of formal education. Learning the influences and factors that affect Latinas during their higher education journey toward successful degree attainment are important to understand and are the focus of this study.

Latinos are labeled as the “disadvantaged minority—poorly educated, concentrated in barrios, economically impoverished; with little hope of participating in the American Dream. This perception has not changed substantially... And it is wrong” (Chavez, 1991, p. 101). Latinas struggle with overcoming past perceptions as they opt to pursue a formal education that had long been perceived as unnecessary for Latinos in general, but particularly for Latinas.

As reflected by the following statement by Morales (2002),

The problem for Latinos is that we are neither viewed as Americans—being consigned to a South of the Border ethos and all the foreign-tongued otherness that it implies—nor are we viewed as white, black, or even Asian in the American race hierarchy. (p. 24)

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, there exists an underrepresentation of Latinas in terminal degree attainment. Figure 1 denotes doctoral degree attainment for Latinas at 8%, indicating they trail behind women of other races and women of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In addition, as noted in Figure 2, when compared to the total U.S. population, they continue to lag behind at 7.8% (NCES, 2018). Figures 1 and 2 identify Latinas as being the lowest group to attain their terminal degrees with exception of two groups: 2 or more races and American Indian/Alaska Native (NCES, 2018).

The reasons Latinas fall behind others academically are multifactorial with a primary reason being family obligation. To fully understand their struggle, it is important to understand the significance that respect holds in the Latino culture (Carteret, 2011) and the allegiance that is given to family. In the Latino culture, family takes precedence. Taking time from family to pursue formal education is not always perceived as necessary and not always met with support. Parental approval is essential when making major life decisions (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004). Proceeding without parental consent is perceived as disrespectful but obtaining parental consent to divert family time to pursue higher education is not always granted.

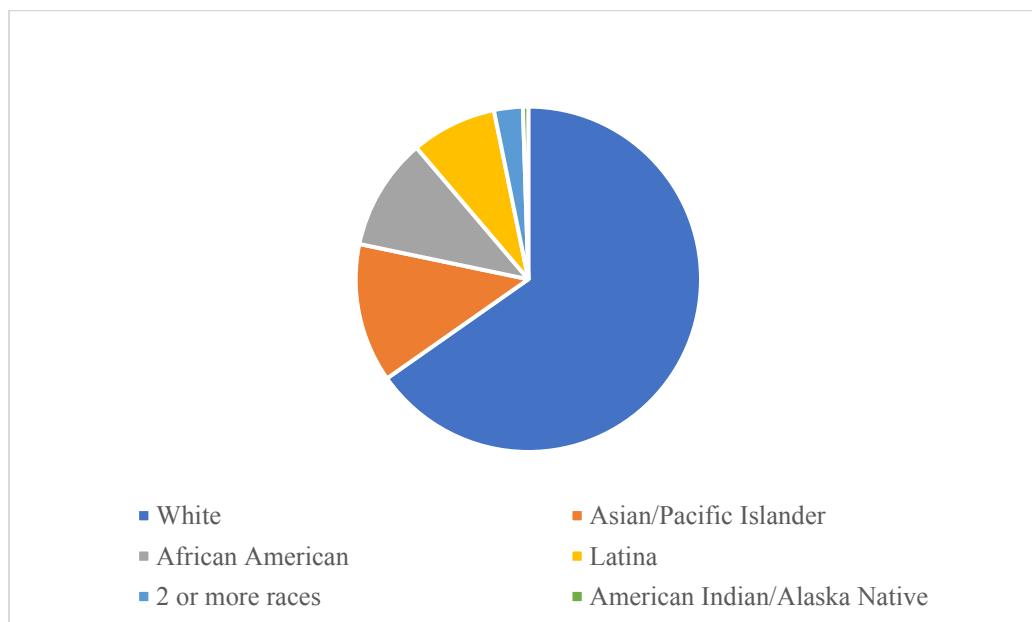


Figure 1: Terminal degree attainment: U.S. citizens and permanent female residents of all races and ethnicities 2016–2017. NCES (2018).

Latinas share similarities with women of color from other ethnicities, but family values prevalent in Latino culture place specific demands on Latinas that influence their degree attainment. Respect is held in high regard in Latino culture and is a value that is passed onto future generations from mothers to their children. Respect is exemplified by adhering to

obedience for authority with deference to authority being most important during times of change or variance from the norm (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010; Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). It is that cultural strong sense of respect for authority and family unity, combined with loyalty, that Latinas consider when making major decisions, such as when contemplating pursuing higher education.

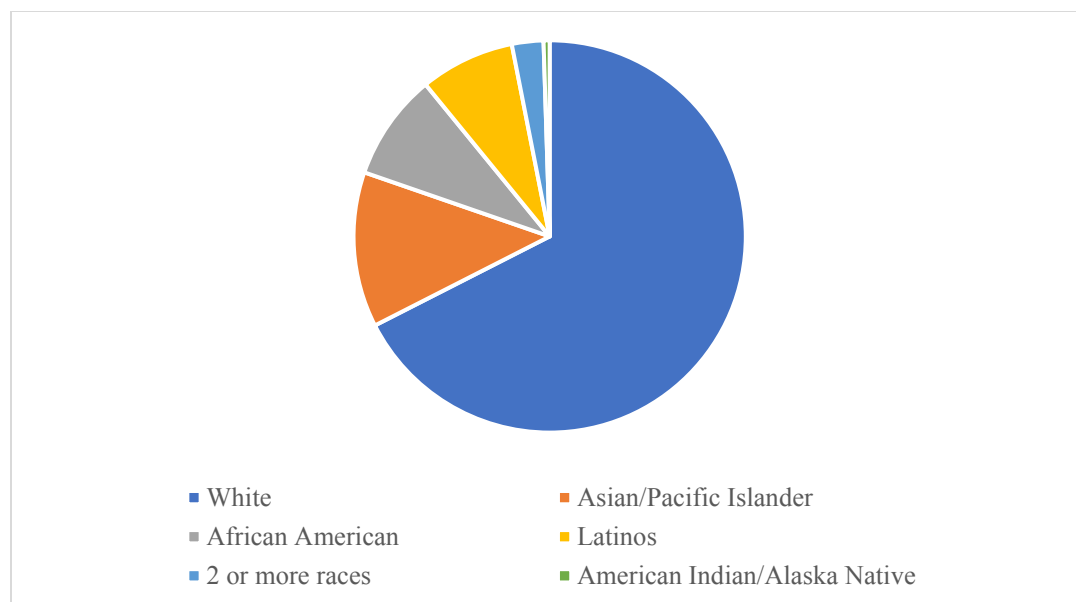


Figure 2: Terminal degree attainment: U.S. citizens and permanent residents of all races and ethnicities 2016–2017. NCES (2018).

Latinas are typically known as having a strong sense of familism in which they are committed to the well-being of family rather than individual interests (Sabogal et al., 1987; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994; Vega, 1995). However, changing family structure and values in the US has occurred for multiple reasons; primarily rapid growth and changes in racial and ethnic composition in the US (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Martin & Midgley, 2003). Personal changes from exposure to different external cultural practices leads to changes within the family as they adapt to new social expectations created from blending new changes with existing customs.

For Latinas whose priority is their family, leaving their families to pursue higher education means changing traditional customs and adopting a changing culture within their families creates emotional distress which they must reconcile. They learn to acquire a new skill set and transition into a new culture (Garcia, 2001). Changes bring about uneasiness and questioning as to the value that new cultural changes bring to their lives. The underlying, perhaps most important, questions are whether changes will support familism as they know it or have the opposite effect and erode family structure and promote a self-centered view focusing on individuality that changes the core of the family structure (Landale, Oropesa, & Bradatan, 2006).

Most of the Latinas in this study are older and from a generation that identifies with strong family ties. For individual reasons, the Latinas in this study recognized the challenge as they anticipated the value in pursuing their doctorate. Difficult changes arose as the domains of family and higher education overlapped. Apprehension developed as they co-existed in two different cultures with the expectation of successfully blending the two cultures into a new way of life. They believed their doctorate would positively impact them and their families and were determined to earn their degrees. Despite the challenges, they agreed it was the best decision. Their educational journey was arduous but the participants persisted as they anticipated the benefits of their education.

For the participants in this study, changing ingrained cultural values meant disrupting their customary ways; changes that often lead to guilt and feeling unsettled (Rendon, 1992). Traditional roles of machismo that support males as authoritarian heads of household and marianismo that portrays females as docile are usual and customary in the Latino culture. The strength and aptitude needed for Latinas to succeed in academia were in direct conflict with perceptions of acceptable Latina demeanor (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986).

The literature is rich in theoretical frameworks from prominent theorists who interpreted the female perspective from the male point of view (Gilligan, 1982, 1993). Much has been written about the progress Latinos are making in education but, to a lesser extent, of the educational advancement of Latinas. It is possible that the Latinas' roles and contributions have not been well documented (Anzaldua 1987, 1999; Castillo, 1995; Herrera-Sobek, 1993; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Lina Leavy, 2007). Female advocates have examined the disparity that exists between males and females regarding contributions that Latinas make (Anzaldua 1987, 1999; Castillo, 1995; Herrera-Sobek, 1993). Within the last few decades, it is evident that women are strengthening themselves and asserting their place in their homes and society, but are not as successful in higher education (Gandara, 2015; Krogstad, 2016; Santa Maria, 2018; Zambrano, 2004).

Education significantly impacts how individuals fare economically. Men in the workforce continue to earn higher wages than women. Without education, Latinas are at risk of living in poverty. As heads of household, they are in key positions to impact their own, as well as their families' well-being. In addition to monetary benefit, children of educated Latinas are predicted to have increasingly favorable outcomes. It is critical to provide a means to increase the presence of Latinas in education and to end the overrepresentation of Latinas in poverty (Gandara, 2015) and underrepresentation in higher education.

Low doctoral degree completion rates do not mirror the rapid growth of the Latina population. There is a need to understand what affects Latinas during their educational pursuit in order positively to influence future Latinas returning for higher education (Gandara, 2015; Santa Maria, 2018; Zambrano, 2004). This study attempts to foster understanding of factors that

facilitated the Latinas' education during their pursuit of education and causes that hindered or facilitated obtaining their terminal degrees.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore cultural and social influences and factors that contributed to degree attainment for nine south Texas Latinas.

Latinas' low academic achievement is evident when compared to women of other ethnicities and race (Gandara, 2015; Krogstad, 2016; Santa Maria, 2018; Zambrano, 2004). By listening to their personal stories and observing their expressions, I gained insight and an appreciation for their struggles and successes during their educational journey as viewed uniquely through the lens of the participants' perceptions. The purpose was to recognize factors that facilitated degree completion so that future Latinas considering pursuing their terminal degrees could benefit from past experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the purpose of this phenomenological study:

- Which influential factors contributed to the successful terminal degree attainment of nine high-achieving south Texas Latinas?
- What role did family play in supporting or hindering educational achievement?

Research Design

This study was conducted using qualitative phenomenological research. Qualitative research involves exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals give a particular experience or problem (Clark, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Rallis & Rossman, 2003) but is unique in that "the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted and... the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 5). The process is

consistent with Creswell's (2003, 2009) method of data collection in the participants' place of choice, followed by data "analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The purpose of qualitative studies is learning. The learner (researcher) is the "constructor of knowledge rather than the receiver" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 5). Data are collected by the researcher to explore the participants' behavior and unique interpretation of events, and the researcher, in turn, converts data through examination and understanding into material that becomes knowledge (Rallis & Rossman, 2003).

To appreciate the essence of the lived experience through the eyes of participants, a phenomenology approach is used for data interpretation. Phenomenology attempts to explain the lived experience of participants by collecting data that are pure and without researcher bias by way of prolonged encounters such as occurs during interviews and extensive exploration. The purpose is to construct meaning in its purest form from collected data to understand the meaning participants give their stories (Creswell, 2003).

Data collection conducted via interviewing was "grounded in the theoretical framework genre of phenomenology" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 190). Interviewing was best suited for this study because phenomenological interviews served to gather and to explore material from the participants' experiences, which facilitated a better understanding of the phenomenon being researched. In addition, phenomenological interviewing provided for reciprocal communication with the participants to understand fully the participants' experiential experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Bandura's social learning theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. Social learning theory incorporates attention, memory, and motivation while it postulates that

individuals learn from each other by observing, imitating, or modeling behavior (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1997). Bandura's social learning theory (1986, 1988, 2002, 2006) provided a credible lens through which the participants' data was analyzed.

While some participants in this study grew up in strict home environments that followed expected Latino cultural customs, that did not hold true for all participants in this study. Some were at times conflicted as they struggled between honoring cultural norms or breaking tradition.

Phenomenological research was the research method that allowed the participants to present and interpret their stories as they related to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Van Manen, 1990, 1997). That form of inquiry facilitated the process of helping the researcher to capture the heart of the participants' stories. A phenomenological method was an appropriate approach, because it allowed for an exploration and analyses of the participants' unique stories.

Significance of the Study

Lack of equal representation in higher education and doctoral degree completion continues to plague Latinas. Although the participants in this study were all doctoral degree recipients, terminal degree attainment is not the norm for all Latinas who continue to earn fewer degrees than the general population and women of all other races (NCES, 2018). The inference is that there is equal opportunity for all races and genders to pursue education and earn their degrees. While the end point may be similar for other groups, Latinas experience stressors specific to their cultural expectancies. All other things being equal does not negate the sense of responsibility that Latinas feel in overcoming familial and cultural expectations. That sense of obligation creates difficulty for Latinas pursuing educational higher education.

The literature emphasizes the low number of doctoral degrees conferred to Latinas (NCES, 2018). The low representation confirms the need to understand circumstances that add to

the Latinas' adversity and to identify elements that enhance the doctoral program experience for Latinas functioning in what is presently a predominantly male- and non-Latina-dominated environment.

Historical stories about Latinas being subservient, the lack of spousal support, and families who expect women to stay home to care for the family are abundant. For the Latinas in this study, some of those stories proved to be stereotypical and false. To a society that regards individuality and social mobility as values congruent with success, familism and family cohesiveness at the core of Latino culture appear to be disadvantageous, because they hinder individuality and social mobility. Familism at one point was perceived as a detriment to Latina advancement because it conflicted with social traits found in successful individuals (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994).

Latinas live in two worlds (Alvarez, 2011; Berry, 2005; Gil & Vazquez, 1996). Aside from their education, they exist in a cultural world that expects a behavior that is acceptable for Latinas. Changes made to best assist their academic undertaking often conflict with familial expectations. Family values can deter the educational process but can also facilitate degree attainment. Recent studies contradict the premise that familism deters Latina advancement but rather find that familism, support systems, and the unity within the Latino culture serve as protective rather than detrimental factors (Guendelman, 1995; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Suarez-McCrink, 2002; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Family structure changes are major considerations in the Latina culture in which familism is held in high regard. The impact that changes and supportive or detrimental factors make on Latinas pursuing higher education are essential to appreciate as individual changes often impact the family structure and, consequently, the level of support the doctoral student receives (Landale et al., 2006).

My decision to pursue this study strengthened when perusing the literature revealed the confliction that Latinas experience when deciding to pursue graduate school. It is important to research factors that promote and facilitate successful degree completion for future Latinas. This study has the capacity to give voice to the participants' stories and to reveal facilitating factors that made them successful while identifying potential pitfalls for them to avoid. Future Latinas in higher education can benefit from their predecessors' experiences by employing past practices that will help them continue their education and achieve equal representation in higher education and doctoral degree attainment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To support this qualitative research study by exploring influential factors that contributed to degree attainment for the participants, this chapter presents a review of literature that addresses matters specific to the educational pursuit of the Latinas in this study. The participants' interviews revealed relationships and formative experiences that had direct bearing on their success in attaining their degrees. Those experiences related to culture, education, gender role, identity development, and support systems that affected their negotiation between culture, identity, and academia. Their experiences influenced their decision to return to graduate school, their educational journey, and their success in earning their doctorates.

Traditional Latino Culture

Culture is “a set of assumptions and deep-level values concerning relationships among people and between people and their environment, shared by an identifiable group of people” (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004, p. 466). Cultural beliefs guide behaviors and traditions that in turn, lead to a value system that a group accepts and follows. In doing so, the value system helps members of the group to maintain longstanding customs that promote comfort and stability. The concept of culture as defined by Fejos was “the sum total of socially inherited characteristics of a human group that comprises everything which one generation can tell, convey, or hand down to the next” (Spector, 1991, p. 50). Anzaldua (1987) concurred that “culture forme[d] our beliefs” and was a learned and dynamic learning process that incorporated personal beliefs and attitudes that were unique to the individual yet were ethnic and gender specific (p. 16).

Culture is necessary to maintain a sense of identity, as well as to create a sense of unity within a group. It is by understanding one's own culture and how it relates to others that one can appreciate the uniqueness of individuals from different ethnic groups. Promoting understanding,

tolerance, and acceptance of those traits is the beginning of accepting diversity. “Although people do not always follow the norms of their culture, culture is particularly relevant to understanding norms and consequently the effectiveness of multicultural work groups” (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004, p. 467). Understanding one’s own culture can lead to self-affirmation. Ivers, Ivers, and Ivers (2008) posited that “our actions and attitudes are largely determined by the way we perceive ourselves and the world. It is based on the principle that different people will have different, often unquestioned, frames of reference, not all of which promote wellbeing” (p. 13).

Culture is best defined by the individual, because each person interprets culture differently and decides which culture has earned respect. How far apart self-perception and cultural influences are determines if self-perception will be affected negatively (Ivers et al., 2008). Culture is regarded as a concept that, in its broadest sense, affects groups and “influences how team members notice, interpret, and respond to events” (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004, p. 466). Culture impacts the Latina’s self-perception and how she responds to life-changing events.

As Latinos integrate into the United States host population, they presumptively become part of the “melting pot” but, in reality, remain a marginalized group (Anzaldua, 1987; Rendon, 1996). Within the Latino group are cultural differences that range from the preservation of traditional beliefs to the acceptance of change. Challenges develop as they adjust to the immeasurable influx of past and present cultural customs.

Specific culturally motivated gender beliefs influence Latinas. Cultural differences exist that differentiate the rearing of Latinas to the cultural upbringing of Latino men even within the Latino population. The basic Latino cultural assertions were or are grounded in a patriarchal society supporting male views. Men dominated while women were nurturing mothers taking care

of family (Anzaldua, 1990, 1999; Bailey, 1986; Castillo, 1995; Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976). “Although benefiting many people: children and men primarily, women’s mothering is a central and defining feature... Because of their child care responsibilities, women’s primary social location has primarily always been domestic” (Bailey, 1986, p. 44).

The interconnection of cultural influence and different ethnic and gender groups is a source of interest to researchers. Castillo, Anzaldua, and Herrera-Sobek are dynamic Latina women whose personal philosophies, while unique, display and share a sense of commonality that support and advocate for Latinas. Castillo (Poetry Foundation, n.d.), a Chicana/Mexican poet, essayist, editor, activist, and novelist; Anzaldua, a cultural theorist, poet, and feminist philosopher; and Herrera-Sobek, a professor, associate vice chancellor for Diversity Equity and Academic Policy, and Ethic Construction Theories and Theories on Aesthetic Activism, all enhance the understanding of Latinas (Keating, 2014; University of California Santa Barbara, n.d.). Although different, these women share a unified philosophy that allows their work and their voices to serve as channels of support for Latinas.

Castillo (1995) shared that Latinas were once considered disinterested in their own culture with no desire to write about their experiences. In reality, they are not only discouraged from writing but excluded from doing so because they are not perceived as having anything noteworthy to contribute. Castillo (1995) concluded,

People with Spanish accents (and Native people’s accents) are often treated as if they are simply not very smart, while on the other hand, people with European accents... are assumed by white people in the United States to be intellectually superior on the sheer basis of an accent. (p. 7)

It was simpler to think of Latinas as complacent and used to living accommodating roles. They were perceived as uninterested in self-actualization rather than acknowledge that women of color were oppressed. Latinas were thought inferior to men and Anglo women, and their

contributions outside of home and family were deemed insignificant (Anzaldua, 1990, 1999; Castillo, 1995; Firestone & Harris, 1994; Friedan, 1963). Anzaldua (1987), a self-identified “lesbian of color” and *mestiza*—the offspring of Spaniards and American Indians—identified with and advocated for multiple groups but primarily for the oppressed (p. 19). She believed Latinas were at a disadvantage, because they must not only live in, but master both worlds, the Mexican and the Anglo cultures, with the Anglo culture being dominant. Rendon (1996) acknowledged the stress felt by Latinas as they tried to exist between two cultures. She suggested that the need to detach themselves from their past in order to thrive in their new circumstances created a stressful environment. “My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 21). “In my culture, selfishness is condemned, especially in women; humility and selflessness, the absence of selfishness is considered a virtue” (p. 18).

Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time, *alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio. Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultaneamente* [soul between two worlds, three, four. I am buzzing my head with the contradictory. I am guided by all the voices that speak to me simultaneously]. (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 77)

Anzaldua’s viewpoints stemmed from observing the role that family members held within their individual families and how culture influenced those roles (Anzaldua, 1987; Bailey, 1986; Castillo, 1995; Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Herrera-Sobek, 1993).

Much of what the culture condemns focuses on kinship relationships. The welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual. The individual exists first as kin—as sister, as father, as padrino—and last as self. (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 18)

Scholar Herrera-Sobek’s (1993) assumption was that society considered the most important trait for the Latinas to possess was the understanding that they existed in a patriarchal society. Therefore, Herrera-Sobek concurred that society viewed women’s role as that of

passivity. Men's domineering traits, as well as Latinas' docility, were recognized and accepted as normal behavior within the Latino culture (Anzaldua, 1987; Castillo, 1995; Herrera-Sobek, 1993; Nadeau, 2011; Santa Maria, 2018). "Culture forms our beliefs... Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 16).

Customs are the linchpin of Latino culture. Behaviors exhibited and accepted as customary encompass the acceptance of machismo and marianismo by the Latino culture. Machismo depicts Latino men in a negative manner that describes them as overbearing and inflexible (Espada, 1996; Rodriguez, 1999). In keeping with their behavior as normal, men's behavior is not challenged in the position as heads of household and affords them to continue their behavior (Chavez Duenas, 2007).

An extension of machismo, gender identity for Latinas is the principle of marianismo, which centers on the Latinas' maternal instinct that endorses complete immersion in caring for their families. The more giving the Latinas, the higher level of marianismo that is revered in the Latino culture. Their ability effectively to manage home and family make them closer to the Virgin de Guadalupe who provides Latinas with strength and the ability to fulfil their duties as wives and mothers (Espino, 2016; Lam, McHale, & Updegraff, 2012; Santa Maria, 2018; Stevens, 1973b). Santa Maria (2018) suggested that marianismo strengthened women because of their conviction to their faith and to their family. Identified as the foundation of the Latino family, Latinas relied on their religious beliefs and strength they drew from their families to challenge deeply ingrained Latino beliefs and to change tradition as they embarked on their educational journey (Santa Maria, 2018).

Traditionally, Latinas were destined to marry, obey their spouse, and take care of home and family (Anzaldua, 1987; De Los Santos & Vega, 2008; Zambrano, 2004). Their most

important role was to be a wife and mother (Anzaldua, 1987; Bailey 1986; Quiñones Mayo & Resnick, 1996). They were subject to being chastised “for expecting their husband to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 16). However, that was a role they willingly accepted. “Thus, the devaluation of the mother must be perceived in terms of a widespread patriarchal ideology that devalues women” (Herrera-Sobek, 1993, p. 15). Research supports that while Latino men’s oppressive attitudes toward Latinas were not out of the ordinary, similar views were also held by non-Latinas regarding Latinas. Even more ironic is the fact that some Latinas, as well, upheld the belief that was entrenched in the time-honored culture, where women were submissive and “the absence of selfishness, is considered a virtue” (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 40). The concept of women’s passivity was a historically founded characteristic of the Latino culture. In the Latino family, *respeto* [respect] implies that individuals reserve feelings of high regard for particular individuals. “Respect is reserved for la abuela [grandmother], papa, el patron, those with power in the community” (Anzaldua, 2007, p. 40). In the Latino culture, to have goals and motivation that did not involve tending to family was considered unbecoming. Understanding the significance of values in Latino families is imperative to understanding behavior. Do Latino(a) researchers’ attitudes differ from non-Latino researchers when studying the Latino culture?

