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Mentorship in Academia and Career: A Scholarly Personal Narrative of a Latina Millennial's Experience

Alyssa S. Cortes Kennedy
University of the Incarnate Word, lysscortes@yahoo.com

MENTORSHIP IN ACADEMIA AND CAREER: A SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF A LATINA MILLENNIAL'S EXPERIENCE

by

ALYSSA S. CORTES-KENNEDY

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the memory of my dad, grandfather, and grandmother, who I lost during the COVID-19 global pandemic while I was in the last years of this program.

Second, to all the women who pursue a doctorate, may we continue to feel heard, be seen, and be the change.

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Alyssa S. Cortes-Kennedy

University of the Incarnate Word, 2023

This dissertation, my scholarly professional narrative, is a self-reflection of mentoring experiences as a Latina Millennial in academia and professional settings. These experiences are told through the art of storytelling using *testimonio*, which promotes critical awareness of cultural intersectionality and intercultural understanding through first-person narrative. My experiences with mentorship in personal, academic, and professional workspaces include mentors who may have influenced my own journey as a doctoral student and business professional as a Latina Millennial. Using testimonio helps explain certain cultural challenges, specific scenarios, experiences, familial responsibilities, and cultural barriers, and how identities are preserved, used, and recognized in individual social contexts. This deeply reflective scholarly personal narrative testimonio introduces a deeper, meaningful, and mutual learning relationship for audiences to connect with the researcher. This dissertation followed a non-traditional format because many personal experiences serve as the data of experiences for this scholarly professional narrative testimonio. The goal of this study was to use scholarly professional narrative testimonio to emphasize the weight of responsibility one Latina woman had to complete a doctoral program and maintain a professional career outside of academia and how the umbrella of mentorship was a part of that journey. Most importantly, this study shows the capability and adaptability of a Latina's experiences within multiple personal and professional

environments and how identities are often created because of cultural influences, decision-making, and personal motivation.

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Chapter I: Illusions and Reality

When I was a little girl, my maternal grandmother always said: “Everyone has a story, and you never know when or where you will be a part of a chapter.” Many years later, I reflect on how something so unimportant at that point of my childhood could be so profound, inspiring, and humbling as an adult.

When an individual thinks of a mentoring experience, it is often a personal and/or intentional act for the parties involved. It is often a method or form of guidance and support many individuals attest to from its positive or negative experiences and outcomes. It is an art that has been around for centuries. Short (2014) mentioned mentoring goes back to “ancient Greek mythology” (p. 8). Traditional mentoring is a top-down mentoring approach where a hierarchy is in place. It is an interactive process between a mentor and a protégé that requires a relationship or guiding hand (Luecke et al., 2004). While traditional mentorship functions by ranking and experience to coach or teach a younger generation, more recently, the hierarchy of age or seniority is not necessarily a dominant factor in all cases or scenarios of mentoring (Palmer, 2002; Zachary & Fischler, 2009). As more employees stay in their careers longer and retire later, mentors and mentees are shifting in age and seniority roles. Thinking from an academic perspective, it is common to remember one or two teachers or individuals who profoundly impacted one’s life. While this personal scholarly narrative focuses on specific experiences with academia and career experiences, it would beseech me if I did not acknowledge the foundational piece of my mentor relationships that started as a young girl.

Throughout my life, I have experienced mentorship in many forms: personally, professionally, and academically. However, my first team of mentors started at home with my family, maternal grandparents, mother, and bonus dad. Those lessons and experiences have

stayed with me throughout adulthood. Mentoring can be one part of completing a PhD program, which is a potentially positive factor in developing the student as a professional, exposing students to new types of critical thinking and analysis, and navigating professional subtleties (Young et al., 2019). Just as in our personal lives, a PhD student's ability to finish their degree is "multifactorial" (Young et al., 2019, p. 43). From a career perspective, organizations have used mentoring programs for interactive peer-to-peer learning and engagement that usually follows a traditional hierarchy, as there is often a wealth of knowledge one can garner from an individual with a long career and professional experience (Holt et al., 2016). Engaging with individuals is imperative to ensure a safe and valued organizational culture. By understanding individuals, in this example, on a holistic level, employees show others the importance of culture and community. This *testimonio* also seeks the perspective of the principal researcher, which is a significant part of this methodology. However, I never thought that one day those reflections would or could become the focus of my scholarly research and doctoral dissertation, much less if I would mentally be able to share highly personal testimonios of those encounters and lessons I have learned through my personal, academic, and professional career as a Latina Millennial.

The Yellow Brick Road

Chapter I explains the foundational piece of the research and the outline of this dissertation. It opens the conversation of self-reflection and research. Additionally, it sheds light on why this study was written in the context of a scholarly personal narrative (SPN). It further explains the purpose of the study, the problem statement, and the objective of the research and notes the research question.

In Chapter II, the SPN methodology practice is explained further, focusing on the roots of SPN and introducing its founding researcher, Dr. Robert Nash, a professor emeritus at the

University of Vermont (2022). It also explains SPN in the form of testimonio, the philosophy behind the research design. The research design is divided into four emphases: the traditional writing and technical aspects of SPN and how they were used in this study. The chapter summary explains the differences between credibility and reliability, possible criticism, and considerations the researcher recognized. The ontological and epistemological mindfulness and the overall positionality of the researcher follow.

Chapter III is the primary starting point of my SPN stories and reflections, interwoven with a literature review as points of reference and theoretical capturing moments. This mixed framework is detailed and explained in this chapter, in addition to the framework of my reflections, which are focal points of my recollections.

Chapter IV focuses on reflections and experiences centered around familial mentors in my childhood and adolescence, which are the foundation of myself as an individual and a research scholar. Each familial mentor is represented in their own space along with my reflection. I also explain growing up in mixed environments and how these can change one's responses, attitudes, and objectives. Finally, I explain how mentorship played a specific role growing up on a specific side of San Antonio, Texas, and why this is even more important now than ever.

Chapter V details the importance of mentoring throughout my higher educational journey, from community college through a doctorate program at one university. The impact of mentoring and a lack of representation of women of color within higher educational settings, and the general lack of women of color in academia and how that can create competitive drive and build a sense of self within one's identity are highlighted. The overall positive and negative effects summarize this chapter.

In Chapter VI, the narrative moves forward with how mentoring in professional career spaces is essential for many individuals but, more specifically, how it has impacted my journey, both positively and negatively. Next, I explain the term *Hispanic business professional* further and detail specific data from the current literature to highlight the highs and lows of where the workforce stands related to work philosophy. Next, the chapter highlights my career choices, motivations, and movements from a student perspective and a professional businesswoman and when, as a Latina, it makes a difference in some situations. Finally, I detail the acceptances, achievements, setbacks, and lessons learned from those experiences.