Non-Latinos have published a significant amount of information concerning the Latino culture. This raises the question, If Hispanics are a uniquely cohesive group with shared beliefs, how accurate are Latino views portrayed if solely interpreted by members outside the group such as Anglo Americans? Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) speculated that Latino experiences could not be understood by using theoretical models intended for non-Latino groups, because those theories did not provide comprehension of the Latinos’ history or background (Suarez-Orozco &

Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Latino tenets should be deliberated with consideration given to how Latinos view themselves (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). What legitimacy do interpretations provided by non-Latinos(as) have in increasing the understanding of the Latino culture? Should Latinos study only Latinos? The risk of researcher preconception exists due to that person's personal philosophies regarding culture expectations, acculturation and assimilation, and managing the task at hand based on the researcher's perception. That person's self-assurance and the ability to exert power over another individual emerged as traits closely correlated with researcher bias (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Research notes the need to understand Latino culture values to avoid researcher bias that can lead to detrimental circumstances (Carteret, 2011; Malott, 2009).

The concepts of ethnic culture and socialization continue to be researched. Culture and socialization were and continue to be used interchangeably in different studies, but there are marked differences. Culture is that which is learned, whereas socialization is spontaneous, involves daily events, and is what influences self-proclaimed identity and directs social interaction (Bartle, 2012). Culture, ethnicity, and gender, as well as acculturation and assimilation, all add to the socialization of Latinas, but their subtle differences each add a different component to Latinas' culture. This is quite evident if Latinas espouse cultural changes different from their basic and "traditional" beliefs.

Socialization. Similar to culture, socialization begins at birth and, much like culture, is the summation of learned cultural behaviors and rituals (Spector, 1991). Socialization is the transfer of social learning, with the end result being how learned experiences lead to personal change and how they assist individuals to function in society with others (Spector, 1991). The socialization of Latina women in this study is grounded in Bandura's social learning theory,

cognitive learning theory, and self-efficacy. Social learning theory proposes that learning new behaviors, values, and attitudes is achieved by observing others (Bandura, 1986). A more complex extension of social learning is the cognitive learning theory that further explains learning by observation yet reasoning to implement self-regulatory measures (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy, synonymous with confidence, is the third element in social learning that is derived from cognitive learning and is the source of motivation for individuals that enables them to approach goals, to succeed, and to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1986).

Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act. Whatever other factors may operate as motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce the desired results. (Bandura, 1986, p. 228)

Learned experiences influence behavior. Women who integrate into a new culture must survive in their new role. They are tasked with deciding how much of their personal cultural influence they will add into what is socially acquired. Theory supports that individuals conduct themselves based on what is learned by observation, example, and modeling (Bandura, 2002). Ormrod (1999) observed that learning was internalized and occurred even when the observers did not overtly demonstrate changes.

Most social learning theories focus on how external forces affect individuals and the individuals' response to external influences. Social learning gained from observing others is the result of self-reflection and learned behaviors. It is a powerful medium that affects people's drive toward goal achievement (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1988). Renzetti and Curran (2002) postulated that socialization was, rather, based on a reward system that rewarded appropriate behavior or chastised behavior not aligning with what was expected of females. Triandis (1994) further defined socialization as a gateway to acculturation that occurred when people adopted the prevalent culture into which they had transferred.

Acculturation and assimilation. “Early theories of acculturation emphasized a three-stage process of contact, conflict, and adaptation. More recent models consider the interplay between the person, his or her ethnic group, and larger societal issues within the majority culture” (Torres, 2011, p. 192). Acculturation and assimilation were once thought to have the same meaning (Hickey, 2015; Ovando & Combs, 2012). However, both terms are identified as key factors that facilitate the shaping of Latina culture. To equate acculturation to assimilation negates the complexity of the acculturation process. Acculturation and assimilation have been viewed as transition phases that expose the individual to the host culture, but it is the individual who elects which customs to adopt and which to discard. Berry (1980) suggested that as early as the 1980s, there was belief that integrating into the dominant culture did not mean that previous customs were abandoned.

But to what degree must acculturation and assimilation take place, and who decides when Latinas are accepted and can function in their new environment? The process of acculturation, although challenging, provides the support that leads to outcomes (Hickey, 2015). Ovando and Combs (2012) defined acculturation as the progression of learned behavior based on exposure to practices followed by a specific culture. Pike, Dawley, and Tomaney (2010), and Zhou and Lin (2016), added that acculturation was necessary for adaptation to new conditions and assimilation to facilitate upward movement of individuals within the new culture.

Latinas’ acculturation process requires learning and adapting to a new way of life by changing deep-seated beliefs and embracing different philosophies that at times, result in abandoning former values (Gilligan, 1982, 1993). Latinas were cast into two minority groups as Latinas and as women, with “the concept of ‘double jeopardy’...to capture the magnified experiences of individuals who endure two minority statuses at the same time” (Firestone &

Harris, 1994, p. 176). As they acculturate into the mainstream culture, there follows a change in traditional cultural values (Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, & Hiatt, 1995). Different groups contribute their cultural influences to society and gather at the crossing of culture and psychology (Berry, 2003, 2005). Phinney (2003) denotes that cultural changes include changes in traditions, while psychological acculturation refers to cerebral changes such as a group's philosophy or identity.

A study by Bell and Alcalay (1997) notes that acculturation has a positive effect on Latinas because "acculturation was also associated with information acquisition, confidence and abilities... confidence in their knowledge" (p. 340). Acculturation, therefore, is a form of coping that facilitates the transition of functioning in a new environment, requiring the acquisition of new ideas and attitudes. The drawback is that the acquisition often results in a separation from past traditions.

Like acculturation, assimilation leads to adaption, yet many accommodate without completely assimilating (Mehan & Villanueva, 1994). "The concept of assimilation has many contemporary uses. Some refer to both cultural and structural elements while others refer only to one of these" (Salinas Villarreal, 1981, p. 27). Assimilation is grounded in the belief that persons who adopt American culture will prosper as a result of integrating into the host society (Gordon, 1964). Once they are fully "Americanized," they no longer have ties to their native roots. Hickey (2015) proposed that "to truly assimilate means to let go of all that one was before a point in time and to become something or someone else" (p. 107). Once they become "Americanized," "an American identity, a staple of the assimilation discourse, ceases the assimilation process" (Chalupa, 2016, p. 51). Perhaps not all those seeking acceptance in a new culture wish to integrate fully and to lose ties with their previous culture. Assimilation may then come to have a

negative connotation if assimilation means sacrificing individuals' past and "at its worst is an act of violence; even at its best it is a negation of what previously existed" (Hickey, 2015, p. 107).

There exist cultural differences in the U.S. citizen Latinas that distinguish them from their non-Latina counterparts. Change is difficult but can be most distressing when change includes unlearning or changing that which has been learned from birth (Renzetti & Curran, 2002). If the assumption is correct that acculturation and assimilation must take place before individuals fully integrate into the new environment, what then are the long-term effects of acculturation and assimilation on Latinas?

Latinas are "a diverse group with many differences," but there are limitations in the assessment tools used to evaluate cultural points of reference in the Latino population (Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002, p. 144). The benchmark for evaluation has traditionally been defined by Anglo American interpretation (Gilligan, 1982). Because culture plays a significant part in the Latinas' role, it is, therefore, difficult to understand fully the Latinas' character if defined by a group that has no understanding of the culture from which the Latinas come. However, when Latinas attempt to voice the unfairness of their portrayal or obscurity, they are viewed as varying from the norm and are perceived as undergoing unjustified misgivings about themselves. Castillo (1999) noted,

White men (and white women) have always attempted this through their writing; and because they are members of dominant society, their search was considered representative of all, therefore universal. On the other hand, the search by those of us who come from marginalized cultures in the United States is categorized as sociological dilemma or a schizophrenic self-perception. (p. 8)

Acculturation and assimilation theory are helpful in understanding how cultural and social influences affect development and how development affects the value system individuals espouse as "normal" (Warner Schaie & Willis, 2002).

Education

Acculturation and assimilation are formative experiences that shape the Latinas' culture and, consequently, their perception of higher education and degree attainment. Latinas must face and make life changes that ultimately determine how they fare as women, wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and in society. Education has been identified as central to Latinas achieving a better life. To become and remain financially competitive and to have the same advantages as other individuals, completing college is key (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014). Gandara (2009) maintained that although Latinos have made great strides in higher education, they continue to struggle. Achieving a higher education presents challenges that for Latinos, particularly for Latinas, are reflective of their background and past experiences, as well as financial status. Title V, Part A, of the Higher Education Act of 1965, became a means for Latinas to enter the educational system by enabling the development of Hispanic-serving institutions to promote enhanced programs and permanence within the facilities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Latinas faced specific challenges, and it is noteworthy to consider factors that contributed to those challenges so as to understand fully cultural influences on the Latinas' educational journey. Education is the foundation for economic health. Educated individuals fare better than those without college degrees. College degrees provide Latinos with increased revenue that facilitates better living conditions. Aspirations for college and attaining a college degree exist, but Latinos have the lowest degree attainment rate in part due to poverty and barriers specific to the Latino culture (Gandara, 2015).

As demographic changes occurred, the number of students of color entering higher education increased (Alvarez, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2019; Ryu, 2010). Despite being one of the largest populations, the number of Latino students graduating high school and entering

college has traditionally been dismal, with about half of high school graduates not enrolling in college (Sepulveda, 2010). Ryan and Bauman (2016) reported, “Hispanics reported the lowest percentage at every level from high school graduate or more (67 percent) to advanced degrees (5 percent)” (p. 3). When compared to other non-Latino groups and women combined, Latinas earned the lowest number of graduate degrees (Gandara, 2015).

Overall, Latinos have historically been underrepresented in academia. From 2002 to 2014, the U.S. high school dropout rate decreased from 32% to 12% (Krogstad, 2016). However, between the years 2007 to 2012, Latino students attending college increased from 27% to 37%. Latino college enrollment is unpredictable. Shortly after the enrollment increase between 2007 and 2012, a steady decline in college enrollment became evident. Latino college enrollment was once again well below non-Latino students’ enrollment (Ogunwole, Drewery, & Rios-Vargas, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The decline in Latino college enrollment continued a downward spiral for the next 2 years, but enrollment has stabilized (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The total population 25 years and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 27.9%, with non-Latinos achieving 30.1% and Latinos a dismal 13%. Regarding graduate degrees, Latinos trailed at degree completion, with only 4% attaining graduate degrees when compared to non-Latinos who had an 11% success rate (Ogunwole et al., 2012). Research also indicates that Latinos were more likely to enroll in 2-year colleges than pursue 4-year university enrollment, but the majority failed to transition into 4-year universities (Krogstad, 2016).

Martinez (2005) speculated that culture, socialization, and education had been areas of interest that had been addressed but noted that little emphasis was placed on the individuality and value of Latinas in education. Research studies on Latina students in higher education continue

to study barriers, support systems, and familial influence to determine the consequences those factors have on postsecondary education (Nadeau, 2011).

In the United States, the Latino racial, ethnic, and gender composition has changed. “One in four female students in public schools across the nation is a Latina. Latinas live in every state and 17 states now have a kindergarten population that is at least 20 percent Latina” (Gandara, 2015, p. 7). Jackson (2013) predicted that the number of Latinas in the United States would increase to greater than 25% by 2050, with Latinas making up one fourth of students in U.S. classrooms, and the number is steadily rising (Krogstad, 2014b).

As Latina presence in the United States adds to the country’s diversity, it becomes even more important to understand Latinas’ role in society, and more importantly, the experiences they face as they pursue their education (Brown & Lopez, 2013; De Los Santos & Vega, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Multiple studies explored the characteristics and cultural effects of Latinas, evaluating the emotions that Latino parents and Latinas experienced as students left home to pursue higher education (Alexander et al., 2007; Gloria et al., 2005; González et al., 2004). Other researchers addressed the role that Latinas held within the family and the sense of family responsibility they felt (Sy, 2006; Sy & Brittian, 2008; Sy & Romero, 2008). These emotions are only part of the complex nature of Latinas. Although they remain committed to their families, studies confirm that degree completion for Latinas has increased. However, while women are closing the educational gap and an increasing number of women have attended college and attained advanced degrees, they continue to lag behind degree completion by non-Latinas (Gandara, 2015; Jackson, 2013; Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Issues hindering Latinas’ achievement of higher education are multifactorial but contingent with factors such as cultural

beliefs, socialization, support systems, and the financial means to fund their education (Valencia, 1989).

Education is the building block on which improved socioeconomic stability rests. In turn, improved socioeconomic status allows individuals the opportunity to pursue income-based goals that might not otherwise be an option. Rogers (2002) found that parents with higher education greatly influenced their daughters' education, as well as identified education to be the foundation for rewarding employment. With high-paying jobs recruiting degreed individuals, it is apparent that education significantly impacts how individuals fare economically and is a means of minorities pursuing and attaining a better way of life, the American Dream. In addition to financial security, the education of Latinas extends far beyond monetary stability. Studies show a parallel between improved educational outcomes for children of educated mothers.

A college education enables Latinas to secure employment with higher salaries that, in turn, enhances the quality of life and lowers the risk of poverty (Baum et al., 2013; Gandara, 2015). There is notable potential benefit to be gained from a higher education. As the Latina population continues to increase, the education of Latinas becomes critical (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Researching the Latinas' culture to understand outside factors that affect their educational journey as they seek higher education becomes essential as acculturation and assimilation bear a significant influence on Latinas and, consequently, their life decisions.

Gender Role

Much has been written about the socialization of students in higher education, but not much emphasis has been placed on gender role during the educational process (Austin, 2002; Mendoza, 2007; Sallee, 2011; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Researchers' meaning of gender roles has changed over time with previous definitions providing a platform onto which to build

present day meaning. It is, therefore, important to understand the Latinas' gender role to gain insight into how gender socialization shapes adaptation and to explore how adaptation relates to educational success (Sallee, 2011).

Historically, those who made rules for Latinas to follow were those in power. The power rested with men. That meant acceptable behavior for men included exhibiting a dominant presence, which was in direct conflict with expectations for women who were expected to be passive (Hofstede, 1986). Men, as well as other women, upheld those beliefs. Women pressured other women to follow suit (Anzaldua, 1999). It was not group or gender role anticipation but the lifelong conditioning of women to believe that their roles as homemakers sufficed (Castillo, 1995). The benchmarks for success as Latinas were once considered to have a successful marriage, to have a happy family, and to obey (Anzaldua, 1999). No thought was given as to what women wanted or what they desired, for they were possessions of men (Castillo, 1995; Herrera-Sobek, 1993). Education for Latinas was not an option; if women did think about pursuing formal education, they did not voice their wishes to do so. Consequently, it appeared that they were content with their lives (Anzaldua, 1999; Castillo, 1995).

Latinas' development is a composite of conduct learned because of exposure to past internal and external experiences, as well as gender role expectations. Gender denotes how an individual self identifies and is often based on outside cultural and social influences, whereas sex identification is based on a biological component. What is socially and culturally expected of Latinas may not necessarily be what women believes. Latinas process and react differently under similar circumstances. These factors influence how Latinas develop and is vital to understanding the women's identity development that ultimately influences the Latinas' decision-making. "When considering race, class, and gender together, it is important to understand that a minority

group may not see gender as salient or in the same way as women from the dominant group” (Torres, 2011, p. 198).

Identity Development

Education and gender have direct bearing on identity development, as both education and gender facilitate the formation of Latinas’ individual personality. Kroger (2000) viewed identity as an individual’s consistent self-perception that persisted over time. The merging of cultural identity into education entails the merging of two paradigms. Identity is a long-standing process based on social paradigms. The Latinas’ upbringing, race, exposure to social expectations, creed, and economic status are deeply embedded in cultural identity and influence the continuation of cultural values (Altugan, 2015).

Research indicates identity is a combination of multiple elements such as cultural background, ethnicity, gender role, social standing, and aptitude rather than one sole characteristic or ethnic group (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Helms, 1990a, 1990b; Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Phinney, 1993; Torres, 2003a; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Therefore, the inference is that women’s upbringing has direct impact on identity development. Kamenetsky (2013) added, “Identity development in women and girls is thus in a double bind: society expects females to develop a nurturing, caring disposition, yet these characteristics are valued less than an identity that is individuated from others” (p. 20).

Latinas will eventually reach a crossroads during which they make life decisions. Cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals reach the point in life during which they must choose to keep previous customs or accept new habits (McEwen, 2003). Identity theories can be instrumental in facilitating understanding the diversity of individuals (Torres, 2003a; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Identity development theories were initially considered ego development

theories as they provided a summary of life-long experiences and how, at different stages of people's life, those experiences provided a means of self-identity that set people apart from their peers (Kegan, 1982). Loevinger (1976) further added the ego development concept that contributed to the identity theory by exhibiting how life experiences affect people during their lifetime.

From early theoretical interpretations emerged three new viewpoints for identity theories: "the role of late adolescence, influence of historical and cultural aspects, and processes beyond the adolescent years" (Torres, 2011, p. 188). The first point focused on college students and the changes that occurred during late childhood. The second point referred to the different factions of identity, which are now known as social identity and are important to note because within society exists a hierarchy of groups with the dominant group, usually White and middle class, influencing lesser or minority groups (Torres, 2011; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). The third and final point denoted that identity should not be considered a direct process resulting in an end point but rather was a dynamic process that continued past youth and was in constant flux as past identities were explored. As people age, identity also changes (Torres, 2011). Life-changing experiences create an imbalance in an otherwise balanced life that leads to the beginning of change. It is not a breakdown of previous beliefs or culture but rather a rebuilding that leads to a sustained changed identity (Marcia, 2002).

Change can affect social identity as social identity develops from individuals' sense of belonging to a specific group with whom they identify and with whom they interact because they share commonalities (Reynolds, 2001). Social identity is a two-fold concept in that it refers not only to the feeling of belonging to a specific group but to difficulties encountered resultant of being part of that group (Wing & Rifkin, 2001).

Ethnic identity. It is important to recognize the importance of ethnic identity within the framework of Latina identity. Phinney (1993) noted ethnic identity theories focused on three major theories that spoke to social identity theory, acculturation and cultural conflict, and lastly, identity formation. The theory of ethnic identity was the first theoretical point and denoted that while the social identity theory might indicate a sense of belonging to a specific group was wanted, it was those in power and how that power was exerted that might lead to unpleasant feelings about the group and might be the determinants as to whether belonging to the group was wanted. The second theory, the theory of acculturation and conflict, emphasized that acculturation and cultural conflict focused on how minorities responded to those in power. Lastly, the third theory, identity formation, referred to the development of ethnic identity and changes that occurred based on time and the environment (Phinney, 1993).

Ethnic identity occurs when an individual identifies with a specific cultural population. It is the sum of qualities and beliefs of an individual that differentiates that person from another, making the individual unique, and is the stable force between internal and external forces (Bernal, Knight, Ocampo, Garza, & Cota, 1993; Kegan, 1982; Kroger, 2004). External forces that affect ethnic identity also stem from family or from philosophies either from the family or others. The balance between these influences and an external environment is what defines the person's identity (Kroger, 2004).

For example, when students in the university setting participate in extracurricular activities with which they believe they may identify, they are basing participation on presumptive beliefs (Torres et al., 2009). It may not be a suitable event that aligns with their beliefs. Torres (2011) observed the importance of determining who decided what was appropriate and what was an acceptable standard. Changes in the environment affect how

individuals fare within a system. Exploring the environment and questioning the status quo lead to further exploring new ideas regarding identity development. Identity helps to explain dynamics within different ethnic groups, and it is, therefore, essential to identify and understand identity development theories that serve as tools in understanding cultural identity.

Latino identity theory. The U.S. Latino population reached a record number of 59.9 million in 2018 and comprised 52% of the U.S. population growth between 2008 and 2018 (Flores, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2019). That makes it apparent that Latinos have significant presence in the US and warrant understanding of Latino identity and development as the population integrates into American culture.

Torres's model of Hispanic identity development emphasizes the importance of ethnic identity in the Latino culture. Torres, who conducted extensive research in Latino identity development, notes a significant difference between ethnic identity and acculturation. The central point identified by Torres was that acculturation developed from choices made by the individual in regard to adjustment to a different culture, typically choices about integration into the majority culture. Ethnic identity focused on preserving the original culture (Torres, 2003a). Both of those concepts played major roles in Latino identity development and, therefore, how Latinos integrated into mainstream society and into academia.

Torres's model of Hispanic identity development emphasizes the magnitude of understanding ethnic identity in Latinos as that identity is central to their coming to terms with their own identity within the host culture. As Latinos navigate academia, they are exposed to new environments with changes often inconsistent with Latino culture. It is imperative that identity development be studied and include issues specific to the Latino population. The relationship between Latino culture and how Latinos assimilate experiences in new environments

is key to understanding Latino identity. Appreciating Latino identity and how exposure to experiences affect Latino identity play major roles in Latino education.

Latino identity formation helps with understanding how persons develop a feeling of belonging that continues after developing a sense of sameness (Kroger, 2000), whereas identity involves the individual's views about themselves, how those views fit in with society, and how the person expresses the relationship between self and society (Torres et al., 2009). Identity development is a dynamic process that changes depending on the environment or experience that is present. It is important for educators to understand Latino cultural influences. Although Latino population growth has increased, Latino identity development in students has only begun to be recognized (Torres et al., 2012).

Understanding acculturation is crucial to understanding Latina identity development (Felix-Ortiz de la Garza, Newcomb, & Myers, 1995; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Torres, 1999). Multiple researchers and scholars have used acculturation as the foundation to research that proposed specific characteristics could be a means of grouping Latinas into categories focusing on culture specific to their ethnicity (Felix-Ortiz de la Garza et al., 1995; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Torres, 1999). Five identified stages that have direct bearing on Latina identity are causal, cognitive, consequences, working through, and successful resolution (Ruiz, 1990). While these five stages share similar conceptions with other ethnic-based theories, Torres and Delgado-Romero (2008) suggested that Latinas transitioned through stages of negative feelings associated with being Latina to embrace their culture and ethnicity. Examples of what affected Latino identity theory included living in a bicultural environment and adapting to living in two separate cultures that consisted of Latinos having Latino roots and the host American culture having White/American roots, and adjustment

to a bicultural environment, all of which are applicable to the women in this study (Torres & Delgado-Romero, 2008).

How Latinas embrace culture and ethnicity as they progress into forming Latina identity depends on past experiences such as how Latinas were reared, family status in the United States, their social standing, and past college experience. These experiences are integrated and determine how ethnicity is either accepted or rejected (Torres, 2011). How Latinas categorize themselves and those around them depends on “gender and race” (Kamenetsky, 2013, p. 30), with the driving force being social standing and power within the group (Sears, Fu, Henry, & Bui, 2003). “The more dissonance there is between the environment in which Latinos grew up ...the more likely cultural conflicts will play a role in their self-identification” (Torres, 2011, p. 195). Racism is a significant factor that will ultimately affect most Latinas, as most at some point in their lives will experience discrimination. It is the lesson(s) learned from that experience that forms their identity (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Although research provides multiple examples of factors affecting the development of the Latinas’ identity, family remains the single most influential element.

Women’s identity development. Women’s identity has been interpreted from various perspectives. Belenky et al. (1986) identified voice, self, and mind as perspectives rather than stages in the formation of women’s identity. Perspectives, however, were not similar in all women as they were dependent on cultural influences (Goldberger, 1996).

No one knows precisely how identities are forged, but it is safe to say that identities are not invented: an identity would seem to be arrived at by the way in which the person faces and uses his [sic] experiences. (Baldwin, 1985, p. 549)

Josselson (1996) believed women’s identity to be a competition between opposing forces of proficiency versus equilibrium. Downing and Roush (1985) considered female development

through a feminist lens that led to the development of a five-step developmental model that followed women's development from a state of submissive consent of imposed gender role to a gender role shift advocating feminist ideals and an equal society (Bargad & Hyde, 1991). Ossana, Helms, and Leonard (1992) posed that women's identity was created through a process that acknowledged contribution from all women but differed in that not all women equally supported feminist beliefs. Casanova (2003) suggested that culture was all inclusive of that which made the individual, such as milestones, but to be considered "culture," needed to be shared, which placed the focus on the group but was problematic because it negated individuality. Leyva (2011) posited that Latinas struggled with gender identity and role expectation as they simultaneously managed family, student, and parental roles. The effort to juggle multiple roles created tension that developed from dealing with expectations exclusive to ethnicity and each specific role (Classic and Contemporary Theories of Latino Identity Development, 2013; Ortiz, 2000).

Lastly, Gilbert and Rader (2002) acknowledged there were identity models that classified women's identity solely based on female, male, or intersex anatomy rather than the many complex external issues that influenced gender identity. Initially, Latina identity development studies focused on and were written by non-Latinas, which brought into question theories of individuals in groups not fitting that specific populace. The growth of the Latino population and consequently Latinas, who are the focus of this study, prompted the need for expanding the scope of cultural studies focusing on women's identity, discussions, and traditions.

Latina identity development. Although women's identity development had been largely explained through different lenses, Latinas' development was grounded in the Latina culture. Their development was a consequence of exposure to past internal and external experiences, as

well as gender role expectations. Interestingly, what was socially and culturally expected of Latinas may not necessarily be what they believed or wanted. Latinas process and react differently under similar circumstances. These factors influenced how they developed and is vital to understanding the women's identity development that ultimately influenced the Latinas' decision-making. Understanding the Latinas' identity development is crucial to understanding future cultural changes that differ within the ethnic group or from the typical Western culture. To understand the uniqueness of individual populations is to begin to understand diversity.

Latinas have traditionally lived in biased environments that promote disempowerment and foster the idea that Latinas are a separate and different group not rising to leadership positions as rapidly as other individuals, despite the rapid, record population growth both in the United States and in classrooms (Cross, 1995; Josselson, 1987; Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007; Phinney, 1993). This brings to the forefront the importance of preparing college students and Latinas for key positions by identifying factors affecting Latinas in academia.

Identity development theorists such as Vasti Torres center on success of minority students in higher education and how identity development of Latino students can influence their college experience. Her work researched ethnic identity and acculturation among Latino college students. Torres's first study, *Hispanic Identity Development Theory* in 1999 was followed by her longitudinal study in 2003. In the *Hispanic Identity Development Theory* of 1999, Torres identified two key categories that were major factors in the first 2 years of college education. The first major finding included different modalities that contributed to the acquisition of identity such as familial influence, upbringing, background, age group and generation, and self-identification of social status. Findings in the longitudinal study noted the significance of

recognizing and understanding the meaning of racism to be an important part of Latino development. While the longitudinal study shared similarities with other ethnic identity theories, that study was holistic in that it incorporated cognitive, self, and relationships. Torres suggested that acculturation was about decisions that were made regarding society, while ethnic identity looked to maintain the original culture (Torres, 2003a).

Belenky et al. (1986) described how women's self-image was directly affected by the need for acceptance and recognition of intelligence to feel valuable in a scholarly environment as identified by self-esteem measurement scores. Interestingly, despite research equating acceptance with success, some individuals might have attained identity achievement in specific sections of their lives but not others (Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982; Marcia, 1980). To prepare Latinas for academia, recognizing how early identity formation affected their self-image and how that affected their overall identity development was vital. To understand and cultivate leadership processes of Latinas, it was essential to realize how culture and gender affected their leadership ability (Onorato, 2010). Their empowerment had become evident, and scholars were beginning to observe their control (Guzman & Valdivia 2004; Montas-Hunter, 2012). More importantly, America was taking note as Latinas were being "recognized as a major force in American society" (Patrick, 2009, p. 2).

Social change. The Chicano movement from the 1950s to the 1970s served as a platform for Latino baby boomers to promote change (Gutierrez, 2011). Although rudimentary, social change was set into motion. As with any new endeavor, resources were limited and uncertain as Latinas sorted through their own mixed emotions. Their deep-seated values were resultant of cultural and familial "norms" to which they had been exposed and with which they had lived most of their lives. Change would require aligning their modern views with previous ideals.

Women of color were left to redefine gender role expectations (Torres, 2003a). As Latinas developed their sense of identity, the paradigm slowly began to shift. Efforts such as the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, as well as the Chicano movement from the 1950s to the 1970s, served as platforms for Latino baby boomers to promote change (Gutierrez, 2011). They were not assimilating into the new society but rather were forming a

new ethnic identity neither Mexican nor Mexican American but as Chicanos... to become a little nation within the larger nation... explored the use of various paths to power in pursuit of justice and equality for their group. The five major paths they took to acquire power were revolt, litigation, protest, electoral work, and building coalitions/alliances... Chicano generation used and institutionalized these paths to power to a greater extent even compared to this day. (Gutierrez, 2011, p. 26)

Latinas began to have choices; among the most significant was the choice for formal education. Traditionally, women were the silent partners, but historical events provided an opportunity for Latinas to emerge. The Chicano movement, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the women's movement of the 1970s provided opportunities for all women, but particularly for women of color, to pursue their goals (Brush, 2001; Gutierrez, 2011; Hersch & Shinall, 2015). That power behind change "[wa]s at least in part a result of increases in Latina/o population over the past few decades, a trend that [wa]s expected to continue well into the future" (Patrick, 2009, p. 2). Change provided multiple opportunities for Latinas but was particularly significant when pursuing education (Martin, 2007).

Education offered financial opportunity and a better way of life, as well as a sense of self-worth, whereas before, the thought of women leaving their family to pursue other options was culturally, as well as socially, unacceptable. Families not being the sole focal point for Latinas often evoked feelings of guilt and self-doubt in Latinas as to whether they were "doing the right thing." "Latina images are often marginalized as they are simultaneously read racially in relation to whiteness and are understood in relation to dominant constructions of femininity"

(Patrick, 2009, pp. 151–152). Latina literature had long been ignored. Women researching literature regarding their own life experiences found that they had to rely on information as written and interpreted by non-Latinas, but Castillo (1995) wrote,

[D]espite presumption of white writers, their perspectives are not wholly applicable to us... the ignorance of white dominant society about our ways, struggles in society, history, and culture is not an innocent and passive ignorance, it is a systemic and determined ignorance. We exist in the void, *en ausencia*, and surface rarely, usually stereotype. (p. 5)

Views and interpretations represented by non-Latinas with little or no intrinsic knowledge of the experiences and spirit of the Latinas were of little value. The unwritten implication was that since Hispanic women did not write about themselves, then it must be because they had “...nothing of interest, much less of value to contribute...to the world at large... there is an insinuation that we are incapable of it” (Castillo, 1995, p. 4). Sufficient literature is not written about or by Latinas. Women have long been accepting of this misrepresentation, which is consistent with the *marianismo* ideal that supports women not receiving their due recognition.

Machismo and marianismo. Culture and tradition have been noted significantly to influence behavior. Initially the meaning of machismo was positive and defined as “a man’s responsibility to protect, defend, and provide for his family” (Morales, 1996, p. 274).

The Spanish word machismo comes from the word macho ...Macho comes from the word mati which means “to know,” or “to be known”... in the Aztec culture a macho man was one who was respected and well known by others for his courage, discipline, strength, and justice. The characteristics of a macho man according to the Aztec concept of machismo were all positive. However, in present-day Latino culture the concept of machismo has been described as having both positive and negative aspects. (Chavez Duenas, 2007, pp. 20–21)

Implications associated with the term machismo characterized men as unyielding and overbearing (Rodriguez, 1999). Furthermore, it was understood no one was to question the

Latino as he was the family's decision maker and had the final say, and he free to do as he wished (Chavez Duenas, 2007). Hence, machismo depicts Latinos in a negative manner (Espada, 1996).

An extension of machismo is marianismo, the feminine side in machismo tradition. Marianismo equates the behavior of the "ideal Latina" as being saint-like by mirroring the Virgin Mary's, Our Lady of Guadalupe's, purity and nobility (Stevens, 1973a, 1973b). Stevens (1973b) defined marianismo as that "which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men" (p. 91). Because they were of superior morality and spiritual belief, women were then able to accept men's shortcomings despite how difficult they might be (Comas-Diaz, 1987; Falicov, 1998; Gil & Vazquez, 1996; Kulis, Marsiglia, & Nagoshi, 2010; Stevens, 1973a, 1973b). Lara-Cantu (1989) spoke to the notion of martyrdom in women that interpreted marianismo as the ability of women to endure even the most trying of times. Latinas were to be kind, subservient, dedicated to their spouse and family, virginal until marriage and were expected to prepare future generations to maintain the same persona and cultural standards (Comas-Diaz, 1987; Falicov, 1998; Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Mirande & Enriquez, 1979; Stevens, 1973a, 1973b; Vera, 1998). Marianismo in previous generations was considered a common cultural value in the Latino culture that often influenced and shaped the Latinas' culture. Most Latinas experienced at some point a degree of machismo and marianismo (Ramos-McKay, Comas-Dias, & Rivera, 1988).

For Latinas from older generations, marianismo confined them because of entrenched beliefs. Blea (1992) understood elder Latinas' quandary when it came to their role modeling for future Latinas. If they endorsed and promoted previous notions of expected subservience in their daughters, they could not model nor support forward thinking behavior that empowered women.

Upholding past tradition meant stifling their daughters' ability to change a past that endorsed following tradition. As society changed and as Latinas observed other women being liberated from marianismo and past mores that hampered equality, they arrived at the Maria paradox that enabled them to appreciate that upholding marianismo was not conducive to their empowerment. Latinas recognized they were faced with decisions that would change their future; they began to change. They changed tradition, increased self-esteem, became empowered, and their demeanor and life choices reflected their liberation (Frieze & McHugh, 1998).

Support Systems

Support systems are individuals who usually provide individuals with support as the need arises. Support may present itself in various forms but is essential (Nora & Crisp, 2008). As with any new undertaking, there are changes and challenges. Hispanic women contemplating embarking on a college career are no different. When it comes to adapting to change, they must adequately prepare. This is particularly true of first-generation Latina students who come from various backgrounds and whose families are unfamiliar with the academic process. Latinas are left to learn the process on their own and to develop their ability to seek college benefits and resources available to them as they become familiar with their new environment (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). These students typically do not have parents who have attended college. Students are unfamiliar with academia and must learn to understand the new system in addition to blending their culture with their new surroundings (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007).

The academic setting is a culture in and of itself, and students need support as they transition into the new culture (Makarova & Birman, 2015). Studies confirm that students with support systems adjust more easily than students who do not have a source of support (Nora,

Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris & Cardoza, 2003). Rodriguez et al.'s (2003) study compared the benefit of support from family to friends. The study showed that friend support was perceived to be slightly more beneficial than family support. In addition, friend support provided more protection against emotional angst. Securing help from others is important for students pursuing higher education but is critical for those students who have responsibilities such as families or employment while pursuing their education (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Miller, 2007). Adjustment is not always related to students becoming accustomed to academia. Equally stressful are the choices students make regarding home and family versus continuing their education.

Students have different reasons and expectations for pursuing a college degree. To achieve success, students should be aware of multiple factors that affect their academic pursuit. The academic institution, social factors impacting academic success, and the level of support have great bearing on Latinas' educational journey (Epstein et al., 2002). First generation college students may not be aware of the demands.

Once college students are in the process of getting their degrees, students discover what is needed to facilitate degree attainment, and hindrances develop. They must manage the level of stress associated with pursuing their education, sacrifices they will make, support systems they will need, and how going to college will affect their overall lifestyle. Often, they fail to recognize just how much time will be spent studying and attending classes. These demands result in emotional stress and guilt over having to spend time away from their friends and families.

Research indicates that family and friends facilitate the progress of students pursuing their education (Nora et al., 1996; Oronato & Musoba, 2015). Stress comes in many forms and, although emotional and financial stress may create difficulty, family support seems to be the

most beneficial to students. Students who do not have a solid support system are at risk for poor adjustment or even dropping out of school (Rodriguez et al., 2003). Students, particularly married students with children, experience the stress of balancing academia, home, and family, as well as unplanned events that occur in daily life. Women fulfilling multiple conflicting roles experience the weariness and strain of managing home, family, relationships, and school, which can lead to overwhelming stress (Oronato & Musoba, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2003).

Learning, as posited by Bandura, occurs from observing, imitating, or modeling others' behavior (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1997). Latinas as leaders and sources of support provide positive role modeling that encourages other women working toward degree attainment. Role models lead by example and reinforce the value of learning from successful individuals as they provide women with the ability to cultivate their skills and abilities to the fullest (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon 2007; Northouse, 2007).

The theory that emerged from the literature review that addressed the connection between cultural influence, as well as the influence of relationships, and support systems, was Bandura's social learning theory. The theory asserts that people learn by observation of others' behavior and adopt and internalize that behavior (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1988, 1997). Miller and Dollard (1941) were the pioneer theorists in first noting social learning theory and proposed that learned behavior stems from observation but was dependent on the observer being motivated to learn. Since 1962, Bandura has added to the theory of social learning (Vondrasek, 2015). Bandura's social learning theory asserts that knowledge is gained from direct observation, but his theory further proposes that learning also occurs by secondary intention, meaning that learning follows association of behaviors originally learned by modeling (Bandura, 1988). An example of secondary learning is a daughter watching successes achieved by her mother's experiences.

Secondary social learning is likely when there is a relationship between the individuals, such as with a mother and daughter relationship and when the mother is the central support system. The daughter inherits self-confidence to succeed, which is consistent with Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy provides a sense of empowerment that affects how individuals gain self-motivation to adopt a behavior conducive to achieving success (Bandura, 1989).

Bandura's observational learning theory stresses that parents are in key positions to model behavior and support that students observe and emulate (Bandura, 1986; Keller, 1999). Matz (2001) further added that the first role model was the immediate family (Bandura, 1986; Keller, 1999). Family sets the precedence for future relationships with others (Matz, 2001). Once support systems are in place for potential students, college enrollment follows, and probability of successful degree attainment is increased.

Mother as primary supporter. Mothers were identified as the key figure who provided the most support for the Latinas in this study. Mothers are considered "a leader and role model of perseverance and self-sacrifice" (Oronato & Musoba, 2015, p. 27), whose support makes "possible the creation of women leaders with a high level of emotional intelligence, allowing them to become transforming leaders and culture change-agents" (Westrup, 2007, p. 16).

Latino families are a historically cohesive group and are consequently family oriented with family representing the foundation of their identity. Referred to as *familismo* by Forehand and Kotchick (1996), respect for family is important, but the family unit is valued above all. Latinos adopt the "it takes a village" approach to supporting and protecting each other and rely extensively on each other for support.

Latino families have long been perceived as patriarchal, but research reveals the mothers to be the pillar of strength in Latino families (Oronato & Musoba, 2015). Dynamics in families

have changed, and families now consist of extended, blended, single parent, or same sex parents that often place women as the head of household. Women as leaders and support systems are dependent on culture, socialization, social standing, finances, and family dynamics (Arminio et al., 2000; Eagly, 2007; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000).

Family influence. Walker, Shenker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2010) identified the importance of parental involvement in assisting students through their educational journey. They noted the benefits of parents who took an interest in students' education, the method in which they were involved, and the extent to which parental support served as the main reason students continued to pursue their education. Parents' perception of formal education and support of that education in conjunction with the academic institutions' support of the students have bearing on the students' scholastic success. Students with strong support systems and parental involvement are more likely to appreciate their education to a greater degree (Garcia, 2015).

Although evidence indicates that emotional and financial support are vital to Latino students' academic success, findings suggest that the struggle between familial obligations and school demands can contribute significantly to a difficult academic adjustment and, ultimately, to the inability to retain students (Rodriguez et al., 2003).

If there is no support system, pressure from their continued efforts can lead to stress acceleration to the point that they opt to discontinue their education. Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005, 2006) note that the relationships that students develop are predictors of student success. It is, therefore, important to identify support systems that will help students reach their goals. While family is central to Latinas, Latinas who pursue an education are as equally committed to degree completion as they are to family responsibility. Thus, support systems are critical to Latinas' educational success.

Education is a gateway to economic stability, which, in turn, provides family stability and a means to provide family with options that might not otherwise be available. A major benefit of terminal degree completion is the ability to secure professional positions in better paying jobs because some employers prefer to hire degreed individuals. While a college degree is not necessary for employment, those without a degree may be low-wage, entry level employees with little if no potential for advancement. They may be employed, but without a college degree, may be exposed to financial hardships that predispose them to inability to financially care for their families and to pursue formal education due to inability to finance their education (Ross & Bateman, 2019).

Culture and family dynamics are changing, which affects the culture within the Latinas' immediate family circle. An increasing number of Latinas are becoming single parents and sole providers. It is vital that they have the same career opportunities as men and non-Latinas. The potential influence that a large population such as the Latinos/as have is inconceivable. To attain the American Dream implies success, but to be physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially successful, Latinas must be afforded equal opportunity to prosper and achieve success through their own work to have the opportunity for a better quality of life. Education is imperative if education is the foundation for a prosperous future (Krogstad, 2016; Sepulveda, 2010).

Latinas pursuing higher education may come from a low socioeconomic status and face economic challenges when matriculating the doctoral program. College admission does not guarantee financial assistance. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated policy change known as affirmative action that protected minorities from discrimination by implementing laws that offered discrimination protection regardless of race, color, or creed (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). President Lyndon B. Johnson went one step further by including affirmative action when

recruiting college students. President Johnson's intent for affirmative action was meant to provide equal opportunity for all (American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity, n.d.). The affirmative action plan that was intended to eliminate discrimination for women and minorities and to encourage increased college enrollment was banned when the Fifth Circuit Court deemed ethnicity to be an inappropriate determinant for college admission. Affirmative action was banned and exchanged for an admission guarantee policy ensuring college admission for those students graduating in the top 10% of their high school class. Shortly after the change was instituted, there was a notable drop in Latino enrollment (Harris & Tienda, 2012).

Harris and Tienda (2012) contended that admission guarantee was not as advantageous to Latinos as was affirmative action. While admission guarantee was touted as the answer to racial discrimination and a means of schools attracting top students to their campuses, the 10% law soon was the center of debate and deemed unfair to those students not within the top 10% of their graduating class (Harris & Tienda, 2012; Long & Tienda, 2008). Statistics showed that affirmative action would benefit minorities not only in pursuing their education but when entering the workforce, which is the main reason people pursue an education (Harris & Tienda, 2012).

Affirmative Action provided equal opportunity to an underrepresented part of society. Cultural differences were sometimes perceived as "abnormal" or deficient when compared to existing standards. The cultural deficit theory suggests a deficiency exists when students differ academically from what is "normal" by blaming the students' poor performance on cultural differences. Proponents of the cultural deficit theory placed the responsibility for lack of academic success directly on the students and their families rather than on the educational system. Students were then held to rigid standards that aimed at teaching areas of deficit rather

than focusing on the students' strengths. Some schools shifted concentration to improving deficits even if it meant cutting into other areas of the curriculum. Latinas from economically challenged families were not afforded the same opportunity as those students not facing those barriers (Harris & Tienda, 2012; Long & Tienda, 2008).

Faced with inequality and challenges that would not improve without proactive intervention, the Latinas' role started to change as it became evident that Latinas had little or no voice (Castillo, 1995). Research indicates that factors such as poverty often associated with Latinos affected their confidence level and, consequently, their ability to develop an active voice (Quiroz, 1997). Elizondo (1988), a priest from San Antonio, Texas, offered evidence of existing racial divide and inequities that presented a struggle for Latinos to excel in an otherwise racist environment. He recognized the need for the Latino voice because, in doing so, it provided Latinos hope for the future (Elizondo, 1988). Racial and ethnic tensions, as well as marginalization, all affected and contributed to the stifling of the Latino(a) voice (Sauceda, 1999). Why was the Latino voice, particularly the Latinas' voice, important? Belenky et al. (1986) proposed that voice was vital because "the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were inextricably intertwined" and, therefore, essential for a well-balanced existence (p. 18). Voice is a powerful medium. The presence or lack of expression determines self and self-identity (Oldacre, 2016).

One attribute unique to the human experience and yet unifying for humanity is the ability to speak, to have a voice representative of who we are and recognizable by its quality. Voice, the ability to verbalize the longings and wishes of the heart, is intricately tied to our understanding of human identity. It is an identifying feature of our Self and our identity as both a human and an individual. Our voice is uniquely our own, and therefore, when it is taken, silenced, or ignored, our identity cannot be clearly represented or expressed; we are not clearly representing our Self. (Oldacre, 2016, p. 3)

For Latinas, particularly mothers, having voice is crucial, because although Latino families were traditionally male-controlled, mothers were regarded as the key member in the Latino culture and, despite patriarchal influence, were deemed the bond that held the family together (Anzaldua, 1987; Castillo, 1995; Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Herrera-Sobek, 1993). As the central figure in the Latino culture, mothers are complex, multifaceted individuals who cannot be explained, labeled, or clustered into a specific group, although mainstream America has long tried to force assimilation as a tradeoff for their success (Anzaldua, 1999; Castillo, 1995). That was such an astounding responsibility for women who warranted so little recognition or respect as women without the traditional coveted designations of wife and mother. Gilligan (1993) affirmed that “to have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act” (p. xvi).

Through their writings, Anzaldua (1999), Castillo (1995), and Herrera-Sobek (1993) added to the women’s movement of the 1970s that started women’s self-reflection and wondering if there were areas of their lives left unexplored. Latinas were beginning to realize facets of their lives needed exploration. Seeking those answers would not necessarily take the place of their family but would, rather, augment their roles as wives and mothers if they were first fulfilled as women. Castillo (1995) added,

[W]e are not asserting our perspective as the only legitimate one, that it is superior to or should replace, repress, or censure others. What we are conscious of is that our reality is vastly different from that of the dominant culture and by measure worth considering. (p. 5)

Anzaldua (1987, 1990, 1999), Castillo (1995, 1999), and Herrera-Sobek (1993) encouraged women to look at life outside of their socially and culturally imposed boundaries but recognized the transition was not an uncomplicated process. “Chicana criticism and theory are still in a state

of flux looking for a theoretical, critical framework that is our own, whatever the perspective” (Rebolledo, 1996, p. 208). Anzaldua’s (1987), Castillo’s (1995), and Herrera-Sobek’s (1993) shared socialization philosophy appreciated that to Latinas, family plays the most significant role in their socialization. Family is a “source of pride and strength” (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2009, p. 22). Nonetheless, women’s changing philosophies were consistent with paradigm shifting and accepting uncertainty rather than continuing to follow tradition.

While history pointed to the subservience of Latinas, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the women’s movement of the 1970s brought to the forefront the limitations that women faced. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 brought about changes that positively affected minorities in multiple areas but, most importantly, positive changes for Latinas by making illegal the act of discrimination based on color, race, and gender. At last, minority women had opportunities that were once not an option (Brush, 2001; Hersch & Shinall, 2015).

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 focused on eliminating discrimination based on color, race, and gender as it applied to the workplace as it stood, it made little impact in minority women’s personal lives (Brush 2001; Cisneros & Galán, 2016; Hersch & Shinall, 2015). Brush (2001) argued that “studies have problematized gender consciousness among women of color, questioning the very relevance of feminism to their lives... race is, or becomes, recognized as a basis of domination or privilege” (p. 171). Latinas experienced discrimination and stereotypes because of their gender and ethnicity (Brush, 2001). Latinas continued to have to prove themselves as they attempted to change ingrained attitudes. “As women participated in those movements and joined public discourse, the reevaluation of the woman’s role became a part of the discourse of the movements” (Derbyshire, 1997, p. 66).

Silva (2002) asserted that the women's movement prompted women's research on gender role repression, but research concentrated on White European American women and failed to address minority women. Similarly, the civil rights movement addressed racism but, again, gender role conflict was not at the forefront. Both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the women's movement of the 1970s initiated change that was the beginning of reform and progress at a pivotal time of cultural transition (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). A change in society and tradition led to women's introspection. Latinas began to question and to examine their roles within their families and, on a larger scale, within society.