Chapter VII encompasses entitled loss and resistance: mentoring through grief. It explains the acknowledgment of self amid grief and death and the internal strength found to power through as a business professional and a doctoral student dealing with such tragic personal circumstances. It details grief's impact and opportunities and how those experiences taught me to become more empowered and find myself.

Finally, Chapter VIII presents the conclusion summarizing how this SPN testimonio impacts us all and how future research and researchers can look further into research implications, ideas of mentorship, mentoring mindfulness, and other opportunities for future research.

Adolescent Me

I was always very adult-minded as a child. While most children want to play with Barbie dolls or house, I was the child who climbed ladders to the rooftop, sold phonebooks, taught myself to type on my maternal grandfather's typewriter, and learned to write checks, all before the tender age of 6 years. For the most part, my mother would say I was a calm child with a streak of wit and grit; I liked to push the boundaries of my "adult thinking" and actions. I often

tried to outsmart the adults in my life, and while I was often unsuccessful, there were a few times I surprised my grandparents and mother with my bold reasoning. From a very early age, I was a dependable and accountable young girl; I was trusted to care for many things other children were not. My maternal grandfather developed Hansen's disease (known as leprosy) around 1958 while serving in the Army Air Core, now known as the U.S. Air Force. This disease significantly affected his limbs, primarily his hands, where he had substantial physical deformities. While this was publicly and medically a considerable handicap in medical books and to others who stared at or even questioned his problem, he never let others' comments keep him from doing the things he wanted and needed to do. He had impeccable handwriting, maintained his tactile abilities just as any other person, even still serving as a deputy sheriff, qualified to fire a service weapon, essentially "fit for duty." My grandfather taught me and often entrusted me to run errands, pay bills, write checks, and learn many home-improvement tasks. I often joke that I am probably the only PhD candidate who could write a 25-page reflection piece and retile a bathroom simultaneously.

I open this study with this reflection to make a point of self-awareness and share an epiphany I had in the summer of 2022 when I decided to change my dissertation 18 months after starting my original study. Many stories within the Latina community and other communities throughout our familial and professional society speak to changing the Latina self for the sake of traditional research implications. These climate adjustments happening in the workplace are often acknowledged or ignored. In academia, we often walk into the classroom and are expected to leave some portion of who we are at the door. This is because a unique group of sophisticated doctoral students find themselves studying and often competing with a small number of individuals in the same position. Competition is known as the unspoken rule's aspect of the

doctoral journey. It makes specific individuals ignore the obvious in conversation and deal with many topics in their own time. Many parts of myself as an individual have led me to where I am today, but mentoring is one of the most significant. However, we often only know a few of each other's stories as a society. Many instances have led me to where I am and what I have been able to accomplish or even fail. I have reflected on this, questioning whether I would finish my PhD and continue as a scholar. I found my answer in understanding that, as a researcher, I could not tell another's story without knowing who I am and having a better understanding of myself before I can move on to help others via storytelling.

Throughout my journey as an academic and career professional, I recognized that I had built strong, successful peer-to-peer relationships. Relationships and experiences are responsible for the individual I am today. As a young Latina, I had no room to "just study." I had to work full-time and maintain my full-time status as an undergraduate student. There was no room for failure or sick days, although now I realize I should have taken quite a few. Nevertheless, it is those experiences of working, studying, and trying to maintain a social life where I learned the importance of dedication, hard work, and determination—or did I? Mentorship was a part of my life through these stages, developing into who I am today. My mentors were and possibly still are unaware of their positive effects on me as a young developing adult going through grade school and college, starting my career, and now as a doctoral candidate.

I have been made aware by faculty, staff, and even my peers that 50% of students enrolled in doctoral programs successfully defend their dissertations and complete all the requirements set forth. The other 50% slowly fade over time (Aud et al., 2010). Statistically, women of color are a minority in graduate studies, even more so at the doctorate level (Gardner

& Holley, 2011). Latina women completing their doctoral education are less likely to complete their doctoral programs and endure in academic settings (Snyder & Dillow, 2010).

Even educated Latina women remain at a lower statistical completion rate at the master's and doctorate levels (see Figure 1). While some research suggests this is because of personal persistence, racism, negative socialization experiences, and limited access to mentoring (González, 2006; Snyder & Dillow, 2010; Solórzano, 1998; Truong et al., 2015), research is needed to understand Latina scholars and their personal experiences as students and professionals. Some qualitative studies focus on the personal and professional effects of academics and careers, maybe even some much like this one. However, this self-narrated testimonio is significant to this time and experience of the 21st century. My personal, professional, and academic experiences have led and plagued me throughout my journey as a Latina Millennial living in South Texas. This narrative adds to the literature on Latinas, their experiences in academia and their careers, and the cultural impacts I carry with me throughout my journey. My self-reflected testimonio makes this type of research different, informative, innovative, and needed in the 21st century.

A critical aspect of understanding a Latina's academic and career journey in the 21st century and why it is ever-changing goes back to our culture and the human connections we create. How we are raised, the cultural expectations, values, ethics, food, language, tone/volume, sarcasm, and wise old tales factor into our identity. This is the one thing that has remained the same in and out of many traditional cultural experiences: our ability to connect and the need to rely on each other. Humans need to connect to others in varied settings, and technologies are ingrained in us at birth (i.e., home, work, school, video chat, and in-person) (Cairns et al., 2020).

Connection to other humans is essential to making experiences worthwhile. Without connection, we lack an innate ability to feel passion, love, pain, stimuli, and healthy social brain function; humans need a lifeline (Cook, 2013; Lawrenz & Stiles, 2021; Lieberman, 2013). While connections can be disconnected or rewired, there are many lessons to learn from those communicative networks, just as we do from personal, professional, and academic connections we make along our journeys. Personal narrative, storytelling, and testimonio are various ways qualitative research can narrate those stories through deep meaning and the scientific method to bring those experiences to other audiences.

This qualitative research study used personal narrative through testimonio, inquiring about the academic and career experiences of one Latina Millennial in South Texas. This is only one story within a larger context of Latinas in higher education and the workplace. It is an exceptional journey that needs to be told and experienced through the reader's lens for a deeper understanding of the context of a Latina's journey.

Latinas are a unique part of the workforce, which has felt the heavy demands of a prolonged global pandemic in the last several years (Dubina, 2021). This has led many to reevaluate their personal and professional goals due to mounting stress, an expensive economy, and fewer career opportunities (Barrett et al., 2021; Moustafa, 2021; Wilthagen & Aarts, 2021). Despite challenges in the workforce, currently, the workforce is unique in that it contains a plethora of multigenerational employees (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). According to Short (2014) and Strauss and Howe (1992), there are five generations in the American workforce: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (AKA Generation Y), and Generation Z (see Table 1) (Caraher, 2015; Milligan, 2016).