As they examined their roles, they gained knowledge, strength, and confidence, which were the beginning of an awakening. Their emerging knowledge shaped a new way of thinking and an emotional journey onto which they cautiously embarked. Change was exciting and encouraged individuality and empowerment. Still, it was an intimidating and daunting undertaking, eliciting feelings of uncertainty between maintaining the Latino culture and adapting to the dominant culture (Torres, 2003a, 2003b).

For Latinas, this was a huge leap of faith. They had to learn to trust in themselves and their own abilities as they did not know if they would have support systems as they moved forward in experiencing a new realm of their lives. Their lives had previously revolved around pleasing others and holding onto tradition; change meant embracing new ideas, as well as lifestyle and cultural changes. Assertion was intimidating. As Latina mothers, they were held in high regard and that offered protection and a safety net that, once removed, exposed their vulnerability (Herrera-Sobek, 1993). Personal growth meant stepping out of their comfort zone and changing the individuals they once were (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1999).

Summary

Studies in the past stressed the importance of understanding Latina history and familial influence, but society is changing. Chapter two reviewed theory and research related to the culture of Latinas. It focused on cultural factors influencing the Latina experience in pursuing higher education, highlighting culture, education, gender role, identity development, and support systems, as well as progress they made in those capacities.

Education is essential in providing a better way of life and facilitating the achievement of the American Dream. It is important to note that Latinos trail all ethnicities in the United States when it comes to college degree attainment (Ogunwole et al., 2012; Sepulveda, 2010). Multiple factors were cited as reasons for the dismal rate of degree completion for Latinas, which led researchers to study Latinos in education. Studies show that factors, such as Latino value conflict with community values, family conflict, and personal values with the host culture, affect degree completion (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Gloria et al., 2005; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Olivas, 1997; Torres, 2003b; Yosso, 2005; Zalaquett, 2005). Latinas' experiences in education are often based on more than academics, which can extend for perception based on color of skin, gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity (Diaz, 2014). These domains are all interconnected with culturally specific emotional ties, which can affect the educational journey. Some researchers refer to this relationship as "intersectionality," and it represents an "Intersectional analyses... in understanding how people identify whether as individuals, families or other social groups" (Mahler, Chaudhuri, & Patil, 2015, p. 100) and is "...an analytic tool for understanding complexity in the world, diversity of people, and individual experiences" (Jingzhou, 2017, p. 125). Intersectionality allows others to view the many characteristics of individuals.

Understanding the complexities of individuals allows for understanding ethnic customs that are identifiable in specific ethnicities. Latino practices, such as machismo, are ethnic concepts that have both positive and negative meanings. The practices are powerful influences that affect Latino families and are major sources of stress as Latinas contemplate the direction their lives are to take (Chavez Duenas, 2007; Morales, 1996). Latinas struggle to overcome traditional influences that, at one time, were considered norms but have to be changed as they acquire new customs that are supportive of their new roles as empowered Latinas. Gender role and identity development, in addition to family influence, were researched and identified as areas in which Latinas required support to achieve educational attainment when pursuing their doctoral degrees.

Support is a powerful and important concept in the Latino culture that defines the interconnectedness within the family. The mother being the most esteemed and respected figure in the Latino family is the key figure in the traditionally patriarchal family (Guajardo, 2013). Although a great source of support, the mother's views have disadvantages and stresses when they do not coincide socially, ethically, culturally, financially, or educationally with the rest of the family. When pursuing education, role conflict developed as Latinas left their families to pursue higher education. Studies examining gender role conflict led to disparities as it related to Latinas' "sense of self and what the socio-historical context sanctions as an acceptable or desirable self" (Kamenetsky, 2013, p. 46). It becomes increasingly vital to research and identify experiences that affect their educational journey to determine what is needed to increase the understanding of factors that positively influence the Latinas' success in graduate school.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore influential factors that contributed to successful doctoral degree attainment for nine south Texas Latinas and the role that family played in supporting or hindering their education. The essence of this study was the participants' personal interpretation of experiences that contributed to their successful achievement of their doctoral degrees. This research study was framed using a qualitative phenomenological approach for data collection and interpretation with the intent of understanding the meaning that individuals gave a particular experience or problem (Clark, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Participants in this phenomenological study provided recollections of experiences and the significance of those experiences as they related to higher education. The provision of participants' personal insights regarding their experiences was consistent with Creswell's (2003, 2009) rationale for use of a phenomenological method of data collection.

Phenomenological research is unique in that "the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted and... the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 5). A key point is that a phenomenological research approach allows the researcher to learn the essence of the participants' lived experience through the eyes of the participants. Phenomenology allows the researcher to capture the meaning that individuals place on events and experiences and attempts to explain the participants' lived experience by collecting data that is pure and without researcher bias by way of encounters such as occur during interviews and extensive exploration. In addition, phenomenological interviewing provides for reciprocal communication with the participants to understand fully the participants'

experience (Van Manen, 1990). The purpose is to capture the heart of the participants' stories (Creswell, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's social learning theory served as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study for analyzing participant stories to identify factors that contributed to the successful terminal degree attainment of nine high-achieving south Texas Latinas and to explore the families' role in supporting or hindering their educational. Bandura's social learning theory (1986, 1988, 2002, 2006) was used to frame the findings in this study that focused on factors that affected educational achievement. Social learning theory posits that individuals learn from each other by observing, imitating, or modeling behavior (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1997).

The doctoral program required acquiring different learning modalities, one of which was close attention to detail. The Latinas in this study observed and adopted behaviors and practices that smoothed the way as they progressed through higher education. Much of what they learned was by emulating what others did that made them successful. When exploring experiences that occurred during the educational journey of the participants in this study, it is important to identify factors that strengthened their tenacity to continue their education. Bandura (1997) specifically perceived self-efficacy, which he defined as individuals' belief to excel despite the experience, as a powerful medium that affected people's drive toward goal achievement. Theory supports that individuals conduct themselves based on what is learned by observation, example, and modeling (Bandura, 1986, 1988, 1989).

Population Selection Criteria

The participants in this study were selected via purposeful and snowball sampling. I began my search for potential participants by doing an online screening of area universities and

colleges for names of professors with Latino surnames. I was not able to log in as faculty or student, so I called different facilities for assistance. I specifically focused on universities that had doctoral programs but also contacted colleges to inquire about Latina instructors with doctoral degrees. I was given names by some facilities, but the most valuable information was provided by staff at a local university who provided me with a copy of the campus directory that listed campus professors' names, titles, campus location, department, office room numbers, telephone numbers, and e-mails. Of those listed names, I chose female professors with Hispanic surnames in hopes that they were Latinas who would meet the required criteria.

I made initial telephone calls to faculty on the list. That was a difficult process because the professors' schedules did not always coincide with the times the calls were made to them. I left several voice messages in which I provided my contact information, gave a brief explanation of the purpose of my call, and asked for a return call at their earliest convenience if they were interested in participating in the study. I received eight responses, but after discussing the study, only three agreed to participate. All with whom I spoke either knew someone who might be willing to participate in the study or were willing to discuss the project with others who they thought might be interested. Some of the professors provided me with contact information so that I could contact them directly. I followed up with the Latinas to whom I was referred. Although some heard about the study from their peers, most had questions consistent with time management due to their time constraints. The main question centered on how long the interview would take as they had busy schedules.

Purposeful and snowball samplings were the best methods of recruitment for this study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants who will lead to better

understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Snowball sampling starts after the study begins by asking participants to recommend others for the study (Creswell, 2009).

Participants for this phenomenological study were women who were mothers, spouses, daughters, siblings, educators, or employees. In addition, to be selected for this phenomenological qualitative study, participants had to meet the following criteria:

- (a) Be of Hispanic descent,
- (b) Be female,
- (c) Live in south Texas,
- (d) Have attained their terminal degree, and
- (e) Be willing to participate voluntarily in this study.

Participant Demographics

As noted in Table 1, the participants shared similarities. All nine Latinas had earned their doctorates. One of the most significant differentiating characteristics was all participants except Linda and Olga, were first generation college graduates.

Research Methods

This study utilized several methods of data collection including interviews, field notes, direct observation, audio recording, and e-mail communication with participants as they related their stories. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed setting. Field notes and audio recordings were done during the interviews, and direct observation was noted throughout the entire interviewing process. Direct observation was important as body language, intonation, smiles, and, at times, tears revealed physical signs that supported their stories. Audio recording was important for referencing and confirming that transcriptions accurately

represented the participants' intended meaning. E-mail was used to schedule meeting times and to clarify questions that participants or I had in regard to the field notes and interviewing process.

Table 1

Participant Demographics Data

Name	Birthplace	College Generation	Marital Status at Time of Interview	Degree	Terminal Degree
Emma	USA	First generation	Married	Doctor of Philosophy	PhD
Celia	USA	First generation	Single	Doctor of Philosophy	PhD
Linda	Germany	Second generation	Married	Doctor of Philosophy, Culture, Literacy, and Language	PhD
Lydia	USA	First generation	Married	Doctor of Education	EdD
Olga	USA	Second generation	Married	Doctor of Education	EdD
Marta	USA	First generation	Married	Health Management and Policy	PhD
Blanca	USA	First generation	Married	Doctor of Philosophy	PhD
Mora	Mexico	First generation	Married	Doctor of Business Administration	DBA
Sara	USA	First generation	Widow	Doctor of Education	EdD

Protection of Human Subjects

I, as the researcher, formally requested approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of the Incarnate Word prior to communicating with participants to conduct this research study. The planned number of participants in this study was a maximum of 10. Potential participants were given a comprehensive letter that thoroughly described the intent of the study.

Initial contact with proposed participants was made by telephone and e-mail to determine interest in participation and was followed by a detailed informed consent letter. The letter provided an explanation of the following elements:

- (a) The investigator
- (b) Purpose of the study
- (c) Requirements for study participation, and
- (d) A consent form to be signed by the participants acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study

Participants were advised prior to any data collection that their involvement in this study was strictly voluntary. The guidelines for the protection of subjects and information obtained from all participants in the process of this study were followed. Prior to engaging in this study, all potential participants were provided the opportunity to understand the purpose of the study and to ask questions. Participants acknowledged their understanding and acceptance of the terms by voluntarily signing and returning the consent forms.

Participants' anonymity was respected and protected. Although critical to connect identifying information to the correct participants and to the participants' interview material to ensure accuracy, it was essential to maintain participant confidentiality. I kept the interviews and

any identifying data in a locked filing cabinet and gave all participants a pseudonym to protect their identity. I deleted their names from any identifiable information and gave codes to any computerized records.

Data Collection

Effective techniques used in this phenomenological research study included interviewing and observing, as well as reviewing of field notes, memos, and e-mails (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Interviews focused on the educational process but asked general questions pertaining to the lived experience as the participants pursued higher education. The participants' perceptions of factors that affected their journeys became a significant part of their stories.

As the channel of data collection, I was aware of self-bias and the potential for misrepresentation based on self-interest. To accurately and objectively present data from the participants' stories, it was imperative that as the researcher, I remained cognizant of personal bias and the effect personal preconceptions could have on data. To help eliminate partiality, while interviewing, I made side notes denoting comments or reactions during the interviews. In addition, participants reviewed my results to ensure my writing reflected their interpretations of their stories and beliefs. I used a pre-screening questionnaire, interviews, observations as forms of triangulation to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002). Member checks ensured accuracy and dependability and were essential to interpreting and presenting information as the participants intended. If some of the interview material presented difficulty in understanding meaning, questions were asked of participants and recorded as side notes to the original interview data. Clarifications by participants were noted and resubmitted to participants for verification and approval. Judicious researchers "interrogate emerging findings, asking, 'what else might explain this'" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 116).

Each interview took approximately 45–60 minutes to complete, was recorded, and the privacy of participants was strictly upheld. Unlimited time was allowed at the end of each session for questions and answers. Due to the participants' scheduling needs, it took a period of 4 months to complete the process of interviewing of all participants. Transcribing and reviewing the interviews for accuracy and verification of the participants' meaning was a tedious and labor-intensive process. It entailed a process cycle of repeated data analyses and returning to the interview data multiple times to extract the true meaning the participants gave to each of the topics addressed. It was my intent to gain information from the interview material that added to the existing body of knowledge regarding experiences that facilitated or hampered the successful doctoral degree completion for the Latinas in this study.

As the interviews unfolded and the participants recalled their experiences, they noted what most influenced their degree completion. It became evident that several factors had direct bearing on their educational pursuit. In their responses, the Latinas in this study elaborated on their stories and noted individuals and relationships that enabled them to remain focused on academia but also recalled those that made their journey difficult. From the participant responses to the research questions emerged topics that evolved that included identified factors and experiences that either facilitated or hindered their doctoral process.

Data Analyses

This study was framed using a qualitative phenomenological research approach for data collection and interpretation that involved exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals gave a particular experience or problem (Clark, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Participants in this phenomenological qualitative study provided past recollections, as well as present experiences, and their points of view as they related to their

experiences (Creswell, 2003). The provision of participants' personal insight in regard to their experiences was consistent with Creswell's (2003, 2009) rationale for use of a phenomenological method of data collection. In phenomenological research, "the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted and... the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world" and allows the researcher to learn the essence of the participants' lived experience through the participants' lens (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 5). Phenomenological interviewing allows for communication with participants to understand fully the participants' experiential experience (Van Manen, 1990). The purpose is to create meaning from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2003). It differs from other research methods because "it does not aim to explicate meanings to specific cultures...social groups...historical periods...mental types...or personal life history...rather to explicate meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (Van Manen, 1997, p. 11). Because phenomenology focuses on exploring the lived experience of a select few and relies heavily on interviews, the management of large quantities of data becomes a critical component of the qualitative phenomenological study (Rallis & Rossman, 2003).

A qualitative data analysis format was used to interpret information gathered from participant interviews. Marshall and Rossman (1999) surmised qualitative data analysis as

the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. It is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear process; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. (p. 150)

The process of data analyses began with the participant interviews during which I asked open-ended questions so as to get the Latinas' interpretation and elicit elaboration of their stories. I carefully listened to the participants as I observed their expressions, intonation, and body language and wrote field notes and memos during the interviews. To ensure accuracy in remembering their information, I recorded their interviews.

The worth of a study is dependent on the validity and veracity of its content. Prior to transcribing their interviews, I gathered all field notations that I had made during the interviews that would assist in conveying the meaning the participants gave to their stories. It was essential to the validity of the study to triangulate and examine different data sources to support the data that would later emerge as major themes for this study (Creswell, 2003).

Transcribing their recorded interviews required careful attention to documenting their words exactly as they had stated them. I listened to the interviews several times to check for any missing information and areas needing clarity, the recordings were then transcribed. The transcriptions were returned to the participants for member checking; they reviewed and approved the transcribed material to ensure transcription accuracy. Once the transcriptions were approved, it was followed by my total immersion into the data. I then began reading and re-reading the transcribed material to become familiar with the data and to identify areas requiring further inquiry, thus beginning the critical thinking process (Creswell, 2003; Rallis & Rossman, 2003).

Following Creswell's (2003) recommendations of reading the transcribed interviews several times, I then reviewed the transcriptions repetitively to look for commonalities in the participants' stories. I closely examined the data by continuing to re-examine not only the transcription but to listening to their recorded interview voices multiple times to actively listen to their words, inflections, pauses, intonation changes to get sense of the participants' meaning. I made notes about my thoughts, ideas, or question I may have had. I allowed ample time for giving full concentration to the data. Once I read the transcriptions, I learned that the transcripts required many more readings and at different times of the day and with the appropriate mindset

to fully understand and honor the participants' meaning. It was critical to have an open mind as their stories were read and their voices repetitively heard to keep from inferring meaning.

I started data organization by identifying similarities using line-by-line coding that analyzed data thematically and helped to answer the research questions (Charmaz, 2006). Line by line coding allowed for review and data probing, repeat data analysis, isolated the meaning participants gave their statements, and allowed themes to emerge. The method was a timely, yet crucial part of the process. The data was revisited multiple times to give voice to the participants' stories based on their interpretation. Data analyses was done by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts as a line-by-line coding process was used for data analyses following recommendations of establishing categories, interpreting data, and establishing patterns (Creswell, 2003).

The actual coding process entailed organizing data into smaller, specific segments of meaning. I used highlighters and different color pencils to highlight key words and phrases, made side notes, used sticky pads, concept maps, cut and pasted data onto sections onto butcher paper taped to the wall, placed cut strips of paper containing potential codes with similar codes in different zip lock labeled bags to facilitate organization when categorizing data. I recreated the coding process multiple times to ensure the meanings were given to what the participants were saying. I made notes in the margins to help develop data categories. I reviewed codes and noted recurring themes, language, terms, and beliefs. I reviewed and revised codes and combined them into themes. From the groupings of smaller subsets developed major theme; themes that were the collective voice from the participants' stories.

After multiple repeat analysis of the data I began to see and "hear" the same things repeatedly from the participants' information. No new information surfaced. That process

produced patterns and themes that emerged. I classified and interpreted the data that generated emerging categories, common themes, and subthemes that arose from closely analyzing the data from each interview and transcript. That final step led to a deeper understanding of the data to organize the information into categories or “themes” based on similarity as defined and expressed by the participants.

Researcher as Interviewer

I am Latina, hold a master’s degree in nursing, and certification in family practice as a family nurse practitioner. I am employed full time in private group practice as a family nurse practitioner while concurrently completing my PhD. I have over 3 decades of experience in health care. I have been married over 40 years and am the mother of two grown children, a son and a daughter, and grandmother to four grandchildren. I am fortunate in that my children are both college graduates and both married spouses who respect their individuality, advocate for education, and foster the value of education in my grandchildren.

For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed the challenge in learning and had treasured formal education. As the offspring of parents who considered formal education unimportant and a luxury not fostered in Latinas, pursuing an education was a challenging and often traumatic experience. Born to a Mexican-citizen father who returned to Mexico after fathering six children, and a 14-year-old mother who was barely more than a child herself, basic survival was all that was met on a daily basis. Long-term goals and aspirations were not topics of discussion in my home, and even less important was a discussion of the value of an education. My home was transitory as we were homeless, and “home” was whatever vacant building we found in which to live until we were discovered and evicted. That made attending school even more difficult. Attending to the most basic needs was the most for which one could hope.

The eldest of six children, I recalled the envy I felt as I watched other children play, go to school, and bask in the love and security of their home and parents as they were free to experience the wonderment and carefree feeling of being children. They seemed to have had everything for which I longed: childhood, innocence, love, security, the experience of being children, and the opportunity to socialize, learn, and experience formal education because they were able to attend school. In contrast, my responsibilities included acting as substitute mother to five children including an infant, toddlers, and preschoolers; working in the fields; and dreaming of what might have been. I was told that my caring for home and children made me a “good girl.” I was fulfilling their perceptions and, as I later discovered, society’s expectations of what made a Hispanic female valuable. The problem was that no one asked me what I wanted to do. My hopes and dreams were irrelevant.

I wanted to be valued as a person and now recognize the need to belong, so I fulfilled others’ expectations of what made an individual a “good” person. Underneath it all was my secret desire to attend school and to attain a formal education. I learned early in life that I had a gift for learning and memorization. My home never had books or educational material, so reading was a challenge. Much emphasis was placed on my housekeeping and childcare responsibilities. School attendance waned as I was infrequently in the classroom due to my home responsibilities.

So few and far between was my school attendance that I, along with my siblings, was removed from my mother’s and stepfather’s custody and, while I was in the fifth grade, became a ward of the state of Texas. I lived in foster care for 2 years with a very caring widowed lady and her daughter who loved children and were who I consider my “family.” Foster care was a temporary place, and I was sent to live in a state children’s home while in middle school. God’s

plan is not always clear, and blind faith is often difficult. However, I truly believe that there is a silver lining to every dark cloud and that everything happens for a reason.

Despite adversity; verbal, mental, and physical abuse at the hands of family; being reared in non-nurturing environments such as foster homes in which I lived with strangers; and later sent to a state children's home, becoming a ward of the state was the best thing that could have happened. It was the start of a new beginning, of the education that I wanted. I could not have been happier.

I met the man of my dreams in middle school. I graduated high school, and we were married in 1974. I had made it; was that not what a Latina did? I had lived up to what, at the time, I thought was the ultimate goal. I had the good fortune of marrying a supportive man who believed in me, my ability to make sound decisions, and most importantly, wanted to know what I wanted. During one of our conversations, he asked what I wanted to do most in life. I told him of my dream to attend college. He said that the sky was the limit and, if I wanted to go to college, he would support my decision in any and every way possible. True to his word, that was the beginning of my educational journey and, despite health setbacks, an experience that I have never regretted. The person most responsible for helping me to achieve my dream was my husband, and I was so fortunate to have met and married him.

Culture and socialization were elements that initially hindered my ability to pursue an education as a young child, but it was formal education that influenced and provided an understanding of the role that culture and socialization play for Latinas in the process of realizing that education. Many Latinas before and after me have and will encounter similar sociocultural "norms" and expectations that may present barriers for them in attaining higher education. It is

important to explore the lived experiences of Latinas in pursuing higher education so that future generations may benefit from research.

I, as researcher of this study, am a Latina and native Texan who is living the experience of pursuing a higher education. The similarities that connect me to the participants may also be viewed as a limitation, since I have experienced similar concerns as those of the participants. The role of the researcher is to build a trusting relationship with participants yet “ensure freedom and integrity” by allowing freedom of expression from participants (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 147). As the researcher, I was careful to actively listen, document, and clarify their interpretations and demeanor. I avoided asking leading questions to keep from influencing the participants’ responses when asking them to clarify any comments that were unclear or could have been misinterpreted. I asked open ended questions and questions that encouraged the participants to further elaborate on their responses.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The rigor in this phenomenological study was entrusted to the following strategies:

- (a) Member check: Transcriptions were returned to participants for their review, but three chose not to review the transcriptions. One participant stated she did not have time to review the material. A second participant stated she did not need to do so because she was confident that the transcription was correct because she knew the interview was recorded and had seen me take notes during the interview as I sought to clarify information that could have been misconstrued. One participant accepted the transcript and returned it unchanged without indicating there was a transcription or clarity error. I attempted to call and e-mailed but was unable to make contact. I accepted that since she had taken the time to return the unchanged transcript to me via

mail, she had no changes to make. I later learned that she had moved to Austin, Texas.

- (b) Researcher bias clarification: Being Latina and having been through the master's degree program, I had preconceived notions and biases of what Latinas might encounter as they sought to earn their degrees. Total focus and analyses were done by continuing to return to the data to extract and understand the true meaning participants gave to the stories they shared rather than interpose my feelings.

Studies specifically focusing on the educational journey of Latinas have been published, but reports specifically about south Texas Latina experiences that facilitated their degree attainment are limited. South Texas was the locality chosen for this study because of proximity. Living in the same geographic area would make meeting with the participants easier for the initial interviews. In addition, it would provide easier access to confer with the participants should a follow-up, face-to-face meeting be necessary. Lastly, south Texas is predominantly Hispanic and rich in Latino culture. As noted in Figure 3, the total Texas population is comprised of Hispanic 37%, White 47%, African American 11%, and all other races and ethnicities 4%, whereas the total south Texas population consists of Hispanic 67%, White 28%, African American 4%, and all others 2% (South Texas Regional Overview, n.d.). Exploring the experiences leading to successful degree achievement of Latinas in a geographic region heavily populated by Hispanics might produce a better understanding of positive Latino influences that show south Texas Latinas that higher education is achievable.

In this study, research of factors contributing to the experiences and, consequently, the success of the nine Latina participants provided the groundwork for the findings that developed from their stories. South Texas is predominantly Latino (Ramirez, Thompson, & Vela, 2013).

Future Latinas seeking higher education in this geographic area can be prepared for experiences particular to Latinas that may facilitate their earning their degrees.

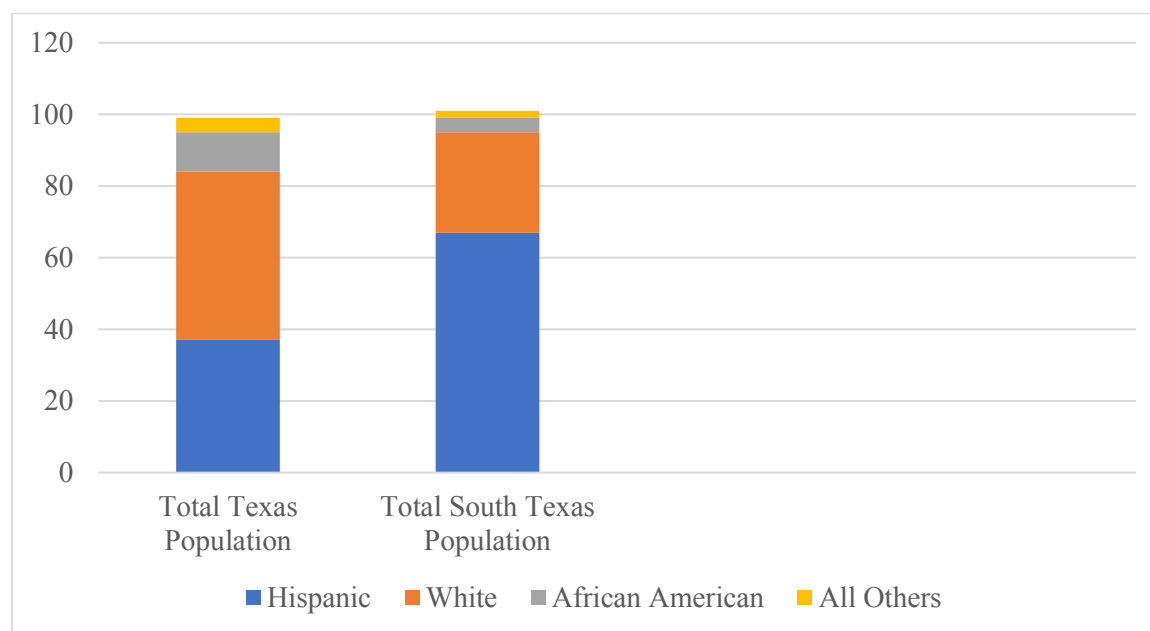


Figure 3: Texas population overview. South Texas Regional Overview (n.d.).

Chapter 4: Findings

The intent of this study was to identify factors that contributed to the successful terminal degree attainment of nine high-achieving south Texas Latinas and to explore the families' role in supporting or hindering their educational achievement. Culture, ethnic identity, gender, race, and support systems were of interest in this study as they continued their education.

The following research questions framed the contents of this study:

- Which influential factors contributed to the successful terminal degree attainment of nine high-achieving south Texas Latinas?
- What role did family play in supporting or hindering educational achievement?

By listening to their personal stories and observing their expressions, I gained insight and appreciation of their educational journey as viewed uniquely through the participants' lens. The Latinas' stories described formative experiences that left lasting impressions on them (Worthman, 2014). Their stories confirmed shaping experiences that affected their educational journey and, eventually, their personal and academic identity. The participants used those experiences as resourceful catalysts that enabled them successfully to attain their terminal degrees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of nine south Texas Latinas to reveal factors that influenced their continuation of their academic pursuit. The events the Latinas in this study experienced served as a foundation for that. Gaining insight into positive and negative influences that affected their educational journey and how they overcame barriers and used positive experiences as a means to continue their studies may be beneficial to other Latinas faced with the same issues.

Analyses and Interviews

The women in this study all maintained full-time employment as they completed the doctoral program and continued full-time employment at the time of their interviews. Their careers in education, health care, and business held high levels of responsibility and obligation aside from their commitment to their studies. Their stories and experiences, told in their own words, added to the rich descriptions that were noted as they worked to manage home, family, education, and their careers.

Seven of the nine participants in this study were born in the United States. The exceptions were Linda who was born in Germany and Mora who was born in Mexico. All the participants were bilingual and fluent in both English and Spanish with the exception of Linda, who was trilingual and spoke fluent English, Spanish, and Dutch.

Participant Profiles

Emma, a first-generation college graduate, was born in the United States, reared in a two-parent home, married, and a professor at a university teaching an ethics course. She described herself as headstrong, yet sensitive, but proud that she was a college graduate working at a university. She also said her father was a laborer, and she saw how hard he worked. She felt that, although there was “no shame in working with your hands,” she preferred to work “smarter,” and that was why her mother always wanted her to get her education. She looked away and avoided eye contact as she quietly shared that support can come from “unexpected sources.” Her parents were nurturing from a familial perspective, but when it came to education, their support took a different approach. It was Emma’s mother who “pushed education,” but she felt her father “didn’t care one way or the other.” For Emma, it was only a matter of time before she went to college; there was never a question. She recalled how strained her relationship was with her

father and how little support she received from him. She later learned that the support she needed and wanted from her father was always there yet went unrecognized as a source of support.

My father was not there most of the time and was not supportive of my education. He was more interested in his work, and his work kept him away from home much of the time. When he was home, he came in, ate, and went to bed. He was too busy with his own life to let mine affect his schedule. As I graduated high school and pursued a college degree, once again, he was not there. I wished he had been proud of my accomplishment, but he did not even attend my graduation when I completed my doctoral program. He gave no reason, just did not show up. I found out later after he died how much of a support system both of my parents really were... It was by his working two jobs and providing for the family so that I could become who I am. My biggest regret in life is not being able to tell him how much I appreciated that and to have been able to know and feel the pride that he must have felt but never mentioned. My mother may have pushed me to attend school, but it was my father who made it happen.

Celia, born in the United States, was a first-generation college graduate, reared in a two-parent home, unmarried, and a college counselor. She preferred to teach at a 2-year college “because I can help these young kids, when I was young and dumb, nobody told me I could go to college... I don’t want to see that happen to others.” She described herself as a “hell-raiser” who “always went after what I wanted,” what she recalled as finding a “non-traditional form of support that impacted me more than they will ever realize.” The feminist movement that started in the 1960s served as source of support for Celia. She found strength in their principles and adopted some of their liberated beliefs as her own. She credited the women’s movement, powered by her own drive as she learned more about the movement, as her sources of support.

Celia was born into a “traditional” Hispanic American family in which her father had the final say in what the family did, but there was no discussion and certainly no emphasis on higher education. Aside from her parents’ occasional mention of college, there was no one to encourage her education. Celia’s family, while somewhat encouraging, were primarily indifferent about her education. “They believed that having an education was not a prerequisite to being a successful Hispanic woman.” Celia stated,

I was so naïve... grew up in a time when there was no support for the Hispanic student. It was not as if there was even a feeling of unfairness; college was just not what a Hispanic student did. If you were Hispanic, you were doing good to finish high school, and there was no expectation beyond that. It was up to you to make your way to college. It is sad but there were no counselors that took interest in you if your skin was brown. The expectation was that White students went to college and that is where counselors and most teachers focused their efforts. If you were Hispanic, you were on your own. If and when you had any interest, they were surprised and at times appeared to be perturbed that you were taking up their time. It was troubling and disappointing but still did not deter me. I was ready to move forward and to go to college. My parents were not against it. They did not help me either, because Latinas were supposed to stay home and take care of their homes and their babies.

Linda was born in Germany, a second-generation college graduate, reared in a single-parent home, and married. Her father was in the military and stationed in Germany when she was born. She was employed as a professor teaching at a university. She describes herself as “a proud Latina.” She stated her mother was supportive while her father was not, but for a reason she never fully understood. Linda’s father completed his master’s degree but never returned for his PhD; Linda believed he seemed envious and did not want her to accomplish what he had not done.

Although she had her mother’s support, her experience was different in that she also had the support of her grandmother. Linda’s parents were divorced when she was young. The responsibility for Linda’s care was left to her grandmother, who became her primary caregiver as her mother worked outside the home as a teacher, then as a principal. Linda recalled growing up in a female-dominated home that passionately supported education and Latinas in education. Although her grandmother supported her in every way, she did not always agree that a doctorate was necessary, as did her spouse. Linda attributed their rationale as part of “old fashion Latino beliefs.” Her mother, on the other hand, never gave her the option of not going to college.

She always said that the PhD path was not for her but always told me that I could do anything I wanted to do. I came to realize that as a Latina, what else do you have if you do not learn survival skills as a Latina? You will be destroyed in the process, because

there is no one to care about you like your mother cares about you. If I had to do it over again, I would not change my education but would make the underprivileged understand that there are many obstacles that they will have to learn to overcome. Those obstacles are sometimes in your own family.

Lydia was a first-generation college graduate, born in the United States, reared in a two-parent home, married, and teaching social and behavioral sciences at a university. A self-described “go-getter but take life as it comes,” she believed that family influenced how one perceived education. Family may be noncommittal and have little influence in leading one to pursue a formal education, but family can also be the opposite and be the driving force that provides that sense of urgency that enables one to attain one’s education. Lydia attributed much of her success to her sister, who was her role model, and her husband, who was a great source of “unwavering support.” “There was nothing that I needed that he would not do to help me succeed. It was truly unconditional support.”

She found that although she hoped her parents would engage in showing their support, their support was disappointingly lacking. Lydia attributed her parents’ indifference to the following:

They grew up poor and worked hard to provide the basics, but they did not value education because they were never exposed to that and never realized what an education could do. To them, as long as you had a roof over your head and food on the table, that was a job well done. They thought that for the Hispanic woman, home and family should be the ultimate goal and to sacrifice your family in pursuit of an education was unacceptable, because a Hispanic woman your priority *should* be your family. That is your whole purpose for being. I am fortunate that my husband agreed with me that my education was important, and he was a Godsend for me. He literally took over home and family while I was in school. However, you still feel as if you have to hurry and get out because your family needs you. I could not help but feel guilty when I missed important milestones in my children’s lives but knew that it would all be worth it... and it was.

Olga was a second-generation college graduate, born in the United States, married, and a high school principal. Olga always knew she would go to college, because she was told that for as long as she could remember. Her parents were both pro-education. Olga’s parents were both

employed outside the home, and she came from the “typical American middle-class family.” Both her parents had well-paying jobs and earned a good living, so that helping finance her college education did not present a burden. She recalled always having the necessities in life and most of what she wanted; “I had it all.” Olga married a supportive spouse and found few barriers as she decided to return to school for her doctoral degree. Her husband became her main source of support while she was in the doctoral program. She described herself as “a lucky penny, always turning heads up.” During her doctoral program, she was employed with a university that encouraged her education, was flexible with her work schedule, and even offered tuition reimbursement. Olga felt higher education was her destiny, although, for her, college came later in life. As a result, she believed that as she matured and gained life experience, she gained a greater appreciation for education. Memories that she found most important were those of “feeling like an equal” and “my gender was not an obstacle.” Olga recalled,

On being Hispanic and being female, well that never factored into how I was raised. My parents understood the value of an education and knew that my life would be positively impacted if I finished college. They wanted what was best for me and for my sister and that, of course, that was to finish college. I am now a high school principal, and who knows what other opportunities my PhD will open? I had a lot of support, but equally important is the mentor that is there for you no matter what to help you over the rough spots and is there even if it is just to talk. Sometimes you just need that shoulder, and someone who has been through the doctoral program can truly understand like no one else, and you need that because it is not an easy road. That little extra support makes you realize that you can do it. Well... it is true, you *can* do it! I am aware of the benefit of getting my doctorate and being in education... that advanced degree makes a huge difference. I don't think I would have progressed professionally as high here if not for my PhD.

Marta was born in the United States and was a first-generation college graduate, married, and a physician assistant but loved teaching so was also teaching at a local teaching university. She recalled being “content with life as it was” and initially had no plans to pursue her doctoral degree. As an instructor in a university setting already teaching future physician assistant

students, she was satisfied with her career choice. She soon heard that a doctoral degree would eventually be required and, fearing not being “grandfathered” into her present role, returned to college for her doctorate.

Marta’s parents were divorced when she was an infant; her biological father did not have much presence in her life. Her mother remarried, and her stepfather became her father figure. He was supportive of most of her decisions. Although he was not against education, he did not actively suggest she pursue higher education. It was her mother who strongly urged her to return for her doctorate, and her stepfather supported her mother’s decision. Marta recalled her mother having slightly different views from her family on matters “like education.” Marta found it interesting that her mother’s views were “different and more conservative,” yet she was a strong proponent of education:

My aunts were “traditional Hispanics”... Some of my cousins did get their college degrees, but I think that life was harder for them, because the older family members made comments about them being crazy for leaving home and going to college when they could get a good paying job instead and save money. There was definitely more support for me than for them from an educational standpoint. I don’t think that is necessarily bad, just a different cultural upbringing.

Blanca was a first-generation college graduate; married to her high school sweetheart; reared by her father and stepmother, a registered nurse; and worked as an instructor for nurses at a local university and hospital. She gave much credit to her husband, from whom, she stated, she received steadfast support and is “the love of my life... the one who made my education possible.” Blanca’s mother died when she was 5 years old. As the second eldest child and female, she recalled it was her “duty” to assume the maternal role, which she did at a young age. She remembered money was scarce for necessities, so going to college was a fantasy. In school, she earned excellent grades, so she knew intelligence was not an issue; money was. Her father advocated an education for her oldest brother. He had little financial support from his father,

because their father did not have the means to finance his education. Their father did encourage her brother to complete his college education; he did not encourage or even discuss Blanca pursuing higher education.

Blanca married after high school graduation and had her four children. Her consideration of college “were still just a crazy thought... a dream of mine.” She approached her husband about pursuing a college education, and he was in total agreement. She began taking night classes and, before long, graduated with an associate degree, followed by Bachelor of Science, and soon her master’s degree in nursing. She ultimately reached her goal and received her doctoral degree. Blanca recalled,

What a dream come true for someone who was never expected to go to college, let alone get my PhD. It was expected that I be a good wife and mother and I was, but back then, there was little for the Mexican woman. Being a good wife and mother is not bad, because there is nothing as precious as home and family... I am very fortunate that my husband... took it upon himself to be that light at the end of the tunnel for me. It is important to have that support system that can help you along when you fall.

Mora was born in Mexico and later became a U.S. citizen. She was a first-generation college graduate, reared in a two-parent home, married, and worked in a corporate setting managing corporate-level international business. She married while in college and attributed her academic success to her husband. She remembered the struggle she felt being “Hispanic” and “fitting in” in the United States.

She and her family moved from Mexico to the United States when she was three years old. She remembered her parents telling her that they emigrated to the United States so that their children would have a “better life.” She always felt the pressure of making her parents proud. Going to college after high school graduation seemed like a natural progression. Mora and her family lived on the ranch where her father worked, and her mother was a stay-at-home mom taking care of the family. As a child, Mora always spoke Spanish at home and that seemed

“normal” but outside the home, spoke English. She did not want to be “different.” Mora recalled her parents visiting her school for parent-teacher night. Her parents did not speak English, and she served as interpreter for them, which as she recalled, “was traumatic” because her classmates were present. Mora wanted so much to “fit in.” She remembered,

That was awful! Can you imagine being a kid and having your friends and classmates know that your family did not speak English? Back then being Hispanic was not something to be proud of. You wanted to fit in, and you wanted to speak the language. Anything that made you different was not acceptable, because that made you stick out like a sore thumb and made it seem as if you were beneath others.

Sara was a first-generation college graduate born in the United States, reared in a two-parent home, widowed at the time of her interview, and teaching as a tenured professor at a university. She described herself as being “lucky to have a husband like him... always there for me no matter what life dealt us.” She became emotional as she spoke of their relationship and the strength of their marriage. “He was my husband, my friend, my support, my soulmate... God took him much too soon, and I was lost for a while.” Sara later found support in “friends and self-direction” more so than in family, although her mother “stepped up her game.”

Sara was a widowed mother of three who got her PhD “later in life.” Her parents had spoken about education leading to a better life and was something she had thought about briefly but did not pursue as she never felt the need because her life was fulfilled. During her childhood, basic needs were met by her parents and, when she married, her husband provided for her and they led a financially comfortable life. Sara did not pursue a terminal degree, because she did not feel an actual need for it. Having earned a master’s degree in education, Sara had once considered higher education but “life got in the way.”

A tragic accident changed her life. Her husband was killed in a motor vehicle accident. Having three children to raise on her own, one of them a “change of life baby,” her thoughts of ever returning to school faded. Sara’s philosophy had always been that “nothing is impossible.”

If you put your heart and elbow grease into it, you can accomplish anything no matter what life throws at you. I repeated that philosophy so much because I believed it and still do. But... it applied to everyone else and not me. One day it hit me, “If I can tell them to do this, why can’t I do it?” It was not easy... I questioned why I was doing this since I already had a good job... Deep down, I knew the answer. It was a life dream and knew it had to be done. I had many, many dear friends who supported my decision and who were there to pick me up when I fell and, boy, did fall along the way. It had to be one of the most difficult things I have done in life but have to say it was the most rewarding. It takes a lot of determination and a lot of support to get through the program. I was a working adult, so that made it even harder but not impossible. Growing up a Hispanic female made me stronger, because I was not expected to achieve much, and you can only go up from there.

The stories told by those women revealed characters of strength, commitment, and perseverance as was apparent in their facial expressions and emotions that indicated uneasiness, pain, happiness, humor, and sincerity. Only one Latina, Linda, spoke of regret or disappointment of the process she experienced as she pursued her terminal degree. Linda described the doctoral process as a time in her life during which she was treated poorly.

It was awful to see how we treat one another. The doctoral program was a miserable time... It was a battlefield... I knew I could do it and knew it would all be worth it but felt like I always had to watch my back, because my peers were not supportive... that was disappointing.

From their interviews, similarities developed that formed invisible bonds between those women who had never met. While all participants’ stories were unique, their stories shared parallels and connections with other Latinas in higher education. Their focus was higher education, but circumstances influencing their journey were at the foundation of their decisions. Whether they recognized support as a basic need or merely a process necessary for their pursuit

of education, when asked about support systems, they each easily identified those who provided the most support.

Overview of Major Themes

The themes in this study emerged from the participants' responses to interview questions regarding factors that facilitated their pursuance of higher education and the roles their families played in facilitating or hindering their education. Ultimately, their experiences resulted in their earning their terminal degrees. Their perceptions and/or experiences as to whether those factors facilitated or hindered their efforts were interpreted from meaning the participants gave to their stories.

Culture, ethnic identity, gender, race, and support systems were of interest in this study as those concepts became apparent as having direct bearing on their degree completion. In addition, attention was given to approaches the Latinas used to overcome adversity as they continued their education.

The Latinas in this study were unique individuals who, although they had never met, share similarities that connected them through their stories. Their stories were powerful, formative, and what shaped them into the Latinas they were at the time of this study. Codes were assigned to the participants' interview response words and phrases that developed into categories. From the categories emerged five major data-driven themes and five subthemes: 1. Education and Culture: Motivation and Challenges (subthemes: Education as key to a successful future, Finding it out for yourself, and Learning successful strategies); 2. Significance of Support Systems (subthemes: Mother as key figure and Other support systems); 3. Adapting to Change; 4. Emerging Stronger Through Resilience, Persistence, and Empowerment; and 5. Stress Management. The following sections will discuss each of these themes.

Education and Culture: Motivation and Challenges

In theme #1, the participants told of expectations that were similar yet unique for each of them. The salient point was the effect that family influence had on their decision-making regarding the care of their families, their roles within their families, education, and maintaining the mutual respect that was esteemed in the Latino culture. Typically, education in the Latino culture had primarily been reserved for the breadwinners in the family who were usually males. For some of the women in this study, education was not initially viewed as crucial, because family was to take priority. Several of the participants spoke of wanting an education but fearful of their family's reaction or acceptance of their decision. The Latinas in this study discussed respecting the traditions they observed in their families, and role modeling influenced them even as adults as they had learned what being successful Latinas meant based on observation of their families (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1997, 2006; Wills & McEwen, 2001).

Blanca stated, "I was the next in line to take over for my mom when she passed... I knew school was out of the question. I grew up watching my Daddy work hard to provide for us, and that's the least I could do. I had to do my part."

Mora recalled ambiguity.

I was not sure what to do... Mother always pushed school but, when it came down to brass tacks, she reminded me that I had a family and that I was a mother first... She was right. Not sure how I was to do one without sacrificing the other.

As with Mora, Sara knew her mother supported her returning for her doctoral degree, but it was obvious she failed to see why it was needed.

After I started school, she was okay with it but at first thought it was unnecessary... hard to reconcile two opposing messages you're getting.

I always had support but was careful. While I had support, there was a limit. I was first and foremost a Latina... reminded that my responsibility was to my family. (Linda)

Olga did not experience opposition but, rather, was encouraged to pursue her education.

My parents were proud when I told them I was getting my PhD. It was me who was scared. It is a big undertaking.

The participants spoke to their families' cultural values that included the Latinas' expected role and their families' perceptions of how education was predicted to affect the participants' lives.

My father expected me to be the lady of the house... Going to school didn't keep me from being the lady he wanted but sure didn't meet his idea of a woman of the house. (Blanca)

I was expected to be the strong Latina I was brought up to be... get my degree... yet always keep in mind that I was a Latina wife and mother... my most important roles. (Linda)

They acknowledged the apprehension they felt having to choose between following expected cultural and gender role norms or developing new pathways that changed past behaviors.

I knew what I was supposed to do... thought about it and decided... I did what I wanted to do... that was the right choice. (Celia)

Making choices that are different from what your parents want from you is not as easy as it sounds... They're your parents... They are the reason you are here, and now you have to choose? Choosing what's right for me... not easy. I was taught to be mindful of what others think... My dad passed before I started the doctoral program... that made my mother value time spent with family... She wanted me home with my family... I'm learning to think with my brain and not my emotions... that helps lessen my doubts. (Mora)

Though presented in a variety of ways, their stories referred to specific times during which the impact of family expectations overlapped and affected multiple aspects of the participants' lives. Linda and Blanca experienced gender norms to be consistent with the concepts of machismo and marianismo that provided privileges for males not afforded females, a practice often acceptable in the Latino culture (Chavez Duenas, 2007). Anzaldua (1987) described marianismo as the Latino female socialization concept that delineated conduct for

Latino females. Marianismo is the traditional feminine quality ascribed to Latinas that is accepted by men, as well as women, who have adopted the traditional gender role of females within the Latino culture. Women are seen as nurturers whose primary role is that of caring for home and family. Traditional marianismo followers shun women who choose to reject the traditional and expected roles of solely being wife and mother (Anzaldua, 1987).

Some of the participants were cognizant of the differences in gender expectations for males versus females in Latino families and the differential double standard treatment that prevailed. Mora and Blanca recognized that males were free to take liberties that were acceptable for men but were unacceptable for females.

Growing up, I was expected to clean and do things around the house just like my mother... My father never did... He was a man and didn't have to... This was acceptable in the Latino culture. (Mora)

Males could cross boundaries when it came to obedience and sexuality, but women were expected to be meek and subservient.

Blanca stated,

My brother could stay out late or not come home at all... That was fine because he was a man... Women who did that were women of ill repute... old fashioned thinking... That's the way it was.

Linda was aware of double standards based on gender. In addition to helping her mother and grandmother around the house, the rules for Linda were different than those for her brother. She was expected to be a "lady," come home by certain hours, and always let the family know where she was. However, the same did not hold true for her brother.

My brother had no curfew... had much more freedom... simply because he was male. I was a "lady"... That's the way I was brought up... I never questioned it.

Celia's observations reinforced that expectations were unequal for men and women.

We were the typical Hispanic family... My mother took care of us... There was an expectation for women... They were to first and foremost be ladylike... Ironical isn't it... We were supposed to be hard workers and believe in ourselves as long as it did not conflict with the man's view.

Blanca knew she was expected to help care for her siblings after her mother died. Her brother was older but, being male, was expected either to go to work or to continue his education. For Blanca, that was not a choice, but rather it was anticipated she would assume the role of caregiver for her siblings.

When my momma died, my daddy needed help. I was the second oldest... had no choice... I don't blame my daddy... He couldn't do it alone... I had no choice... had to help raise my brothers and sisters... My brother was the oldest male, and my daddy told him to go to work or go to school, because he was going to be the breadwinner in his family... I wasn't told that.