Table 1

Generational Years

Generation	Years
Baby Boomers	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1980
Generation Y/Millennials	1981-1996
Generation Z	1996-2010

Data collected during the 2020 U.S. census reported that three specific age groups accounted for the highest percentages of our current population's statistical data. In 2022, there are three age groups between 26-39 years, which account for the highest population currently in the United States (see Table 2) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). Additionally, the 2020 U.S. Census advised that 77.9% of the population were over the age of 18 years and stated, "the U.S.'s population of adults grew faster than the entire nation as a whole" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a). This is an increasing reason why we need to know more about the Millennial generation of Latinas and their career experiences and journey in developing and creating their professional identity and testimonio. This is because they are next in line to lead. Hispanics comprise a large quota of employees nationwide, which is also true in South Texas (Comptroller Texas, 2019). There has been significant research and awareness of mentoring and its benefits in the past, but reverse mentoring is a relatively newer approach that has slowly gained popularity; this is because there are four premises it intends to help with, "Millennial employee retention, sharing digital skills, drives culture change, and promotes diversity"; it builds these by empowering the younger individual in the mentor relationship to share their knowledge and skills with the older individual (Jordan & Sorell, 2019, paras. 1-4).

Table 2

Highest Age Population Percentages

Age Group	Percentage
25-29	6.8%
30-34	7.1%
35-39	6.6%

Note: Adapted from Age & Population Research Report, U.S. Census, (2021b). (The U.S. Census has granted permission to utilize data charts from the census website.)

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), Latina women account for 16% of the female workforce in the United States. This information is significant because this percentage of Latinas is also in the age group of 26-39 years old, the age group I identify with. There are many opportunities for women of color within the career movement; yet, numerous barriers and experiences make those journeys unique. Latina women have played a significant role in the participation of the workforce at 57.7%, yet accounted for the most significant losses of employment at the beginning of the pandemic and significant pay difference gaps between white men and Latinas, which many Latina women do not openly discuss (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). One reason is that many women in this category were raising children who were not attending traditional school, leaving moms across the globe to homeschool their child or children, plus maintain the daily household duties, left with the choice to continue to work or go down to a one-spouse income (if they were married or in a relationship) because employers were also trying to determine their business structure. A second reason women lost employment was because of a pay gap in the amount of work the employer requires vs. compensation. Before the global pandemic, there was a pay gap; however, multiple stresses pushed many women to reconsider their career choices and points of happiness.

While a career is a part of my narrative, the other piece is the educational side. Academics at the graduate level are not for the faint of heart. It is a long, tedious road of twists and turns for any student. As a master's student, I enjoyed my time tremendously; it was a completely different experience from my undergraduate days. If you have been through that program, you may agree with me on the difference in the level of independence and self-awareness one builds to become a master. However, the transition to a doctoral program would be more concentrated; as a first-generation college graduate, being accepted into such a program was a dream and honor. Academia as a Latina is different and challenging. A substantial amount of work goes into being a student, peer, and scholar, respectively. I recall being told, "It is not a sprint; it is a jog." The time one spends as a doctoral student and then the candidate is years, and for some, close to a decade. As a result, the process can become dull, anxiety-filled, stressful, annoying, frustrating, and all the while, become an addiction, speaking from experience.

Personal testimonio for this research method is helpful as it provokes the deepest assertion of critical thinking while creating new elements of context and examination through hearing someone's truth, a significant part of the literature needing additional context. Recently, there has been a significant shift in using the qualitative methodology, how we look at individual experiences, and how those stories are told (Kajamaa et al., 2019). There are many ways to tell a story, explain a thought, or paint a picture for your audience. Qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, is a method that allows a narrative to come through as its authentic self. There is a romance in using words and a dagger for each one in-between. A narrative can shed light on someone's world experiences to gain understanding and create awareness and change. A testimonio is a subset of narrative inquiry known for its first use with critical race theory (CRT), Latino critical race theory (LatCrit), or specific stories related to people of color and the

injustices they have experienced (Bartow, 2005; Saldana, 2015). While testimonio is a profoundly impactful way of storytelling, it is not for the faint of heart as it is a profoundly moving and vulnerable way of narrating experiences throughout one's life. Personally, this has resulted in the desire to understand and address my academic and career experiences and the role these have played as a Latina Millennial on a unique and opportunistic journey.

Purpose of Study

This study provides a deeper understanding of mentoring experiences from a Latina Millennial's perspective. The perspective as an academic, a career woman, and a woman of color is a unique combination of understanding the impact of mentoring on Latinas at different stages of life and the outcomes of those encounters. The goal is to understand mentoring better from the perspectives of relationships, cultural influences, and motivational support as a Latina throughout my journey.

Statement of Problem

While current literature speaks about mentoring in quantitative and qualitative measures, it still needs SPN documentation from Latinas about their individual experiences, personal stories, and thoughts on professional and academic standards. It often characterizes or uses outsider perceptions of Hispanic culture. One example is the perception that more Hispanics are in manual-labor-focused professions vs. white-collar business or corporate professionals. While this could be true, it is not the whole truth (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019; DelCampo & Hinrichs, 2006; DelCampo et al., 2011). This perception is often contextualized by the media locally and nationally and often by individuals who are not culturally aware of the many Hispanics who work outside of blue-collar jobs. For example, Rivera (1983) published an article in the *LA Times* entitled "Latinos find job choices are both limited and limiting." Nevertheless, in the year

2020, we still saw articles entitled “Closing Latino Labor Markets Gap Requires Targeted Policies to End Discrimination,” among other articles focused on the difficulties Hispanics still face in the workplace and the perceptions of the only types of jobs they are perceived to fit (Rivera, 1983; Zamarripa, 2020). As a Latina woman, before I graduated with my bachelor’s degree, there were several occasions where I was mistaken as the housekeeper or maid in the place of business where I was a manager. Even after having a degree and a graduate degree, I have been approached in a Target store and asked where products are or for help within the store. I was not wearing the classic and identifiable red t-shirt, and I had a shopping basket in front of me. While some may say these are common mistakes, the continual micro-aggressions and assertions of whom I am strictly based on physical characteristics are what many Latinas face in academia and the workplace.

Many successful Hispanics work in blue- and white-collar fields; however, a lack of personal storytelling is why we need to show the professional side of individual Latina growth in academia and career. For many first, second, third, and even fourth-generation Hispanic Americans or Latinas, such as myself, who are currently leaders or growing in their professional organizations, these are the stories we still do not hear. The acknowledgment of societal preconceived notions and a smaller standard for Hispanic individuals and what they do professionally is a social misperception we must change. Acknowledging this gap of personal storytelling in literature recognizes how Latinas experience doctoral programs and career growth. For many qualitative scholars, there is a lineage of telling personal or another’s stories with high quality so they provoke emotion in the reader. While this is one of the unique ways qualitative research projects are different from quantitative research, more progress and growth can be made within qualitative research using this style of writing and methodology. Therefore, personal

narrative, self-narrative, and reflective writing in a testimonio are the best fit for this research (Saldana, 2015).