The participants voiced awareness of expectations providing more flexibility for males when compared to females. That flexibility for men, however, was not only a restriction in freedom for women but meant delegation of additional work for females. Traditionally, men were expected to work outside the home. Their work was finished at the end of their workday. For women who worked outside the home, their housework and family obligations at home were in addition to their employment. Education became the key to changing expectations.

Education as the key to a successful future. The women in this study shared multiple stories, experiences, and relationships that were significant to them because of the profound and lasting influences those experiences had on their decisions. When considering higher education, Blanca wondered,

Is there more out there? I loved my family but wanted to explore my options and feel completely satisfied with my life... I knew education was my ticket to a better life.

Linda never lacked confidence when it came to formal education.

Education is in our blood... I don't remember ever hearing my mother say I couldn't do anything... Education took work, but I knew education was the way for me to help others.

Similarly, Sara recalled,

Ever since I was very young, my parents encouraged completing what I set out to do... Education was one of those things... taught me about goal setting and pursuing my dreams. How we encourage has great bearing on how we survive in school as adults.

Although the participants had unique ways of defining expectations, they expressed their feelings in terms that were meaningful to them. Blanca, who early in life assumed a parental role, stated,

I knew my family, especially my daddy, expected me to step in to help, and I gladly did it but wanted my education more than anyone knew. As Hispanics, we do for each other and take care of our own... but didn't want to compromise my dreams of getting an education. I felt guilty because I wasn't raised to be selfish and I felt selfish.

Mora voiced education to be "an opportunity for a better life."

The Latinas in this study believed education to be a means of ensuring a better future but were often lost as they navigated through the matriculation process and later through academia.

It felt like we operated in silos. Latinas were left to fend for themselves. Nobody was there to guide us. (Celia)

When you register for the doctoral program, you're flying high... Then reality sets in. When then if nobody is there to guide you? Things change. You need more help than those young ones with no responsibilities. (Mora)

I knew the education system and felt confident that I would get my degree, but the process from start to finish was confusing at times. You feel badly asking for help, because you're supposed to know better. (Sara)

Blanca stated,

Lordy, what a mess...no idea where to start...Professors took it for granted I knew what to do... not easy for working women to find answers unless you went in to talk to them... not easy when you work.

Finding it out for yourself. As the participants progressed through graduate school, adjusting to the demands of academia and life in general became increasingly challenging. As

adult learners, they found much had changed from when they initially attended college. From matriculation to class attendance, the process was more involved and complicated. Celia, Mora, and Blanca shared feeling confused and often overwhelmed, which brought about uncertainty about returning to school. Some felt no one was available to help and, if help was available, were sometimes students who were uninformed as to how to assist them. Most stated the lack of mentors to facilitate the process was evident, but mentors were needed to facilitate their educational process and decrease unnecessary stress.

Recalling feeling “lost and frustrated,” Celia commented,

It was bewildering... Where do you start? ...Learning how to go through the “maze” was not explained to me... don’t remember being coached on how to navigate the process to get into college.

The complexity of the process merely to start the doctoral program produced feelings of self-doubt for Mora.

I was always timid... All of a sudden, boy, oh, boy, I am smack in the middle of it and have no idea where to turn... I thought, “This was not for the faint of heart... What was I thinking... Could I do it?”

Blanca felt overwhelmed but feared failure for a different reason. What most concerned her was failing to earn her degree meant additional financial strain for her family. Should she fail to complete the doctoral program, the financial burden placed on her family would have created incredible hardship.

I could do it but... so much money... It was crazy... Lordy, what if I didn’t make it... I had to make it but needed help in getting there.

Learning successful strategies. The participants found the doctoral program to be dynamic and ever changing. With change routinely occurring, it became necessary to plan successful strategies to facilitate positive outcomes. The participants recalled having to alter plans at a moment’s notice to address changes that arose. Strategic planning became imperative.

Anticipating and recognizing stress factors, remaining focused, and prioritizing were yet other strategies they regarded as important and provided what Olga termed “a safety net.” Once issues were identified, participants found avenues to meet the challenges.

Effective communication proved to be an invaluable strategy to success. Marta and Blanca found the benefit of communication to be a successful strategy.

I learned the value of communication... importance of opening myself up... There is no shame in asking...takes isolated individuals and makes them as one... You get strength from each other. (Marta)

Before graduate school, I wasn't forceful... didn't talk much... kinda timid... things happened... I just accepted it... The program changed me... Nobody there to hand me anything... guess they assumed if I needed anything, I'd ask. That taught me a lot... I learned pretty fast to voice what I wanted. (Blanca)

The demands placed on participants created a distraction. The participants agreed that remaining focused was imperative. They found various ways of remaining motivated.

So much to do... easy to go off in a different direction... I put a picture of my kids in my notebook. Every time I looked at it, it was a constant but powerful reminder of why I was putting myself through so much. (Emma)

Having experienced similar incidents of “running off in a tangent,” Celia agreed with her peers but simply noted, “Stay focused.” Lydia stressed making a conscious effort to remain centered was what kept her grounded yet noticed that few took time for themselves, which was critical to remaining engaged and to promote overall wellbeing. She advised,

Find “me time”... Sometimes it's hard to do but make time. You won't *find* the time; you have to *make* time... It's necessary... makes life and school easier. We run around taking care of this, that, and the other but forget that if we're not well... things fall through the cracks including school.

Mora shared like views when it came to concentrating on her studies. She found the strategy, however, that helped her remain resolute was recognizing the “real reason” behind

wanting to complete graduate school as important in keeping her driven. Her family served as the focal point.

You have to know the “why”... How can you focus if you don’t know why you’re doing it? I wanted it so badly for me and my family... that drove me and kept me motivated... dedicated... kept me going. (Mora)

Sara felt as if she “had it all”; she had a “full life” that was suddenly taken away when her husband passed. For years, she led a fulfilled and purposeful life with life’s decisions often made for her. Once widowed, she was at a crossroads, left to make decisions that would affect her and her family. Her family became her motivation, but her family’s needs were also a distraction. Children needed direction, and life itself made demands. Sara credited recognizing the value of degree completion as the following:

There has to be a reason that makes it worthwhile... find it... What’s your reason? Why are you doing it? Very few have a PhD, so why a doctorate? That’s so personal... different for everybody... You don’t need it... You *want* it... You lose sight of that reason, and you’ll end up dropping out.

In contrast, Linda also appreciated her family, but her desire to complete graduate school was so she could become a role model and advocate for other Latinos.

I wanted to make a difference... what I was meant to do... what I had to do... Few people advocate for Latinos... especially Latinas. We are collectively researched and studied but for what... Where’s the reason? Is there anybody out there pushing for us? Maybe... but I hadn’t seen much of that, so I took it upon myself to help Latinos who had nobody to help ’em. I saw a need... I knew I was that person... My PhD would open doors that were still closed to us.

The participants acknowledged strategies aimed at streamlining their work when possible, but most recognized that “life changes on a dime” (Sara). Regardless of challenges or experiences that presented, most agreed prioritizing to be preferable to adapting reactively to challenges.

When you have to switch gears midstream, you're caught off guard... no time to take into account what's happening... no time to plan... look at the big picture... work on it one step at a time to make sense of it all. (Marta)

The participants used different strategies to meet various situations as they arose. Olga stated,

You just have to be flexible... Nothing is perfect. There's always gonna be problems... Rolling with the punches is the best advice I ever got.

Significance of Support Systems

Theme #2 brought to light the importance of support systems. Higher education was challenging and time intensive. Aside from their academic work, a major concern was having reliable support on which they could depend. "Support is crucial," Mora stated. Most found support to be the primary factor to consider when pursuing higher education.

You can't make it without help... Somewhere along the way, you will need help. Your family can help but so can professors. (Linda)

Celia said,

Don't overthink it and hesitate to ask your support people for help... You need it or you won't make it.

I know I would not have finished the doctoral program had it not been for my focus on the women who were my role models and, yes... to a small extent... my parents... It's tough, and you just simply can't do it alone. (Celia)

Mother as key figure. The Latino culture is typically described as cohesive with a hierarchy of the father being the head of household. For the Latinas in this study, however, their mothers emerged as the central figures. The participants agreed that they might not have withstood the rigors of graduate school without help. Their mothers became the pillar of support that their daughters needed. The participants' mothers challenged perceptions that maternal roles were merely that of caretakers and, instead, consisted of what was unconditional, progressive, and, at times, innovative support. The participants' mothers assumed the role of surrogate

parents, chauffeurs, housekeepers, emotional supporters, and advocates as they supported their daughters to pursue their education. Most of the Latinas mentioned that they were not surprised that their mothers provided support. Traditionally in Latino families, the role of the mother is that of caretaker.

The participants reflected on supportive and influential individuals in their lives, and mothers being the most important and prominent figures became evident. Some women had more than one source of support, but the mothers' emergence as the central and single most significant supportive figures held true for most of the women in this study. Maternal support varied and often depended on the level of support needed. At times, support was physical; other times, it was emotional, which was just as important and supportive. All women defined their mothers' support in their own meaningful way.

Emma and Mora both recalled how physical support was helpful.

My mom picked up my children from school and kept them when they were sick when I had classes. This was a Godsend. I did not have to worry about that and, for me, that was huge. (Emma)

My mom was essentially a stay-at-home mom when we were growing up... barely even drove... was afraid of driving... All of a sudden, she was doing things for me that she would have never done... She drove to my house and got the kids ready for school, cooked for them and me... picked up around the house, whatever it took to help me... My mother was left to shoulder the brunt of running a household and then, to top it off, helped me with my family so that I could follow my heart in getting my education. She was amazing... like my mother never got the chance to realize her dreams, because she was always doing for others. I so lucky to have her in my life... don't know that I would be here if it wasn't for her. (Mora)

For most, support was a combination of physical and/or emotional support. Emma, Olga, Marta, Linda, Lydia, and Sara shared how important emotional support could be. Emma, Sara, and Lydia considered active listening most helpful.

Sometimes you just need somebody to hear you out, really hear what you're saying... not feel sorry for you but tell you "You can do this." (Emma)

When all else fails... you feel like you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, and you're just plain worn out... It helps to have somebody take over... My mom would just sit and listen... just listen... I cried and I talked and cried some more... She listened... That's what I needed. (Lydia)

The following participants described experiencing emotionally driven stress and the role that emotional support played in their continuing their education. For them, support was always available.

There were days I was in the dumps and thought of quitting... I have to tell ya, it was rough... They say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger... Some days I thought it was not worth it, and that's when my mother would step in and ask if I wanted to talk about it... She listened intently like what I had to say was the most important thing she heard all day long... I knew it wasn't... She always understood... knew what I needed... a sounding board. (Sara)

Mom was always there... ready to encourage me when I thought I might fold... never thought of quitting... guess because no matter what... mom was there to hold me up... ensured I was in the right frame of mind to continue my studies... never a miss, she was always supportive in any way I needed her... emotionally, she kept me in line. (Linda)

Olga recognized that although doctoral students are

able to manage well on their own. It's nice to know you have support... emotional or any kind of support any time you need it... I've always had it... My schooling was no different. Mom and family were there for me.

Linda's exposure to peers whose "scheming and dishonesty" created a stressful environment for her that was an unexpected challenge. More importantly, she found that professors did not intervene. She found the doctoral program was tolerable by her mother's support.

My mom was my biggest source of support... that made my schooling easier... not to say it was easy... It wasn't... Their pushing and underhandedness made me a survivor... made me stronger.

Once she came to terms with it, my mom was there for me from day one rooting me on. I wouldn't have expected anything else... saw classmates that didn't have that emotional encouragement and my heart went out to them... I had it... sometimes took it for granted. (Marta)

Undertaking a commitment such as completing the doctoral program was daunting not only for the participants but also for their families. Some of the participants' mothers initially expressed reservations over their daughters returning to college. The participants understood their mothers' concerns were primarily for the pressure they knew their daughters would encounter. The participants also understood that their mothers recognized the value of their daughters pursuing higher education. Once their mothers committed to helping their daughters, they became allies, advocates, mentors, and advisors.

Funny how some people think when you try to better yourself. My neighbors and even some of the family thought I was uppity because I was going for my doctorate... Who has time to visit when you're trying to finish school? My mom set them straight... She took up for me. (Emma)

Advocacy was particularly important to one of the participant's mothers. Linda stated,

My mom being a teacher helped. She was my advocate and helped me spread the word just how important education... higher education is to all of us... She knew I wanted to help Latinos become educated.

Both Olga and Linda's mothers were college graduates who mentored their daughters.

Olga gained insight from her mother's college experience.

My mom taught me the ins and outs of college... She had been through it and used her college experiences to make my college experience easier... no need to reinvent the wheel... Mom knew the ropes and taught me how to navigate the system.

Likewise, Linda's family was well versed in college life and used their past experiences to teach Linda "the ropes."

My parents are both college grads and had been there, done that... Mom knew what to do and when to do it... She also taught me what not to do... who not to piss off... equally as important when you're trying to get your degree... no time to waste on things that don't matter.

The women in this study understood they had their mothers' support despite how long their education took to complete but stated they felt a sense of urgency to finish their education.

Most acknowledged that once their mothers committed to supporting them, their mothers remained committed. As the strength of their mother-daughter relationships increased, their confidence in their abilities to obtain their degrees became a reality. Those strong bonds also determined their belief in the level of support they received. The participants' observance of how their mothers adapted to their roles as supporters lessened the guilt they sometimes felt and became a source of comfort for the participants. They "took it one day at a time," and their mothers became vital to the successful completion of the Latinas' education. However, the participants recognized the strain that placed on their mothers.

Emma, Linda, Lydia, Olga, Marta, Mora, and Sara perceived support to be unconditional. Blanca's spirituality sustained her belief that her mother, although deceased, continued to watch over and protect her. The participants' expressions of how they felt about the support they received from their mothers were often moving and conveyed a deep sense of gratitude as exemplified in their quotes. Marta and Mora appreciated their mothers' unconditional support.

I owe all that I have accomplished to my mother... I appreciate her for what she did for me. She went against her own tradition to do what was best for me. She is the definition of support... I thought... I still think my mother is my hero... I can't imagine life without my mother. I may be grown up, but you never stop needing your mother... She keeps me grounded... My mother is such a blessing and feel blessed to have her in my life. Not a day goes by that she is not calling me to see how I am doing. If I need anything, she is always there to help me. (Marta)

I can never repay my mother for the sacrifices she made while I was in school... She never complained... I often felt guilty. I got to this point because of her unselfishness, and I will never forget that. How do you repay that? (Mora)

For Emma, love was the motivation that prompted her mother to help.

How do you measure a mother's love and support? How much she is willing to do for her kid? She was a strong woman who took life by the horns and expected the same from me... My mother... does an amazing job of making me feel that what I am doing in life is worthwhile no matter what it is. I don't know what I would do without her... My mother was the one that had this quality of making you feel everything was going to be fine. My

mom was such an inspiration, and she gave me strength even when she was not physically there with me... I knew she was only a call away.

Linda, Lydia, and Olga believed their mothers recognized the value of education and, therefore, attempted to remove obstacles by helping by whatever means possible.

My mother... the ultimate supporter... always made sure I was in school. Being an educator, she knew that my life would be much easier if I went to college. She always encouraged a college education, and when I wanted to get my doctorate, knew it would not be easy but knew it was the right thing to do. I knew that no matter what happened, she was there for me... She is and always will be the one I know I can count on... She had my back... All I had to do was do it... She was there to help me through it. (Linda)

She's a lifesaver... What can I say? No matter how hard it was... and it was damn hard, she stuck to it... was there through thick and thin... Helping me was her mission, and she never missed a step. I don't know that I could do that for anyone... that took commitment. (Lydia)

My mom is a strong mom. I made it... My parents were always there, but my mom showed me how to succeed... to finish my education. She took over and I let her... I had to. I felt guilty but knew my family was in good hands... I looked up to my mother and, if I can be in the least bit like her, I have made her proud. (Olga)

For Sara and Blanca, although they also identified their mothers' help, it was slightly different. Sara's mother eventually agreed to support her if she returned to college but not without reservations.

My mom, yep, my mom helped me get through college. She was opposed to it at first, because she worried about my family... I was a widow... but then came around. Once she did, she was unstoppable, and I had my mommy to fall back on.

Blanca's support was a spiritually based support that strengthened and sustained her.

Blanca's mother, although deceased, provided solace and a sense of security that strengthened her.

She was watching over me and helping me all the way from heaven... God gave me strength, but she supported me from heaven... I felt at peace knowing she was there... She was there and had sent me a good husband to help. She knew I could do it, and that made me believe in myself. I had already done so much with her guidance.

Family, particularly the mothers, was instrumental in supporting most of the participants in their academic endeavors. For most, their mothers were the most important people. Others received support from sources some might have perceived as out of the ordinary.

Other support systems. The participants mentioned family as the first line of support, which was expected, but found additional sources of support to be just as valuable. For most, it was their mothers, but for some, it was spouses, and for one participant, it was a remote group of women whose strength was a source of support.

The core of the Latino culture typically embodies machismo for men and marianismo as the predictable gender role of women and girls (Anzaldúa, 1987). Typically, men are not expected to step in to help, as this, according to the Latino culture, is “women’s work.” Some of the spouses, however, stepped out of “traditional” roles and became strong support sources and mentors for their wives. For some of the participants, the customary portrayal of Latino men did not hold true, as their spouses were nurturing and supportive of their wives’ education. Their caring behavior is supported by the views of caballerismo, a behavior in men that is caring and supportive rather than the negative and domineering behaviors previously ascribed to Latino men (Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos, 2013).

It’s important to start finding that go-to person right up front... You’re going to need them. (Sara)

You just can’t do it alone. (Blanca)

Personal experiences and the level of support the women in this study received deeply strengthened their relationships with their sources of support, since it was their support systems that enabled the participants to continue their education.

I can’t ever recall not having support in my life. My parents made sure I had all I needed to be successful. (Olga)

Sara noted,

Without support, you have nothing... dead in the water... Support helped to get me where I am today.

Likewise, Olga commented,

I had both my mom and my husband supporting me, but there were days when it was touch and go. You just can't go through school as a working adult learner and make it without somebody to help you.

On the other hand, Celia did not agree that support needs to be family.

I found this group of women that had my mentality... had my views on making a difference... That was enough for me.

Stories provided by the participants evoked different emotions that, in some instances, were apparently painful. For some, a number of those memories and emotions had been repressed. Some of the participants admitted either to having avoided or forgotten experiences that they found difficult to process while in school and had not discussed until they were specifically asked during the interviews to tell stories about relationships with their families.

Linda recalled,

My grandmother stepped in... when my husband was not helpful. It was understood I would one day get my PhD, and my mom made sure I was headed in the right direction and had plenty of help in getting it.

Lydia, Olga, Blanca, and Mora shared stories of help they received from their spouses and came to consider spousal support to be just as valuable as that received from others. Despite the negative light in which Latino men were customarily portrayed, spouses of the Latinas in this study proved to be active participants in supporting their wives as they pursued their education. Their spouses' nurturing behavior was consistent with *caballerismo*, a behavior in men that is caring and supportive, opposite behaviors from what has previously been attributed to Latino men (Cerezo et al., 2013). Spousal support was unconditional for some of the Latinas in this study. Lydia became emotional and teary eyed as she said,

He was an absolute doll... went above and beyond to help me live my dream... took over when my sister couldn't... knew I was under so much pressure... did whatever it took to relieve my stress. Took years but he hung in there knowing there would be a happy ending for us both. I came to appreciate my husband more than ever. He wanted me to graduate, because it was important to me... so blessed that he was selfless enough to put up with all he did while I was in school.

Olga recalled,

My husband went above and beyond... He did whatever it took to ease my load.

Mora expressed that her husband

picked up where I left off... It takes a village, and he lived up to it.

Although Blanca was orphaned as a child, she expressed a similar sentiment when it came to support from her husband. She stated,

Good grief, how would I ever had done it without my hubby? He didn't go to college, but he knew I was smart, and he knew what me getting my degree meant to us as a family, so he hung in there for me... for us.

For one of the Latinas, discovering the level of support she had made her feel sad and selfish. Mora poignantly added,

My mom... What can I say... She's an angel. Even when she was sick, she came through. I tried to tell her I was able to take over, but she insisted. I cried when I saw how difficult I was making life for her. My dad has passed, and she had only herself to rely on and could not even count on me because I was in school.

Adapting to Change

Theme #3 focused on the need for change. It was evident from their stories that the women in this study all experienced challenges as they progressed through the doctoral program. As the participants experienced change, they found adaptation became a necessary skill for survival. Adaptation as defined by Berry and Sam (1997) involves a process of adjustment during which the individual conforms and changes so as to fit in with the situation. Depending on various factors, each adaptive change is different with each presenting situation. Adaption can

be well received and welcome, such as when willingly changing to integrate into new anticipated situations. Adaption, however, can also have negative implications when adapting to unpleasant situations, divisiveness, and ostracism. The participants experienced both the positive and negative aspects of adaptation as they pursued their academic goals.

Adaptation became a necessary and significant coping method. Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman (2008) found that change was a form of “shock” that involved cultural changes and required adaptation as a means of coping to maintain a healthy psychological balance. That was evident as participants voiced personal ways of coping with struggles related to their aspiration to attain their terminal degrees.

The participants overcame adversity by recognizing challenges, persisting, and developing adaptation skills. What resonated with them all was their awareness of the changing environment and of acquiring coping skills necessary in learning to adjust as they continued their education. For some, accepting change was part of the process. Olga, Blanca, Marta, and Linda anticipated change, although the degree to which they were affected was different for each of them. They learned adaptation from repeated exposure to adversity, adaptation that ultimately resulted in resilience and emergence as empowered strong Latinas.

Olga and Blanca viewed change as unavoidable.

Change is inevitable in the doctoral program... in anything, really... You just have to take it in stride. (Olga)

Blanca noted accepting the unexpected as helping to relieve stress associated with change.

Nothing ever stays the same... Things had to change... Change is a necessary evil but, good Lord, that was rough.

Marta accepted change differently. Having grown up in a home in which structure was normal, she not only welcomed change but embraced it.

Change is part of the deal... Welcome it... Embrace it or it will change you and sometimes not for the better. If you accept it, you'll do much better... less stress... more learning because you appreciate your work, and isn't that the whole point?

Linda understood adapting to change was vital but felt some changes were unnecessary and made worse by individuals who had little regard for her.

Change is necessary and has to happen. I was familiar with the college bit... things changing... I watched my family go through it. I had already been there, so school was no surprise... But graduate school was different... They were cutthroat, forcing you to watch your back... little help... not at all what I was expecting.

Sara regarded the graduate program as a diversion creating a distraction that provided a reprieve from "real life" problems that, in turn, helped her adapt.

You can't really think about your problems when you're busy researching. Sometimes I would sit for hours researching and writing and would "lose myself" in my work. That was healthy for me. My problems were still there, but that "mental vacation" helped me manage... I guess you can say school contributed to my personal growth... helped me see the big picture... Everything happens for a reason... kids, work... best laid plans... Life changed my plan... changed me, forced me to change... to cope.

In addition to anticipated pressure, two of the participants noted that while family was usually a source of support, family also served as a source of stress requiring adaptation. Marta noted,

No matter how good they are or their best intentions, family adds to the stress... I rolled with it to keep my sanity.

Sometimes adapting to change means having to take honest soul-searching. When you find the answer, it is not always what you want. My husband did not appreciate my education... actually made it hard for me... I handled it, but it wasn't easy... My father was jealous of my schooling... I adjusted but wasn't easy. (Linda)

As the women in this study continued their stories, they revealed having to adapt to change in order to complete the doctoral program. The transition to accepting change was difficult for Sara who recalled,

I wasn't supposed to be a widow... wasn't supposed to be a single parent... wasn't supposed to go through life alone... Life is not fair... I had to adapt or get lost in the shuffle... so I learned to adjust.

The idea of a new life as a doctor was exciting but scary all at once. I was scared... Other times, I was so proud of how much I had accomplished... Emotions ran the gamut... My life had changed... I changed. (Emma)

The unique personalities of all of the women in this study determined how they managed stress, which, in turn, determined the effect of the experience.