Objective and Research Question

As an inspired, new doctoral student, I needed to learn about research methods, designs, and a theoretical framework. On many occasions, I would look up definitions while my professors lectured late into the evening. I did not have a scholarly mentor early on as a student, but at that moment, I knew I would need to learn as much as possible in a relatively short time. As aspiring scholars, we are exposed to many lines of research and quickly taken through a soft exposure of each descriptive definition to become more acquainted with a specific methodology. As a doctoral student, many junior and senior courses are offered every other semester or once per year.

I began my dissertation journey knowing I wanted to do qualitative research based on an in-depth, upper-level course I took as a 3rd-year doctoral student. That semester, we were challenged to learn about another peer's religion and life through religious affiliation. We were lucky enough to have many multicultural and faithful individuals enrolled that semester. Throughout the 16 weeks, we interviewed our peers one-on-one, visited each other's places of worship, and held focus groups on the differences and similarities between our religions. At the end of the semester, we were honored when asked to be facilitators at a cultural and religion network dinner held at a local Catholic church. The movie and dinner were titled "The Saint and the Sinner," a story connecting Islam and Christianity. While this was not the first time that I had heard a story or experience or witnessed something like this; it was culturally and emotionally different. In those moments of being surrounded by entirely different faiths, languages, skin tones, and cultures, I saw the beauty in people learning from other stories. I recognized the

power of research as a scholar. There was significance in storytelling and bringing people to mutual respect for each other's culture and religion. It was then that I knew qualitative research was what I wanted to forge ahead in and learn as much as possible.

Most recently, I was selected to write an article for a graduate-level peer review group at Boston University; the topic was open but needed to consist of the idea of explaining "(De)Constructing Environs." I wrote about my experiences as a Latina attending a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). Throughout the experience, I wondered more and more about what I have experienced, the things I have done or not done, the micro-aggressions within higher education and graduate school, stereotypes, and much more in my professional and academic career. I wanted to explain my story in a more profound and more thorough text. However, I also thought: Am I the only one who keeps these feelings inside? As researchers, we are obligated to protect our participants by doing no harm, but how much harm have I experienced or openly expressed?

I began my candidacy journey hoping to tell other individuals' stories through narrative case studies and action research. Dabbling in various mixes of methods and variations of methodology, digging deeper and deeper into the dreaded black hole, respectfully, we often do this as PhD candidates. The design of this study would have to solidify what I see as my purpose as an individual and be able to answer my research question in a scholarly fashion. This point in my research process was difficult, and I still need help typing about it now. During this time, I reflected on the mentoring I received in the last 2 years of my coursework before testing for doctoral candidacy. My reflective perspective took me to the thought of pedagogical learning and teaching. As experts in a specific field or subject, we are tasked with the responsibility of another individual's educational experience in and possibly out of the classroom. Consequently, the

design of this study first needed to address my competence and knowledge of myself. As a research scholar, how can I correctly understand others while trying to understand myself, my experiences, and how those have shaped me? I shifted my dissertation to what you see before you, a qualitative research study using SPN in the form of an individual testimonio, also known as a form of narrative inquiry.

The research question focused on the influence of mentoring, as a Latina Millennial, and how it impacts one's experiences and decision-making. Answering this question added to the literature by providing an additional SPN of my unique experiences and the impacts of mentorship as a Latina. The following research question guided this study: How does mentoring impact, empower, and influence a Latina's education and career endeavors?

Chapter II: Scholarly Personal Narrative as Practice

> You can't learn how to tell someone else's story until you first learn how to tell your own.
>
> —Saldana, 2015, p. 174

Thinking back to the 1st day of my PhD program, sitting in a classroom surrounded by roughly 20-25 other master's and PhD students on a warm evening in the fall semester was the intimidation of a lifetime. All of us, students with different backgrounds, careers, and experiences, come together to discuss adult learning theory or the more formal term, andragogy. Having already graduated with my master's in administration almost 5 years prior and well established in my corporate career, I felt an overwhelming sense of not belonging and being inadequate to contribute to discussions. As a result, I came to formally learn a term that would still follow me today: *impostor syndrome*. Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) explained impostor syndrome as a sense of self-doubt within ethnic students who are surrounded by others of sociocultural backgrounds; it is thought to stem from two possible contexts (a) roots of racism toward the individual's ethnicity or race or (b) the overall feeling of new environments including new people or spaces. Though it would not be the last time I experienced this, it could have been a moment where I might have walked away from my potential and future as an academic scholar. Instead, it has been those types of experiences that have given me perspective and guidance, leading to better outcomes. Positive or negative, those outcomes have always told a story, each unique in its form. I have always been an inquisitive "why" child who needed an answer to every question. I was the teenager who pushed the boundaries and the young adult who thrived on pressure and slowly became a workaholic. Meanwhile, listening and telling stories was something I was exposed to from a very early age, primarily because of being surrounded by

mostly adults. I often heard my family, friends, and acquaintances' woes, fears, accolades, and affirmations.

Looking forward to my 3rd year as a doctoral candidate, I was at another crossroads in my forge to becoming a practicing scholar, with the question of pursuing expertise as a quantitative or qualitative researcher. As an academic, I found myself experiencing impostor syndrome and feeling inadequate and useless in conducting research. I had yet to learn what I was doing or if I would finish my program. In addition, the mounting pressures from my career, family illnesses, and the global COVID-19 pandemic were becoming too much to handle. I decided to be my own participant and research scholar because, as a student, I was required to take an advanced research methods course to focus my attention on qualitative research. This would lead to my first significant encounter with narrative inquiry when I started to understand there was a different side to research and research results, which allowed individuals to tell their experiences in an alternative scholarly format from quantitative or statistical research. In general, narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that focuses on exploring human experiences and stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I found narrative inquiry a relevant tool for my research even though I still did not know I would be the principal researcher and participant in the study. The primary objective was to construct a story based on experiences with mentorship and the effects of this on Hispanic individuals. As a new researcher, I bring a reflexive and empathic relationship of living through experiences that have had a profound impact on me, which other individuals can experience through reading and potentially relate to, plus adding to the literature related to my subject. These life lessons and characterizations of events, which are part of the written narrative experience, create connections between memories for audiences to experience and require "meticulous attention" from the researcher (Saldana, 2015, p. 172).

Fast forward again 18 months after passing my qualifying exam. I found myself in a study that started with passion and grew into hate. I had no purpose academically (in my mind) and was still at a crossroads with my professional career, which brought me severe anxiety, stress, and no room for new growth. I started reflecting on my experiences and how I got there. There I was, an educated Latina, one of 15.7% with a complete undergraduate college degree. To put this into perspective, white women who have completed the same degree account for 60.8% (NCES, 2023). Furthermore, although I had graduated with a bachelor's in criminal justice, a master's in administration, and a 3.98 GPA in my current doctoral coursework, was married, and traveling the world, I was utterly miserable with myself and my research purpose. I had allowed self-doubt to manifest in multiple forms and areas of my life. Finally, I had a moment of clarity: Am I the only one who feels this way, and even if I am not, why do I feel this way? In my heart, I knew, and now know, it was not true, but, as a Latina woman, feelings are never spoken or aired out in the open because we are supposed to be strong and silent, able to deal with these types of things in the privacy of your own conscious. Since the narrative inquiry is about telling researchers about an experience, it relies on the researcher narrating these experiences through rich storytelling for audience members to relive the participant's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The conclusion and solution to sum up this portion of my academic student career led to documenting my journey with a reflective piece of experience as a Latina in academic and professional spaces dealing with the mentoring I have been fortunate to receive throughout the years in hopes of (a) helping another Latina in the future, (b) opening the door of conversation in higher educational and professional settings about this topic, and (c) fulfilling the requirements of my doctoral program.

Scholarly Personal Narrative in the Form of Testimonio

Nash and LaSha-Bradley (2011) explained SPN as a "research method that serves a justifiable purpose in terms of an academic discipline's unique body of knowledge, respected scholarly traditions, field-tested standards of inquiry, and intended outcomes using conventional notions of scholarship" (p. 13). While SPN was a method for my research, it was through the form of testimonio that I chose to tell my story. Testimonio is the Spanish word for testimony, an individual's experience as told by the individual. It is rooted in narrative inquiry, as is SPN and draws from the perspectives of the individual, but also other possible individuals, cultural influences, and community relationships (Beverly, 2004; Garcia, 2020).

As a Latina who identifies as a woman of color within the larger community of Hispanic individuals, a testimonio allows complex and informative storytelling, like mine, to be creative and flexible from the researcher's reflexive process. It was vital to my type of scholarship that this story be told with this approach to represent other Latinas who may be in similar circumstances. Additionally, by using testimonios, I pay homage to my ancestorial Espanol (Spanish) language. Therefore, some of the words I chose were in Spanish along with translation because certain words were culturally used and understood or gave a better construction to the story.

Núñez et al. (2016) explained counter-storytelling as being able to "provide an alternative way to focus on experiences of students with multiple identities and expose contradictions and complexities these individuals encounter across various domains of power" (p. 2). Testimonios fit within the framework of storytelling, especially experiences of mentoring and how those experiences have influenced my life. This also comes with the recognition that I am polyglot from an intellectual perspective, knowing there are different areas and various forms of personal

and professional experiences that have built my Rolodex of informational tools and skills. Initially, I did not recognize this as an asset, but more because of the complexity of the multiple hats I wear daily. However, this is also a notion that SPN shares and addresses. For example, SPN-driven writers have the "ultimate intellectual responsibility" of finding a way to tell their experiences and get conclusions for audiences to learn from (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011, p. 4).

Research Design Philosophy

Early on in my experience as a full-time doctoral student, there were many questions about the research world. What was research? How was research done? What was considered "scientific," and what was not? This last one is still highly debatable by some intellectuals in higher educational settings. Nevertheless, many questions were answered differently and depended on the scholar you spoke to and their expertise. Academic scholarship has been more accepting of approaches toward quantitative statistics with solidified data collection, analysis, and synthesis; there were two ways to write: scientific or wrong. These are elements of a PhD life that many students understand. For example, using "I" in a sentence was never in the toolbox assigned to me.

Alternatively, it took an immense amount of time to understand that a different research approach was artistic and personal, qualitative research. Using a theme such as transformation, which is the center of SPN, should result from this type of work (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). This approach to SPN research requires an in-depth examination of oneself and one's perception of circumstances to understand better who one is as a researcher, learning about the stories and hearing the sound in one's voice and the social dynamic of change focused on leadership (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). While there is a scientific format to generating a research question, the question has a deeper meaning. The research question I focused on was answered from a

cultural, academic, and professional perspective. The research question was formulated with guidance from Miles et al. (2019) and Maxwell (2013), who both explained that research questions should follow the reason for the research and focus on a specific topic for clarity and specificity. As mentioned previously, the question I answered in this research addressed the impact, empowerment, and influence of mentoring in various situations of education and my career as a Latina.

Testimonio allows additional insight into these experiences, which I have had with mentoring as a young girl growing up and becoming a woman. These insights come from both personal and professional spaces. These profound lessons have taught me and changed me in many ways. The research question brought thoughtful insight, critical analytical processing, and open community dialogue through those shared encounters, each having an individual result. Providing a larger, explanatory picture of the impact mentoring has had and how it prepares Latinas as students and professionals also sheds light on why academic institutions and business organizations see fewer Latinas as experts in these roles.

Research Design

Designing a SPN as a testimonio is an expressive and complex journey to design in an academic world built on formality and tradition. Nash and LaSha-Bradley (2011) explained SPN as a four-part process from start to finish. These parts consist of what academic traditionalists call the standard research process, which includes defining the issue, reviewing published literature, designing a research method, collecting, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing data, and making recommendations. In addition, SPN research uses a process of pre-search, me-search, research, and we-search (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). Finally, there is an intense implementation process when writing an SPN manuscript. However, four areas of emphasis

allow SPN researchers to complete the same traditional research steps with a personal narrative focus. This approach sets the researcher up for a cumulative and flowing self-narrative of experiences to invoke critical thinking and analysis for their audience.

Emphasis One: Pre-Search

Pre-search consists of the "internal and external actions" of the SPN author even before the author begins to start writing their manuscript (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011, p.36). Like many other methods in research, the author needs to understand what they want to research, what current literature entails, and how they go about their study. Nash and LaSha-Bradley (2011) explained that during the initial phase of writing this research, it was required that I understand the "SPN process is not simply writing; the process is the sum of its parts, and the three essential parts are starting, sustaining, and finishing a manuscript," and there should be intensity in the central idea of the research led by "conviction or burning question" (pp. 36, 43). Essentially, the prerequisites that lead to this type of research are strong convictions that lead the researcher to show their story in a vulnerable way. This is done by examining my convictions of self through the process of freewriting through a writing prompt entitled "This I believe," first introduced by National Public Radio. These free writing prompts indicate who, what, when, and why researchers write about specific convictions, morals, obligations, fears, and triumphs they courageously share with others. Compared to other methodologies, SPN has solid convictions for its writers to match other methods to ensure a level of scholarship is met. Nash and LaSha-Bradley (2011) made it clear that the SPN process is an "extremely intense self-probing reflection and a large amount of responsibility for a researcher to undertake" (p. 37). Compared to other methods, it is not for the faint of heart.