Early on, I knew I had to make changes... to understand... to keep up... It was all moving too fast... Always a believer, I was being tested so I turned to my faith... prayed for guidance... It helped me find peace and made me more productive... I liked the new me. (Blanca)

Celia, on the other hand, found mental toughness to be the pathway to effective adaptation.

Let's face it... didn't have time for being a wimp... The tough get tougher and learn to deal with what comes along. Just suck it up! [Laughs] I made up my mind to accept I had to change as much and as often as I had to. Why go through all the stress of graduate school if you want to live in the past and stay the same? Just a waste of time if you can't or won't accept change.

Marta found exercise to help her adapt to her changing role.

The more comfortable I got with my graduate classes and the more I understood the program requirements, the more excited and nervous I got. I was supposed to hit the floor running when I graduated... I was tired... Maybe that's normal, but I was so tired... Exercise helped to energize me physically and helped my frame of mind. I took up running... made time... kept it up since then... a healthy way of coping.

Effective adaptation fostered resilience. Recollections of their experiences during which they encountered difficulty were sometimes emotional and detailed, while others were simply straightforward. A newly widowed, broken-hearted Sara said she knew she had to "deal with it." Faced with a difficult decision, Sara adapted. She chose to leave her family to pursue her

education at a critical time after her husband died but felt that she owed it to her family to provide them with the best opportunity. She stated, “

I did what I had to do... I am as survivor... I could do this... Surviving my husband's death was a tough... I continued to survive... I had to provide for my family.

Blanca who assumed the role of mother figure to her siblings at a young age after her mother died recalled,

Life tests us... I was happy but not really fulfilled... Something was missing... That's life is what I told myself.

She always knew that if the opportunity arose, she would continue her education. Surviving her mother's death, raising her siblings, and becoming a wife and mother to her own children might have previously restricted her academic aspirations, but once in the doctoral program, made her more determined to succeed.

As the participants shared their stories, it became evident they shared experiences that followed a similar pattern. New experiences, adversity, effective coping strategies to overcome hardship, persistence, and adaptation resulted in their emergence as changed resilient individuals. The need for adaptation was apparent, but the ability to adapt effectively became a critical asset. While the degree of difficulty cannot be quantified, their identification of coping strategies followed by adaptation and their development of resilience were pertinent to their completing the doctoral program.

As they adapted to their new responsibilities, the participants noticed “things got a little easier.” Persistence, adaptation, and feedback from others indicating “I was on the right track” (Marta) inspired the women to continue their education. Adaptation was the stimulus that was the beginning of finding an inner strength that led to resilience, empowerment, and a knowledge that “I was on my way... I knew at this point I would finish” (Blanca).

Emerging Stronger Through Resilience, Persistence, and Empowerment

Theme #4 emphasized that at different points in their lives as the Latinas continued their education, they felt a sense of strength that empowered them. They recognized their persistence paid off as they felt changes within themselves. Their ability to work through adversity by drawing on empowerment, resilience, perseverance, and persistence led to their self-recognition of how those attributes served as sources of strength that culminated in their emerging stronger. Masten and Tellegen (2012) defined resilience as the ability to recover from a challenging event and enduring regardless of the degree of difficulty. Perseverance can be further explained as the effort that is used over a period of time that cannot be measured but can be explained by the individuals' interpretation. To fully understand their experiences in the doctoral program, it was imperative to explore how the Latinas in this study described their lived experiences and the effect those experiences had on them.

As the participants told of returning to graduate school, they noted how quickly they came to realize the need for “thicker skin” as they navigated the course of education. They anticipated changes in academia but were surprised at how great those changes were, and their commitment to their studies eventually affected their home and families. As they described their journey, they emphasized the need for developing the ability to stay on course and to develop coping methods as different situations arose. Most recalled trial and error and learning from their mistakes, but most described their experiences as strengthening them. Most recalled specific setbacks that temporarily discouraged them but found means of continuing.

I picked myself up and getting right back on that horse and did it over and over again till it became easier. (Celia)

All of a sudden, “it was as if... wait... did that problem just happen, and I sailed right through it?” (Emma)

They discussed feeling stronger as they continued their education. They persevered and persisted and, in doing so, felt stronger. Some of the participants recalled knowing that they were going to “make it,” but at the time,

I was feeling in control knowing it was going to be okay. (Mora)

As they adapted, some became conscious of developing a feeling of empowerment that was necessary to cope with the many adjustments they had to make while in the doctoral program. The participants repeatedly expressed relief at their ability to overcome obstacles that might have otherwise been deterrents. Their stories demonstrated their acquisition of resilience consequential to their experiences but remarked their persistence was what led to success. The phenomena of resilience and persistence consequently emerged.

Although only three participants specifically used the term “resilient” or “resiliency,” the participants all identified times during which they faced adversity such as illness, family problems, financial difficulty, stress, and having to meet the demands of the program. While resiliency implies flexibility, participant resiliency did not suggest that they did not find their experiences challenging, rather reinforced their comments of their capacity to recover from hardship. The participants in this study all acknowledged experiencing adversity at some point during their course of study but eventually reached a point at which they understood and anticipated overcoming adversity to be part of the process.

A small number of the Latinas in this study stated they were “used to stress,” but a doctoral degree presented undue stress, something new to them and their families. Most mentioned their degree was not necessary as they were already working professionals but was a degree they wanted. That was their primary source of stress. Several participants recalled periods of self-doubt and questioning if higher education was worth it. Some wondered if they

themselves doubted if they had made the correct choice, how could their families fully understand. While they found higher education to be an arduous experience, most stated they also found the experience exciting and rewarding.

Some of the women in this study recalled feeling overwhelmed and not knowing how to cope.

I had no idea how much work this would be. I had to find something that helped me deal with changes... I had to learn to change with the situation and just let things happen.
(Blanca)

I had very little time for anything and felt like I was not doing nothing right” (Marta).

I knew it was worth it. That’s what made it bearable. (Olga)

There were times I felt inadequate. I knew I was smarter than that, but the program humbles you. (Lydia)

You’ve gotta find what works for you... It can be anything, but once you find it, hold on. That’s what’s gonna get you through it. (Celia)

The participants’ stories revealed their strengths as they persevered. Perseverance is the persistence of a purpose-driven individual pursuing or accomplishing a goal despite problematic hindrances (Merriman, 2017). The participants were well familiar with remaining focused even though they felt at times that their problems were overwhelming. Blanca stated,

Felt like I was just putting one foot ahead of the other with no end in sight.

Adversity, perseverance, and their ability to recover connected the participants’ stories yet had distinct meaning for each of them. When asked if she felt as if she had encountered and overcome hardship, Blanca replied,

I would say I did... I’m strong... resilient don’t you think? I graduated, didn’t I? I made it happen.

Mora describes how she coped.

I put up a front...my happy face... Nobody made me go to school, you have to remind yourself over and over... can't take it out on others... You have to have something to pull you through when being yourself is not pretty.... I was worn out, but nothing could stop me... I was determined. The more I went through, the more I knew I could take on...It made me even more determined to finish... I could see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Celia admitted an ability to handle situations that most would consider intimidating yet experienced situations that even she considered disheartening but was determined to succeed.

Resilient? Yeah, maybe. Don't know that I would use that fluff term to describe me... Maybe tough? Hardheaded? Feisty... Certainly strong and tough because that's me but that's what it takes... The important thing is that I never gave up... Failure wasn't an option. I survived whatever they threw at me... Exercise helps clear the mind and helps you shake it off.

For most participants, resilience and perseverance became interdependent in that they persisted and persevered, which led to resiliency, but recognized they became resilient because they persevered. Resilience and perseverance support each other.

Therefore, I have categorized resilience and perseverance together. As they continued their education, they repeated a cycle of persistence, perseverance, and resilience numerous times and found that although their experiences were often stressful, with each experience, they became increasingly adept at managing difficulties. Resilience is relative and defined and interpreted by the individuals affected by the experience. For the Latinas in this study, resilience developed from perseverance, yet it was their persistence that kept them working through obstacles and remaining in the doctoral program despite challenges. Different experiences required the participants in this study to recover from adversity, which, in turn, forced them to develop both internal and external coping strategies to keep them moving forward. It was their adaptability that facilitated their earning their doctoral degrees but resilience from persistence that kept them coming back.

Stress Management

Theme #5 underscored that an essential component of this process of empowerment was the capacity to cope with stress at home and at school. Stress management entails coping that enables individuals to manage stressors and undesirable situations by helping to change the person's response to the circumstances (Kenney, 2007). Stress management was different for all of the participants. Some of the women identified themselves as able to "take control" of their lives, to manage life as it "came along." The ability to grasp the magnitude of work required to complete the doctoral program was a learning experience for most. Most were unprepared for the rigor of constant evaluation of their academic standing in addition to maintaining professional careers and raising families.

Prioritizing became the key to survival. Olga stated,

It's a balancing act... Prioritizing is the key... Choose your battles.

Marta recalled feeling

exhausted... better to stop sweating the small stuff... You learn to prioritize so you can bounce back... to survive.

Olga likewise expressed,

You learn to hold onto the important and do away with the trivial... Knowing what to let go of keeps you sane.

Emma shared similar a sentiment but recognized the benefit of resolve.

You choose what's most pressing at the time... stick to it till you get it done... just keep going.

Emma stated,

Survival mode teaches resilience.

My mother made sure I was a strong Latina... I am... always have been. The doctoral program was awful... simply awful... made me stronger... had to learn to look out for myself... taught me lessons I can teach my students... definitely made me stronger. I can

be the voice that my students need, and that's why I got my doctorate so that I can help others. (Linda)

As they continued through the doctoral program, they became increasingly resilient and learned adaptation. At the same time, they became aware of a transformation taking place within themselves. Their resolution strengthened, and they became stronger individuals who emerged as empowered and confident Latinas. They developed inner strength and an inner drive and were convinced they had the ability to succeed.

The term "emergence" is a nebulous term that often creates conflict but ends in change. Emergence refers to something or someone coming to existence and involves the making of meaning from turmoil (Holland, 1998). The women in this study were each uniquely influenced by culture, society, and their own resoluteness as they underwent emotional, mental, and physical upheaval while they pursued their education. As they persisted through different experiences, they learned to recognize challenges, prioritize, adapt, and overcome adversity.

Celia stated,

I had no idea what kinda ride I was in for but was worth it... I am a strong and productive Latina... Hispanic, whatever you want to call me, but I am one strong person partly because of what I went through when I was in the doctoral program... I am stronger than ever. There's a reason why there are so few with doctorates... The program helped define me.

I remember being almost apologetic for wanting to get my PhD. I didn't want to upset what I had. I'd been through so much... I had to make so many changes. The biggest change happened in me... I became what I am today... I gained confidence and power... don't think that would've happened if I hadn't gone back for my doctorate. (Blanca)

During their educational process, the participants gained a stronger sense of self through self-awareness and empowerment. As they traversed through the emotional journey that was associated with academia, something changed. They started developing a change in their self-perception as they became aware of how they were meeting goals as they worked toward degree

completion. Their self-esteem increased, which, in turn, increased their confidence. As they repeated the cycle of facing challenges and recuperating from exposure to challenges, they became stronger. At one point, they experienced an epiphany during which they became aware of the importance and purpose of their journey. They advanced from merely reacting to acting. As the participants became increasingly aware of their inner selves, “she begins to listen to the ‘still small voice’ within her; she finds an inner source of strength” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 54).

Marta stated,

My mom had always encouraged me and told me I had what it took to make it... It was me who ultimately had to know in my heart of hearts that I could do it... It is different when you know in your gut that you can and will make it.

I was timid and scared for so many reasons... When problems came up, thought that was the end of the road for me and that I’d have to drop out of school... I figured it out and took care of problems along the way... The more I did it the stronger I felt. (Blanca)

Not bad for a Latina that few expected would finish college let alone get my doctorate... It took a while to wrap my head around it and convince myself that I could do it, but when I did, by damn, I knew it was a done deal. (Celia)

Adversity could have been detrimental, but for the women in this study, adversity produced the opposite effect. As the participants progressed through their educational journey, they became acclimated to their surroundings and processes. In addition, they were gaining inner strength and feeling stronger.

Strength and resiliency gained from exposure to adversity inspired them, made them stronger, and allowed them to emerge as empowered individuals prepared to face challenges. They accomplished their goal of earning their doctoral degrees, but in the process, emerged more advanced as women than they ever imagined could occur.

Summary

In this chapter, I articulated the ways in which the intersectionality of culture, gender, and ethnicity (Cuádras & Uttal, 1999) affected the Latinas in this study from the perspective of sense of responsibility to their families and themselves. I discussed the impact that support systems, adaptation, and persistence had on their development of resilience, and consequently empowerment, which led to the strong emergence of the Latinas in this study. To understand how they make meaning of terminal degree attainment, it is important to understand experiences and factors that influenced their educational journey and degree completion.

The first theme, education and culture: motivation and challenges, was based on the participants' accounts of their upbringing in the Latino culture and how culture affected their families, as well as the participants' views on education. Sometimes the challenges were resolved at the expense of time spent with their families. Motivation and challenges were dependent on multiple factors. The subthemes of education as key to a successful future, finding it out for yourself, and learning successful strategies provided insight into issues that directly impacted their educational journey. Family served as motivation but was not without challenge. The Latinas had to overcome stereotypes, social and family expectations, support systems, and self-imposed challenges such as feeling guilty for aspiring to complete their education.

The second theme, significance of support systems, centered on the level of support needed to facilitate the participants' education from its inception to degree attainment. Supportive individuals who helped the Latinas to materialize their dreams of attaining their terminal degrees were identified. The subthemes of mother as key figure and other support systems identified the mothers as the main source of support for most of the participants. However, this study revealed hidden and unexpected figures as sources of support.

The third theme, adapting to change, emerged from their interpretations of recognizing adversity yet understanding that to succeed, they had to adapt. Lessons learned during the process of adaptation strengthened them and led to their becoming resilient. They learned that to navigate the difficult journey of higher education, they had to become resourceful and find means that enabled them to realize their goal of terminal degree attainment.

The fourth theme, empowerment, resilience, perseverance, and emerging stronger, became apparent as the participants persisted through adversity and followed their determination to succeed. Their determination led to resiliency but most importantly, their discovery of inner strength enabled them to emerge as stronger and empowered individuals.

Lastly, the fifth theme, stress management, was a necessary part of the doctoral program and life in general that they recognized. They coped by taking charge of their lives by learning to say no to nonimportant issues. As they learned to be selective in balancing home, family, and education, their stress levels lessened. Their persistence and reliance were motivators that kept them focused on their resolution to earn their degrees but not at the expense of their families or their education.

The women in this study at times felt conflicted as their internalized cultural values sometimes differed from their emerging roles that developed from their acquisition of resiliency, personal growth, and emergence of self. For the participants in this study, traditional hierarchy was no longer the norm. The Latinas recalled graduate school as being unpredictable with some days being easier than others. It was during those difficult days that support made the difference between pursuing their education or giving up. All of the participants expressed gratitude for those who supported them.

For the Latinas in this study, adversity and perseverance served as catalysts for personal growth, self-discovery, change, empowerment, and emerging stronger. The participants embraced their Latina culture, as well as their new identities as empowered Latinas. Being Latina was perceived as a source of pride for all the women in this study. They expressed in some way feeling proud of their accomplishment, and most expressed wanting to continue to open doors for future Latinas.

Culture, ethnicity, gender, and their sense of identity uniquely affected the Latinas in this study, yet they shared similarities that occurred as they navigated the doctoral program. Cultural beliefs and their perception of self-identity were how most made meaning of their educational experience. Understanding the Latinas' culture, ethnic identity, and perception of self is vital to comprehending how their academic success was affected. Most importantly, it is necessary to understand how their experiences revealed factors that enabled them to obtain their doctorate.

Support systems proved invaluable to the Latinas' degree completion. The safety net that support systems provided afforded them time to focus on their studies. As they focused on their education, they also reflected on the impact their education had on their families and on them as Latinas, and their roles within their families. The participants in this study were faced with multiple challenges during their educational pursuit but persevered as they adapted and found various means of successfully coping with challenges. They developed a "voice" and survival skills as they learned to ask for help from key individuals such as family, mentors, and colleagues.

Latinas in this study developed a feeling of having a right to education versus questioning if an education was the right thing to do. Their journey toward self-efficacy and emergence as strong Latinas experienced setbacks. The participants' perseverance, however, led to resilience,

which added to their sense of self. That, in turn, strengthened their determination to succeed and resulted in their emergence as empowered Latinas.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted by exploring the experiences of nine south Texas Latinas who had completed their terminal degrees. This study examined factors that contributed to successful terminal degree attainment and explored the role that families played in supporting or hindering educational achievement for nine high-achieving south Texas Latinas. It was anticipated that families would be willing to support their daughters in their endeavor to earn their graduate degrees. Since most of the participants were married and had children, it was also assumed that there would be some degree of difficulty in finding a balance between family and education. What was not anticipated was the degree of initial hesitation by families to support the participants' dream of pursuing higher education.

This chapter presents an overview of the study, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, and major themes. Findings are discussed in relation to other research studies and a model of the pathway to degree completion is presented. The chapter concludes with limitations and implications of the study as well as recommendations for future research,

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore cultural and social influences and factors that contributed to degree attainment for nine south Texas Latinas. The objective was to explore influences that facilitated or hindered their attaining their doctorate.

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed by the tenets of Bandura's social learning theory that asserts behavior is learned by observation of others' behavior and adopting and internalizing observed behavior even when recipients did not outwardly demonstrate a behavior change (Bandura, 1969,

1977, 1986, 1988, 1997; Wills & McEwen, 2001). The participants faced challenges, but learned to adapt, persist, and remain on course by observing and emulating successful doctoral program graduates.

The Latinas expressed that at some point while in higher education, they experienced cultural, ethnic, or gender bias that heightened their awareness of differences between non-Latinas and them. Some of the Latinas expressed feeling like novelties who were out of place but were accommodated. Most regarded those experiences as being part of their new environment, while others believed it was a sign of the times. Experiences from the overlapping of culture, ethnicity, and gender in their new environment brought to light the concept of intersectionality which is essential to understand in furthering educational equity.

As issues of gender and ethnicity emerged in the analysis of participants' stories, I returned to research the literature to explore studies addressing gender, racial equality, and intersectionality (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gilborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2000; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Critical race feminism was added as a lens of analysis which added to my understanding of factors that impeded the Latinas as they pursued higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this phenomenological study:

- Which influential factors contributed to the successful terminal degree attainment of nine high-achieving south Texas Latinas?
- What role did family play in supporting or hindering educational achievement?

Research Question 1: Influential Factors

Participants identified personal strengths to enable them to overcome their struggles. They attributed their ability to manage stress as the key to doctoral program tenacity.

These intrinsic factors facilitated their doctoral persistence. This is consistent with Tinto (1993) and Wao (2010) who suggest that multiple facilitative factors were needed to empower the determination to succeed, a precursor to persistence. As noted in Table 2, factors that affected them while in the program were either facilitative or detrimental, yet both were influential for different reasons.

Facilitative factors listed in Table 2 were primarily self-driven by the participants' focus on degree attainment. Ryan and Deci (2000) supported that motivation could be self-inspired and self-directed or could emulate a secondary influential source such as occurs from community influences that encourage and promote change within the individual. The power of motivation as the drive behind the desire to succeed is further supported by the self-determination theory that elucidates how resolute and persistent behavior effect goal achievement.

Table 2

Facilitative and Detrimental Factors to Degree Attainment

Facilitative Factors	Detrimental Factors
Coping Methods	Inequitable Gender Expectations
Self-efficacy	Lack of Peer Support
Ability to Adapt	High Expectations
Tenacity	Lack of Mentors
Clear Direction	Internal Conflict
Support Systems	Feeling Isolated

Studies indicate internally driven aspirations and internalization of said behaviors and objectives produce changes that lead to learning and understanding at a capacity that results in personal growth changes (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Comparable studies indicate potential benefits resultant of their education were driving forces for educational attainment, as they were for the majority of the Latinas in this study (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez, & Conner, 2012).

The participants' goals were innately motivated aspirations they chose to fulfill, goals they set for themselves because the goals were what they wanted. Most significant was that the goals served to instill confidence in their own abilities and strengths. The intrinsic driving force and level of commitment toward achieving their doctorate were different for each of them. Coping methods, coupled with clear direction and a high level of support, contributed to their college readiness. The Latinas' confidence in their abilities to succeed is in agreement with Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997) theory of self-efficacy that refers to one's ability to adapt so as to control self-behavior as a means of attaining a set task. Self-efficacy were the participants' internalized beliefs of self-control that enabled them to recognize their capacity to succeed and prepared them to earn their degrees (Bandura, 1997).

Research by Gonzalez, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) noted that additional studies indicated that pursuing higher education for minorities was often limited by lack of social and economic resources and family obligations. They might not have the knowledge base or support systems needed to pursue avenues that provided an easier route to academic success. That lack of resources contrasted non-Latino students who might have parents who were familiar with academia and could draw on their own lived experiences to facilitate degree retention and completion for their families. Family responsibility and high expectations for success without support, resources, or mentorship to facilitate the process complicates the pathway to degree attainment. In keeping with conclusions in Gonzalez, et al.'s (2003) and Espino, Munoz,

Marquez, & Kiyama's (2010) studies, the Latinas' pursuance of their terminal degree was complicated with family expectations and lack of resources.

Detrimental factors, as depicted in Table 2, were primarily socially or family-driven extrinsic factors that developed from influences such as family and cultural expectations. Detrimental factors created obstacles that impeded their progression through the doctoral program and required them to utilize facilitative factors to overcome the hindrances of detrimental factors. For the Latinas in this study, detrimental factors created stress that hampered their degree pursuit.

The participants in this study were proactive trailblazers whose internal strengths enabled them to capitalize on facilitative modalities that allowed them to remain focused on finding the positive among unfavorable situation as they continued their education. They learned to rise above difficulty as they managed the disadvantage of detrimental factors. Their terminal degree was contingent on utilization of facilitative and effective control of detrimental factors.

Research Question 2: The Role of Family

A major finding of successful degree attainment for the Latinas in this study was the role that family as sources of support played in providing "me time" for the participants to find balance between higher education and family as the Latinas navigated the doctoral program. Initially, most of the participants' families were reluctant to support their daughters' pursuing graduate school as they were unfamiliar with the process.

Parental attitudes influenced how the participants felt about their decisions to return for their doctoral degrees. Lack of family support was due to a myriad of reasons to include concern for the participants' families, cultural expectations, and concern about participants not fitting in with the host culture during their educational journey (Gloria et al., 2005). Consequently,

parental approval of the participants' using family time to pursue higher education was not always given. High expectations from family created discord. Conflict stemmed from apprehension about the length of time required to complete the doctoral program and care the participants' families would receive if the women were preoccupied with their education.

Alexander, et al. (2007) concurred that parental unfamiliarity with graduate school requirements was often the primary reason for parental disapproval. Parents' expectations of their daughters were often in conflict with what was necessary to succeed in the doctoral program. Consistent with Gonzalez et al.'s (2004) findings, while parents voiced wanting their daughters to capitalize on academic opportunities, most believed their daughters should be home with their families and not away from home.

More than half of the participants expressed feeling anxious when initially broaching the subject of returning to academia. They valued and wanted support, but some family members questioned if a terminal degree was necessary. Respect is revered in the Latino culture. The Latinas in this study did not want to risk disapproval or loss of mutual respect. Traditionally, education in the Latino culture had primarily been reserved for males who were the anticipated breadwinners. For some of the women in this study, families did not consider their higher education necessary, because they felt that the participants' families should take precedence over an optional education.

When the participants returned to graduate school, their responsibilities to their families were often strained, which led to guilt and subsequent stress over having to choose between their families and their education. The participants' perceived future quality of life often led them to place emphasis on their education as they delegated family responsibilities to their support systems. Placing education above family needs increased the participants' self-reproach over not

being there for their families. The participants' families stepped in and provided emotional, physical, and emotional support.