Emphasis Two: Me-Search

Compared to conventional methods, SPN strongly emphasizes self-reflection and honesty within one's personal and professional experiences. The author/researcher is the variable in the study; I am the study. Anthropologist Ruth Behar described personal narrative as "writing vulnerably" (Behar, 1996, p. 16). As the study participant, there was a series of analyses with personal data collection, including journal entries, personal poetry, photographs, videos, journaling, and memos from different times throughout my life. Having multiple resources of personal reflections allowed me to include my interpretations and observations through vulnerable writing. In SPN and general narrative inquiry, this helped create efficient and effective writing. The me-search portion of methods emphasized examining, interpreting, and understanding self-doubt and impostor syndrome within reflection while creating a way to blend interpretations with theory and introduce the emergence of research themes.

Emphasis Three: Re-Search

The top emphasis of re-search in SPN is traditional in the who, what, and how questions found in other research methods. However, in SPN, the difference is in speaking one's truth in a "seamless combination of showing and telling" (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011, p. 69). Once again, testimonio was a form of storytelling used in this research. This form was chosen to represent the author (myself) regarding ethnic identity and cultural awareness of where I come from, an essential component of bringing my experiences to life within this dissertation for my audience. Testimonio can also be defined as a way for witnesses of a particular situation to express the happenings and portrayal of what happened during that time (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). In this SPN, the purpose of a participant's sole testimony allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the context, setting, time, and emotions the participants explain

through oral recollection. Those experiences told in the participant's own authentic way embody the collection of memories and self-identity one builds through personal and professional encounters. The outcome confirms that the re-search is "meant to serve a greater end" (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011, p. 69).

Emphasis Four: We-Research

Universalizability is the key to the we-research portion of this type of method. It implies that the writer "provides universal understandings or connections of the themes, research, and personal narratives in the SPN manuscript that generalize beyond the writer to the greater readership, especially the reader's profession" (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011, p. 104), therefore, allowing the researcher to make real connections to their roles in professional and personal settings (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). For this research, an inductivist style of narrative sharing was utilized.

Credibility and Reliability

The assurance of validity throughout this process was built into the four emphases of SPN writing and scholarship because these areas are a form of triangulation (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). Validity in SPN is called credibility and reliability based on a writer's belief and passion. This is because SPN uses personal testimony and does not accrue empirical evidence (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). Traditional research methods call this member checking to identify any misinterpretations, misunderstandings, or researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). There is a standard within SPN and personal testimonio that implements a specific way of storytelling, explained as showing and not telling. This piece separates SPN from other forms of qualitative research and makes it, in some cases, one of the harder-than-normal research inquiries (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011; Nash & Viray, 2013).

SPN strives to be an organic process, which implies creative scholarship within traditional mindsets. Therefore, data were collected through the creation of storylines/themes /illustrations throughout the researcher's dissertation (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). Artistic materials, notably journaling, photography, personal vlogs, and letters, were used as supplements in my creative space. Epigraphs also appear throughout this manuscript, creating visuality at the beginning or end of the chapters (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011).

Data Analysis

A holistic content analysis analyzes the data in repetitive steps of researcher reflection. Holistic content analysis was explained by Lieblich et al. (1998) as a form of telling an entire story and centering around a specific topic or theme, in this case, mentoring (p. 15). A holistic approach was determined to be the best fit for this research study because it provides the opportunity to focus on the individual experiences and language used and provides a sense of connection from the author to the audience.

Miles et al. (2019) noted how other materials, such as audio and visual, written, and art-based data, make the "search and retrieval" process more fluid during analysis. Therefore, personal mementos such as photographs are shared sparsely throughout SPN's reflective process.

Traditionally, triangulation allows for several data collection methods to assure confidence in the data collection and analysis processes (Leavy, 2017). In this case, being an extensively organized process, as the principal investigator, first, I have decided to ensure triangulation is formed throughout the four emphases. At the same time, I am reflective throughout the recollections of my testimonio. Second, to solidify that triangulation has been assured, I used LaSha-Bradley's SPN equation to reference this SPN in its scholarship (see below; Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011, p. 143).

SPN = Questions + (Constructs/Themes + Hooks + Stories) x Outside Scholarship/Universalizable

Criticism and Considerations

Criticism of the type of method I have chosen to tell my narrative was a subject for many traditionalists in scholarship who strove for complex data collection and statistical and empirical evidence. As previously mentioned throughout this manuscript, as the principal researcher and participant, I used a foundational practice (SPN) to conduct this research process. As a student scholar, I have spent years studying within the academic conforms of tradition and realize that as an expert in a field, for example, a Doctor of Philosophy, it is my duty to implore new ways of thinking, learning, and creating. This is a personal and professional conviction that I carry with me when other traditionalists question my type of research. It is also the foundational truth of why I wanted to share highly personal, professional, and academic moments that have happened at various times in my academic and professional life so that others can gain a greater perspective.

Two of the primary considerations I am fully aware of are general denial and depression. Nash and LaSha-Bradley (2011) called this “post-scholarly personal narrative depression syndrome” (p. 185). PSNDS is a common effect of writing, such as personal recollections and memories or stress-related inductions. To counter this effect, I recognized the importance of relaxation and breaks when writing material that I deemed emotionally intense or ultimately taxing. In addition, recognizing my privacy and not sharing what I feel would be detrimental to me physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. Nash and LaSha-Bradley (2011) referred to this as making sure an author continues to “identify their core beliefs openly, honestly, and clearly” (p. 196).

Pre-Search: Ontological and Epistemological Mindfulness

The background of my personal experiences has led to an ontological perspective based on my professional career as a Latina female business professional and throughout the 25-plus years as a student. I have experienced traditional and reverse mentoring through my experiences within large and small organizations implementing these programs. I found those experiences to be both beneficial and detrimental at various times throughout my continued career. While both traditional and reverse mentoring served a purpose to promote my professional growth, there were still times as a Millennial business professional that I felt overlooked, under-utilized, and simply "filling" cubical space or another student outnumbered by the smarter ones filling the room. I often wondered, and still do: Does anyone else with similar experiences feel this way? It was determined that by 2020, half the workforce in America would consist of Millennials, and by 2050, Millennials will represent 75% of the workforce globally (Caraher, 2015; McManus Warnell, 2015). Therefore, experts in all fields of business should shift their focus to mentoring practices to attract and retain younger talent (McManus Murphy, 2012). Mentoring is a method I have seen used in school and at work. It is through those experiences that many individuals are influenced and motivated. In addition, I also identify as Latina, adding an entirely different level of encounters. Multiple elements make up myself: my home life, upbringing, education, religion, culture, career, and much more. However, these are the central part of my core and what has made me who I am and who I am not. These elements of the self are so powerful to me and my experiences, which is why it is imperative for me as a researcher to examine these, the most sensitive subjects, to understand the core of my being. Therefore, this research focused on the impact of mentorship at multiple points of growth I have experienced throughout my life. I

cannot pinpoint one small analysis of time; I must look at each angle and tell those stories that have profoundly impacted my growth as an individual and where they have led me today.