Despite some of the families not fully understanding why the participants chose to return to higher education, their continued encouragement made the difference between the participants pursuing or discontinuing their education. Eight of the nine Latinas expressed frustration over their perceived loss of family control. The participants recognized that although support was not always provided exactly as they wanted it, their families went above and beyond in facilitating their education, often acting as surrogate parents.

Support was different in each family. Families were instrumental in assuming different roles in caring for the participants' families that enabled the Latinas to remain focused on their studies. For the families who had a college education themselves or personal knowledge about the benefits of higher education, they realized the advantages that a terminal degree would mean for the participants. For those with no personal formal college education experience, the anticipation of an improved quality of life for the participants that was better than their own was what motivated them to continue to support the women.

Although the participants all had college degrees and personally experienced the benefits of a college education, they knew that continued educational advancement was key in remaining competitive in the job market and in remaining employable in jobs that paid higher salaries but required terminal degrees. The participants felt an obligation to succeed academically to provide better lives for their immediate families. Recognizing the challenges and sacrifices their families made as they provided support for the Latinas to follow their dream of completing graduate school, most of the participants realized that failure to earn their degree was not an option.

Family values and responsibilities were complex and played dual roles acting as both facilitators and hindrances. Most of the participants mentioned how their return to higher education was different and much more difficult from what they had previously experienced. The Latinas acknowledged the uncertainty they felt as they tried to reconcile their need to succeed academically while honoring their commitment to their families. Without the help of their support systems, most of the participants acknowledged they could have not completed their education.

Detrimental factors negatively influenced and hampered the participants' education. Those factors were extrinsic as well as socially and family driven. Obstacles were multifactorial and not always academically related. Family support often differed from that of the participants' expectations. Most of the women recalled feeling as if they were losing control as they delegated their families' care to caregivers who managed situations differently. Frustration followed with the realization that they needed others' support in order to be successful. Valencia (1989) conceived their allegiance to culture as fundamental to goal valuation. Some of the barriers experienced by the participants stemmed from their family's cultural and social expectations that the participants should care for their own families rather than pursue further education.

The level of support was sometimes inconsistent and not always positive. There was strife. Some of the families supporting the participants at times expressed feeling conflicted between their beliefs that mothers were to be there for their families and their commitment to continue support for their family members in academia. Latino culture holds the family in high regard. Families provided necessary support but, alternatively, families sometimes presented difficulties that the participants learned to accept. Out of respect, the participants accepted their families' help but felt they could not express disapproval without seeming ungrateful.

The Latinas experienced frustration and isolation which became additional stressors that added to internal conflict and contributed to their feelings of unfair expectancies simply because they were women, wives, and mothers. High expectations seemed insurmountable at times and increased the feeling of not having adequate mentors and support although for most, their families remained committed. Some of the Latinas mentioned that as their families tried harder to fill the void left by the participants, the more isolated the participants felt because their children were looking to someone else to fill the mother role. Literature supports that isolation challenges degree attainment, whereas students with an increased social network complete the doctoral program quicker than students without support (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

The participants worked to overcome barriers and used motivating factors as means of leading them to their goal. Their stories addressed anticipated difficulties as they continued the doctoral program. Some of the Latinas repeatedly expressed that certain difficulties they encountered may not have been as problematic had they been male, because family responsibility was primarily entrusted to the mother. The addition of family responsibility to their educational expectations created stress that they learned to manage. For those who did not have children, they felt the cultural pressure of completing their education while remaining cognizant of their obligations to their parents who had supported them through graduate school.

Eight of the nine Latinas in this study credited their family as being critical to their degree completion. One of the women believed family was important but believed support can come from multiple sources although the participant concurred that “some sort of support from your family is always nice” and is necessary for successful terminal degree attainment. The results of this study were consistent with previous research that found support systems to be a

fundamental component in providing doctoral students with the resources needed to succeed in higher education (Gardner, 2009; Gonzalez, 2007).

Findings

This study examined the stories of nine south Texas Latina residents whose degree completion was made possible by their tenacity but most importantly, by the support they received during their educational journey. Significant to these findings was the role that support systems played in both facilitating and hindering their success.

Five major themes and five subthemes emerged from the data: 1. Education and Culture: Motivation and Challenges (subthemes: Education as key to a successful future; Finding it out for yourself; Learning successful strategies); 2. Significance of Support Systems (subthemes: Mother as key figure; Other support systems); 3. Adapting to Change; 4. Emerging stronger through resilience, persistence, and empowerment; 5. Stress Management.

The participants recognized the significance of support systems and understood that no one source of support sufficed in assisting a doctoral student in higher education. A network of support systems was necessary to facilitate the doctoral students' success in obtaining their degrees. The primary source of support was family, particularly their mother who emerged as the key source of support but extended to peers and mentors who had either already been through the academic system or were familiar with doctoral program demands.

Unique to this study was the unexpected spousal support for four of the Latinas. Their spouses provided a source of balance between stress and support as they exemplified *caballerismo*, a constructive and progressive attribute demonstrated by Hispanic men who support their families by assuming what were once perceived as their spouses' duties. *Caballerismo* not only lessened the burden and pressure felt by the four women, it decreased

stress for their extended supportive families (Castillo & Cano, 2007; Castillo, Cano, Chen, Blucker, & Olds, 2008). Based on the usual dynamics associated with Latino family cohesiveness, improved relationships were expected from *caballerismo* (Castillo, Conoley, Brossart, & Quiros, 2007; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007). Improved family relationships were additionally facilitative.

The participants in this study were professional career women who were mindful of their family obligations yet opted to pursue higher education to earn their terminal degree. Completing graduate school led to self-fulfillment, the opportunity to help others as they became role models from which others could learn, but most importantly for the benefits their families stood to gain. The hardships they experienced ultimately became advantageous. Adversity became the catalyst that strengthened and drove the participants toward degree attainment. Persistence became the connection between cultural influence, education, and graduate school as the participants learned to manage facilitative and detrimental factors that influenced the Latinas as they navigated higher education. Facilitative and detrimental factors influenced their educational pursuit yet most of the participants accepted it as necessary to appreciate the value of their education.

Fundamental Relationship of Culture and Education

The phenomena of education and culture were interrelated for all of the participants but to what extent was personally defined. For the Latinas in this study, the central tenet that culture and education have a reciprocal effect held true. Although there was no definitive example of cause and effect, most of the participants acknowledged cultural changes within themselves and their families that developed secondary to their continued education. Consequently, their education affected their family's culture and cultural changes affected their families. Social

changes were heavily influenced by their culture yet could not negate the impact that education had on the transformation that occurred from the blending of culture and education. Giorgetti, Campbell, and Arslan (2017) agreed that social developments were coupled with education. The relationship between culture and education became crucial factors in understanding and explaining social change. The Latinas in this study experienced social change with consequent personal change as they navigated the doctoral program.

Culture and social change were major factors that surfaced as the Latinas returned to college and were faced with the challenge of acculturating into the host culture that sometimes conflicted with their previous beliefs. For most of the participants, cultural mores, social change, and education were often incongruent. Acculturation resulted in psychological changes as well as changes in their behavior (Berry, 2005; Fox, Merz, Solórzano, & Roesch 2013). Changes for some of the Latinas proved to be overwhelming at times, but their support systems facilitated their coping. Adversity was the catalyst that initiated changes that led to empowerment and academic success (Santa Maria, 2018).

For the participants in this study, culture, education, and careers were interwoven into the fabric of their achievements. The culture and ethnicity into which the participants were born were highly interdependent and influential in their affirmation of their identity as Latinas. The environment influences individuals (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). The Latinas' families established the foundation of culture and socialization to which they were exposed since birth. What they learned they learned from families but continued exposure to social change and education changed their cultural beliefs. A fundamental relationship between culture and education is undeniable. The introduction of education to culture, particularly when the Latinas

entered the small and elite group of those with doctoral degrees, transformed them socially and culturally.

Pathway to the Doctoral Degree: A Process Model

Most of the participants expressed experiencing change as they transitioned through the doctoral program. Circumstances and specific needs obliged the women to draw on different coping methods. Graduate school changes elicited a myriad of emotions for the participants yet despite unfamiliarity with the process, they all expressed feeling increasingly stronger as they advanced through higher education.

During data analyses, the pathway to degree attainment model in Figure 5 emerged. From the Latinas' educational experiences developed a pathway in which they learned from each encounter as they progressed to earning their terminal degree.

Although the model indicates a pathway, the pathway was iterative rather than static. As the participants got closer to completing the doctoral program, they gained knowledge from repeated experiences. The iterative process involved recursive cycles that brought the participants closer to their goal with each repetition.

In Figure 4, Latina identity is listed at the beginning of the pathway. While Latina identity is not a "step" in the process, the participants as adults began the graduate program with a sense of self; their ethnic identity. Torres (2003a) noted ethnic identity as a dynamic concept that changed based on past experiences and environment with the salient point being how people identify themselves. A sense of self was essential prior to beginning the Latinas' journey as it served as the foundation on which they navigated higher education. Their identity was the product of cultural, familial, and social influences as defined by their own values and principles.

Exposure to change caused the participants to question their beliefs as they related change to their self-identification as Latinas.



Figure 4. Pathway to degree attainment.

The participants learned by observation, internalized changes, and acquired a sense of inner strength that inspired them. The Pathway model shows the course the participants followed. The doctoral program was demanding, rigorous, and arduous but that only strengthened their determination. When challenged with adversity; persistence was critical to survival. They persisted and remained focused as they continued their efforts despite barriers.

Their ability to rebound from adversity made them resilient as they developed the ability to continually recover from challenges regardless of the degree of difficulty. Although only three participants specifically used the term “resilient” or “resiliency,” the participants all identified

times during which they faced adversity such as illness, family problems, financial difficulty, stress, and having to meet the demands of the program. While resiliency implies flexibility, participant resiliency does not suggest that they did not find their experiences challenging, rather reinforced their comments of their capacity to recover from hardship. They recognized setbacks as temporary and were resolute in their beliefs that they would bounce back. Several of the participants recalled periods of self-doubt and questioning if higher education was worth it. Some wondered if they had made the correct choice in pursuing higher education.

For most of the participants, resilience and perseverance became interdependent. They persisted and persevered, which led to resiliency, but recognized they became resilient because they persevered. As they continued their education, they repeated the cycle of persistence, perseverance, and resilience numerous times. They found their experiences stressful but with each experience, became increasingly adept at managing difficulties.

Different experiences required the participants to recover from adversity, which, in turn, led to the identification of both internal and external influences that kept them moving forward. It was their adaptability that facilitated their earning their doctoral degrees but persistence and resilience that kept them coming back. Prioritizing became vital to survival.

The Latinas became increasingly adaptive and resilient. At the same time, they sensed a transformation taking place within themselves. As exposure to various experiences occurred, they questioned past beliefs, gained different perspectives, and adopted new viewpoints. This

The participants persisted and in doing so, felt stronger and in control. As they adapted, some became conscious of developing a feeling of empowerment that was necessary to cope with the many adjustments needed while in the doctoral program. These women repeatedly overcome obstacles that could have otherwise been deterrents. Having experienced adversity in

many forms, they persevered, rebounded, and emerged stronger. Their stories demonstrated their acquisition of resilience consequential to their experiences, but the women remarked their persistence was what led to success. Resilience was defined by the individual. The phenomena of resilience from persistence emerged.

The term emergence is a nebulous term that often creates conflict but ends in change. Emergence involved the making of meaning from turmoil. The participants were each uniquely influenced by culture, society, and their own resoluteness as they underwent emotional, mental, and physical upheaval as they pursued their education. They turned adversity into personal challenges, persisted, and emerged stronger. Figure 4 illustrates facilitative and detrimental factors that influenced degree attainment but Figure 5 illustrates their pathway to success. Their self-esteem and confidence increased as they overcame obstacles; each iterative cycle made them stronger and resilient. Persistence strengthened their determination and they became confident individuals who emerged as empowered Latinas.

The Latinas developed a feeling of strength that resulted in their empowerment and knowledge that they could overcome most obstacles. Their personal growth resulted in resilience, empowerment, and ultimately, their degree attainment.

Limitations

First, the participants were all from south Texas, a predominantly Latino populated region in Texas. A predominantly Latino region would project a culture and customs that are primarily influenced by Latino culture. Second, the study was subject to researcher bias and participant forthrightness. As a Latina researcher, I had cultural, gender, and ethnic similarities to those of the respondents. It was essential to return to their interviews to review the data to ensure

accuracy. Third, only one interview was conducted. Considering the limitations as noted, conducting more than one interview could have potentially added to the findings of this study.

Implications for Practice

Despite the Latino population being the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States, studies show that Latina degree attainment is half of that of White students. The trend has continued since 2000 (Barshay, 2018; Harris & Tienda, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2019). One implication of this study is the need for better understanding of facilitative and detrimental factors that affect the educational pursuit and degree attainment of Latinas so as to facilitate their negotiation of academic success. Recommendations include providing programs to strengthen academic skills and develop mentoring programs.

A second important implication derives from the power that support systems hold in helping doctoral students to continue their educational pursuits. Findings point to the strength of cumulative sources of support, such as were received from family but augmented by spouses. Their specific ways of influencing the participants in this study set spouses apart yet establish that sometimes seemingly unlikely sources of support are invaluable in helping doctoral students meet their academic needs. The Latinas in this study expressed difficulty in finding balance between work, family, and employment. It is essential for future research to explore specific ways of supporting participants in higher education. Research should study how support systems can sustain Latinas as they pursue their education and should discover how universities could include families in recognizing the demands of the doctoral program. Understanding present university means of involving family in supporting doctoral students and of identifying future programs to provide even more assistance is critical to help Latinas become equally represented in attaining their terminal degrees.

Recommendations for Research

This study is a small but significant step toward identifying factors that helped the Latinas in this study achieve their doctoral degrees. Multiple components contributed to their success in their completing their education with the most beneficial being the value of support systems. Being Latinas represent a low number of doctoral degree graduates, it is important to continue to explore means that promote Latina doctoral degree attainment.

The first recommendation involves support systems. Support systems emerged as the key factor in assisting the Latinas in this study to remain in the program and to succeed in graduating with their doctoral degree. The supportive role of the maternal figure emerged as the most significant person, although some spouses came forward and became just as beneficial for the participants. Latino culture has gender role expectations that were traditionally espoused by both men and women. Men assuming traditional female roles entailed the overlapping of culture, race and gender, which could have potentially created a climate of discrimination and family distancing as *caballerismo* did not always produce an environment of acceptance of the men's new roles (Rodriguez et al., 2007). Further research is needed to examine how significant others can take a more pro-active role in assisting their loved one through the doctoral program.

The second recommendation is to study Latinas who failed to complete the doctoral program to identify factors that hindered earning their doctoral degrees. The underrepresentation of United States Latinas in doctoral degree attainment continues (NCES, 2018). The incremental rise of Latinos at the doctoral level at 1.1% is encouraging but is less than half of that of non-Latino students whose graduate school increase is 2.8% (Schak & Nichols, n.d.). The rationale for Latinas' substandard rate of doctoral degree completion is multifactorial with family obligation being the primary reason but needs to be explored further to determine other root

causes for the high attrition rate (Carteret, 2011). Determining why Latinas failed to enroll or dropped out of graduate school is critical to finding means to promote graduate school enrollment and retention. The attrition rate for failure to complete the doctoral program signifies the need for intercessions that may be instituted to enable Latinas not only to remain in the doctoral program, but most importantly, to facilitate their earning their doctorate.

The third research proposal is to address mentorship. For some of the participants in this study, mentorship provided guidance that enabled understanding of the requirements of the doctoral program. For some, mentorship was lacking and affected their ability efficiently to navigate higher education. The demands of the program produced varying degrees of difficulty, with some of those problems imposed by peers, and negative behavior was not always discouraged by mentors. Research is needed to explore how efficacious mentors facilitate the transition and successful navigation of the doctoral program.

Lastly, the Latinas in this study were all south Texas residents. Research is needed to explore if the rate of Latina/o doctoral degree attainment is higher in localities with a high Latino population in other regions (Martinez, 2005). Research on doctoral degree completion in different geographical regions in Texas and perhaps the United States would be beneficial to explore to determine if the ethnic mix in a specific locale impacts doctoral completion rate. It is suggested that higher education promotes social progress and the combination of different social groups promotes an impartial society (Hurtado, 2006). However, incorporating the Latino population into a diverse society might not be a simple process. Locality and the population makeup affect the degree of diversity. A study by Franklin in 2011 indicated how Hispanics were less likely than other ethnic groups to accept student diversity (Franklin, 2013). Therefore, is the

Latina doctoral degree completion rate in south Texas less or equitable to regions that do not foster the Latino culture?

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

This study adds to the body of literature that focuses on Latina degree completion by identifying factors that facilitated and hindered their degree attainment and how culture, ethnicity, and gender affected their educational choices. The most important findings in this study were the identification of the significance of support systems and the recognition that multiple sources were critical to degree completion. Support sources were usually family members, but the support of peers, mentors, friends, and faculty members also contributed to success. Support came in many forms. Spousal support provided an additional and unexpected support system that expanded the Latinas' circle of support. It is important to honor that there were changes in the Latino culture that had a positive impact.

This study strove to explore the participants' stories in hopes of identifying factors that facilitated academic success for the Latinas in this study and to explore the role that family played in helping or hindering academic success. The women in this study spoke about their cultural beliefs and the effect their upbringing had on them as Latinas, wives, mothers, and students. Their allegiance to family was evident.

For all, the sacrifices they made were for the sake of pursuing their doctorate; for most, their altruistic motivation was the benefit for their families. It is imperative to explore how the Latinas in this study overcame challenges that affected their education. They anticipated change but most underestimated the degree of difficulty those changes held and how their commitment to their studies affected their families. They emphasized the need to "know who you are and what you want", "remain true to yourself", and remaining focused and resilient. They advised to

“pick your battles”, and develop coping skills manage difficult situations that arise. Most recalled learning by trial and error. Some recalled specific setbacks that temporarily discouraged them, but they all remained focused.

Their stories were their interpretations of their experiences as they progressed through the doctoral program; I merely gave voice to their feelings and interpretation of factors that enabled their success. The Latinas in this study successfully overcame barriers and underwent transformation that strengthened them and helped them emerge as empowered and educated Latinas who successfully earned their doctoral degrees. However, without support systems, earning their degrees might not have been possible. Their stories were significant in identifying facilitative or detrimental factors that affected doctoral degree pursuance. Those factors were important to identify so that future Latinas might benefit from the findings in this study.

To say that I have a complete understanding of what is precisely needed for Latinas to be successful in the doctoral program would be untrue. There is no single defining moment that leads to degree attainment as what is needed constantly changes and sometimes includes the unexpected. The majority of the Latinas in this study experienced the unexpected benefit of family cohesiveness brought about by change. Once the participants’ mothers realized what earning their doctorates meant to their daughters and the sacrifices their daughters were willing to make to achieve their goals, their mothers’ attitudes changed as did family dynamics. Rather than dividing the family, the participants’ ambitions and clear objectives that their sacrifices were for the betterment of their families showed graduate school actually solidified their support systems’ willingness to help. What remains consistent is the learning and transformation that the women in this study acknowledged. In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, “I change myself, I change the world” (n.d.).

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Appendices

Appendix A

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The University of the Incarnate Word

IRB Continuation/Completion Form

In accordance with Federal Regulations 45CFR46, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects must review research protocols at least annually, or more frequently if warranted. All approved research must submit a continuing review request to the IRB prior to the expiration of their IRB approval. Sufficient time must be allowed for IRB review of these continuation requests. Please contact the IRB at 829-2758 if you have any questions.

IRB #: 08-09-006

Project Title: A Study of the Lived Experiences of South Texas Hispanic Women during Higher Education Attainment

Principal Investigator: Mendez, Maria

PI Tel. and e-mail: 361-490-5839 mendez@satx.rr.com

Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Dorothy Ettling - Dorothy Ettling

Advisor Tel. and e-mail: 829-2764 ettling@u.wtx.edu

If research is funded, please provide information about source of funding and grant number:

Study is Completed

If you have finished enrolling subjects, performing study interventions, collecting data, and the only data that you will be working with is deidentified, you may close your study and continue to analyze the deidentified data.

Completed.

☒ has been completed and closed.

Total number of subjects enrolled in the study since the study began:

Go to signature box on next page.

Study is Being Continued

You must have active, on-going IRB approval in order to enroll any subjects, perform any study interventions, collect new data, and/or analyze identified data. Any changes to the originally approved protocol must be approved by the IRB *before* implementing the changes.

Continuation.

This study (*select only one option*):

☐ will continue to involve human subjects during the next approval period. If the study will continue, please answer questions starting with "Risk assessment".

☐ will not involve human subjects directly but will involve analysis of identifiable data.

(Continues on next page.)

Appendix B

A Study of Familial and Cultural Factors That Contributed to Degree Attainment for Nine South Texas Latinas

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a doctoral student in Organizational Leadership in Education attending the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. I will be conducting a qualitative research study of the lived experiences of the South Texas Hispanic Women during higher education attainment. Your name was suggested to me as a possible participant. Data supports the fact that a greater number of Hispanic women are entering institutions of higher education and pursuing their doctoral degrees. The data obtained from this research focuses on the educational journey of the Hispanic woman. The data may be helpful for future applicants who are contemplating pursuing higher education.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and will pose no potential risk or harm to you. Participation requires one individual interviewing session that will be audio and possibly video-taped. All material collected will be held in strict confidence. As transcription is completed, the material will be assigned a number and then will be placed in a secure place to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Information will not be identifiable.

It is your right to discontinue the study at any time should you feel that you do not wish to be video or audio taped. The interview will be ceased immediately. Completion and return of the signed consent form indicate consent to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate in the study, it will not have an effect on professional organization membership or future affiliations with this program or with this university.

Should this study or a section of this study be published, you will not be identifiable nor will it be traceable to you. Your data will be integrated with the total data collected for this study.

When this consent form indicating that you wish to be a part of the research has been returned to me, further instructions indicating a mutually agreed meeting site will be forwarded to you.

Your signature indicates that you have consented to take part in this research study and that you have read and understand the information given.

Please complete the enclosed registration and return it to me immediately. I look forward to hearing from you.

You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee for further information:

Dr. Dorothy Ettling
Professor of Education
University of the Incarnate Word
4301 Broadway
San Antonio, TX 78209-6397
Telephone: 210-829-2764

Signature of Subject

Signature of Witness

Name of Subject

_____/_____
Date Time

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C
Study Qualification Assessment

Dear Potential Participant:

I am in process of preparing a list of potential participants for my upcoming dissertation research project entitled A Study of the Lived Experiences of South Texas Hispanic Women during Higher Education Attainment. To determine whether you qualify to participate in this study, please respond to the following questions. All information received is vital to the success of this study.

To participate in this study, you must be of Hispanic descent, be female, attained a doctorate degree, be willing to participate in this study, and be able to read, understand, sign and return this informed consent.

Please complete the enclosed form and return the information to me at as soon as possible. For your convenience, I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope. You may also choose to fax this form to me at: 210-490-4046. Thank you in advance for your help. For my records, it is imperative that I receive your signed form if you wish to participate in this study.

Please check the following list of questions if you meet the criteria.

1. _____ Yes, I am of Hispanic descent.
2. _____ Yes, I am female.
3. _____ Yes, I have attained my terminal degree.
4. _____ Yes, I am willing to voluntarily participate in this study.
5. _____ Yes, I am able to read, understand, sign and return this informed consent.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

A Study of Familial and Cultural Factors That Contributed to Degree Attainment for Nine South Texas

Questions for Participants

Please complete the following information and return with your consent forms. All information will be coded so that you will retain anonymity. All data will be included in the final analysis of this study.

Family Background:

1. Name _____
2. Date of Birth _____
3. Place of birth _____
4. What is your profession? _____
5. What was the level of education attained by your parents? _____
6. Including yourself, how many siblings are in your family? _____
7. With which significant figure do you mostly identify? _____
8. Who would you say has been most influential in your family and
why? _____
9. Tell me about the language spoken in your home.

10. Describe the approach toward education in your home.