Pre-Search: Researcher Positionality

As the primary tool in the research, I have thought deeply about how I would tell my experiences, bringing across their meaning and purpose through storytelling. I identify as Latina and a woman of color. I am the oldest of four children born to maternal and paternal first-generation Mexican American parents. The importance of my position as a researcher and the primary participant is reflective of the Hispanic community. I was raised in and grew up on the west side of San Antonio, Texas, where I spent most of my adolescence from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. My neighborhood was predominantly Hispanic, middle- to lower-income working class and consisted of several military families.

Through self-reflection and critical analysis, I see myself as a typical school student who earned average grades and eventually earned her General Education Development credential and started at a community college, earning an associate degree in criminal justice in 2010. Even though I remained an "average" student, my academic career continued. I earned my Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2011, a master's degree in administration from the University of the Incarnate Word in 2017, and presently am a doctoral candidate in a PhD program. Therefore, as a Latina Millennial who has and continues to grow within my professional career and as a scholar, I have a direct account of the struggles, sacrifices, and acknowledgments of what mentorship can do for a Latina. In addition, I hope this critical analysis and synthesis help others understand Latinas as a group of academic and professional individuals.

Chapter III: There Is No One Like Me

While you would typically find Chapter III of most research manuscripts to be the literature review, SPN is a narrative process that allows the literature to be embedded throughout the entire manuscript as I narrate my experiences (Nash & LaSha-Bradley, 2011). Although SPN does not follow a traditional approach in terms of an outline, it does promote a strong sense of application and critical analysis of the literature to actual experiences or events in one's life. You will notice traditional aspects of scholarly research; however, non-traditional approaches to my research style continue to adapt to and follow the SPN method.

A Mixed Framework

As I have reflected on this throughout my research practices over the last year, my research focus has become more and more self-focused and curious about my uniqueness, not because of vanity or self-indulgence but because of several personal losses since the summer of 2019, when I lost my dad to glioblastoma, a form of brain cancer and one of the most aggressive cancers. It was also a stressful time for me to change my career path, leaving my former career to focus on my academic career, as I wanted to finish my PhD sooner than later. Egbert and Sanden (2014) talked about how the reality that is viewed and interpreted by individuals is subjective and has multiple experiences leading to the understanding of "truth or truths." In this case, the nature of this research is examining "truth" through multiple lenses. This would mean my uniqueness, who I am, and how I have become myself are based on my life experiences. This study explains experiences of mentoring through a personal narrative. It is also about how to help develop their professional identity, which is an integral part of the mentoring process.

For this study, several considerations served as lenses guiding my theoretical framework, which I used to tell the experience(s) in my testimonios: theory of experience, Latino critical theory (LatCrit), and social identity theory (SIT).

Lens of Reflection

John Dewey's theory of experience (1938) was a central guide to this qualitative research process, preparing the study to delve deeper and have a deeper-rooted meaning in telling an individual's story. Dewey implied a regulative ideal for inquiry, not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is why my research recognizes there is a multigenerational workforce perspective that looks through the lens of a Latina Millennial professional's experience in the workforce and academia. Remember, experiences do not simply appear to be connected through time; they are continuous (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Traditional mentoring happens throughout one's entire life, formally and informally. It is an essential part of shaping ourselves and our professional lens. Ironically, John Dewey's ontology is not transcendental but transactional (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The second lens was LatCrit, which originates from CRT (Bernal, 2016). As a woman of brown-toned skin, dark-brown eyes, and a mix of American, Mexican, Native American, and Anglo ancestry, many people assume my identity. I have been called what I like to say is a chameleon who tends to blend in wherever I travel. This is an experience I often have outside of my hometown. It is not something I experience at home. At home, in my city or region, I am a Latina. There have often been instances of sexism, racism, ageism, and other "isms" I have experienced in and out of academics and the workplace. While I consider myself lucky compared to other horror stories I have heard from Hispanics or other people of color who have

experienced harsher acts of discrimination, it does not lessen my experiences as a Latina Millennial. Therefore, LatCrit was a part of this study. CRT began as a way of examining and talking about the injustices and/or discrimination of African Americans, women, or other individuals primarily of color and their experiences with racism and sexism, which challenged the traditional norms of white male standards (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). In addition, I reflect on my personal mentoring experiences as a Latina woman in and out of academia and the workplace. This testimonio is about how forging those relationships formally and informally has impacted my development as an individual and a professor. Its importance is sufficient to show the role mentoring plays in Latinas' lives and why having a lack of mentorship is a loss for the Hispanic community.

LatCrit is a branch of CRT. They are similar, but LatCrit varies slightly as it focuses on Latina/o individuals and their experiences with racism, sexism, classism, and other discriminatory injustices (Bernal, 2016). In the past, LatCrit has often been used as a framework and theoretical perspective in higher education and legal studies, where both have mentioned issues of organizational structures, discourse, and/or process disputes (Bernal, 2016; Fernández, 2016). Aoki and Johnson (2008) argued that although LatCrit is applied to legal studies and higher education, it can also be applied to the business world. The legal and higher-education fields both bring significant ideas and perspectives that remind us that in the business world, a plethora of benefits can be applied using this theory as a part of my framework. LatCrit was specifically designed to address the experiences of Latinx people; thus, it was relevant to frame this study because I self-identify as Hispanic and a woman.

Millennial Latinas are getting older and are also aging into their careers and identities (Mather et al., 2015). No longer are we the new kids on the block. Millennials have reached an

age where we are still young enough to change careers without too many financial implications yet have enough world experience to know that job security is needed to pay our bills. Yet, our professional identity has been written by many of the emotions and tones outlined in our experiences with others who glance past us, not directly in conversation. Latinas grow up in socially tight-knit communities which, in many ways, work like an intricately woven basket of family, friends, religion, food, and music, ultimately shaping Latinas in many ways as young children (Lopez et al., 2020; Santa-Ramirez, 2022).

Last, SIT is relational to understanding an individual's growth in their identity and how identity development has different implications of identity within various social contexts (Tajfel, 1976). According to statistics, Latinas make up a portion of the current workforce; also, Hispanics lead in labor participation at 66% in Bexar County, where San Antonio counted 64% of their population identifying as Hispanic (Texas Demographics, 2020). Furthermore, education is another area that continues to grow; for example, 15% of Hispanics age 25 years or older hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Educated Hispanics have increased 36% since the 2010 Census (Texas Demographics, 2020). There has also been a significant increase in overall Hispanic enrollment in postbaccalaureate degrees from 15% to 21.3% between 2012 and 2022 (NCES, 2022). Overall, women account for 60% of students in graduate school, of which only 8.8% are Hispanic women who go on to attain a doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdE, MD, DDS, JDs) and who complete their chosen programs with a conferred degree (NCES, 2019). More recently, the census estimated that women over 25 in the United States account for 1.9% of PhDs: Hispanics only account for 0.8% of this prestigious population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Sadly, Hispanic women are in last place in this category as Asian women account for 5.3% of PhDs., followed by white women at 2.3% and black women at 1.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The experience of being a Latina Millennial differs from that of my mother's generation (Generation X). Her parents were born in 1930 and 1933 during the Silent Generation. Orrenius and Zavodny (2019) explained how there are numerous intergenerational differences within the workforce; age, gender, and even which generation of American citizenship the employee/individual falls under (e.g., first-generation Mexican American, second-generation Cuban American, third-generation Puerto Rican-American). The expectation of my mother by her parents was to "be seen and not heard," which was how they were raised. Fast forward to my ideologies of myself, a Millennial versus the Silent Generation, unloads many differences yet identifies our connection as humans. Orrenius and Zavodny (2019) explained that each Hispanic intergenerational age group differs in values and work ethics based on their generation's ideology, ethics, and morals. It is essential to understand that generational lineage is a factor for Latinas, personally, academically, and professionally. For this study, I focused on myself; I am a part of the Millennial generation, which includes the ages between 26-39 years old, also known as Generation Y (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). It is important to note that this study examined age and identity rather than one's citizenship status or origin. This is to promote uniqueness in how Latina Millennials go about their career decisions, professional prospects, and decision-making through their experiences with mentorship.

As I continue to tell my story, keep these lenses in mind with how and why I am weaving throughout the testimonios.

Chapter IV: A Foundation for Practice

Mi Familia (My Family)

Speaking of past recollections, it is often an intuitive process in many cultures; it was also no exception in mine. Although my childhood was filled with a lot of love and hardship, I tend to remember love over everything else, from the feeling of a warm embrace from my grandfather to the smell of his Marlboro 100s fresh out of the wrapper. My family experienced many levels of pain and gratitude, hardship and grace, truth and lies. Through these experiences, my family became my first set of familial mentors. Through these reflections of experience, I introduce you to my world and that of close family and external influences that have shaped many of my life experiences and motivations as a Latina scholar and business professional.

My Uncle Mark

One of my earliest memories is at the tender age of four years. I can recall my uncle teaching me how to tie my shoelaces. While I do not recall every detail of the encounter, I can vividly see the whiskers on his black mustache move as the words slipped out of his mouth, explaining the process and revealing a perfectly imperfect bow. He was a wonderful human being struck by many hard lessons throughout his lifetime but found a level of peace and forgiveness that was unlike anyone I have ever met. My maternal grandparents baptized their godson, Gary, at 6 months old. Shortly after, his birth mother passed away unexpectedly. His grief-stricken father, who was an alcoholic, started selling his children to the first buyer, some would say, for the love of the drink and to cover his grief-stricken wounds. When my grandfather found out what was happening, he reported it but found himself trying to find homes for the siblings as they were to be divided and sent away separately. My Uncle Gary was a remarkable individual who served his country as a proud Marine, fixed classic cars and made the best and

sweetest iced tea. Unfortunately, my beloved uncle passed away at the age of 31 years. It is hard for me to believe I have already outlived him. Time passes, and yet we never know how long it will be until we realize the profound events of those we love to have missed out on. It is hard to swallow when you come to terms with it—if one ever does.

My uncle passed away from AIDS, an internal family secret and truth that has never openly been shared. Because of cultural implementations of societal expectancies and the social context, this carries for many Hispanic families along with the enduring stereotypes or labels the 1980s and early 1990s had portrayed all AIDS patients as homosexuals. We did not talk about it. It was making my oh-so-traditional grandparents fearful that people would think less of their beloved son. After all, this was a point when the AIDS epidemic was at its peak, and the stereotypical gossip was that this disease was connected to homosexuality. To my grandparents, this was a complex piece for their generation's mindset; after all, my grandparents came from a Hispanic culture where disgrace had many social repercussions. Who would believe this disease was due to the military not regulating blood testing before such a time? Any soldier who needed a blood transfusion for medical necessity was potentially exposed and contracted many diseases without their knowledge until it was too late to treat or even know the outcome of a life cut short. AIDS did not happen to my uncle; unfair stereotypes and discrimination happened. At this time, at a young age, I had my first taste of stereotypes and cultural repercussions due to others' perceptions.

As a family, we obliged my grandparents and understood he had died from stomach cancer. Even at such a young age, I knew the truth and not the Truth and not that of a harsh and stereotyped disease. Even now, as an adult, if I close my eyes, I can recall my child-like figure sitting toward the back of the chapel on the hardwood pews in the funeral home. My uncle's

silvery-blue casket was open and draped with the American flag for the country he proudly served, what seemed to be millions of crisp red roses and other delicate flowers to my 5-year-old eyes. If I close my eyes, I can smell the freshness of such petals as the air conditioning whips their soft floral fragrance around the room.

Within a year of learning to tie my shoes as a naïve, carefree child, I learned what it felt like to see immense grief and pain through the eyes of the mourners who surrounded me, none more than that of my immediate family. I look back on how his passing made me feel pain, anxiety, and uncertainty for the first time in my 5 years. My eyes saw my grandparents suddenly turn into a puddle of drowning tears, cutting the world out and becoming reclusively separated in grief, unable to control their pain as they buried their beloved son. This event forever changed my family, and it is the point in my life when I can recall immediately growing up. As often as I continue to tie my shoelaces as a full-fledged adult, I still remember many years later my uncle's patience and creativity. Throughout the adventures of my life, I often look back and smile about my first vivid familial mentor. Though gone, I realized this was when the shoelaces were completely untied, and I realized I had learned from another. For many Latinas, early mentors, such as my uncle and others in their lives, are familial individuals who are related to them or have a strong family/friend relationship (De Los Reyes et al., 2022). Formal mentors, or those who mentor the individual outside the home, such as at school or work, have an average relationship span of one to three years because of enrollment or active membership in a formal mentoring program (Sánchez & Reyes, 1999). Nonetheless, Lechuga-Peña and Lechuga (2018) asserted that these mentors of any relationship are usually individuals who are "authentically caring" people "invested in their mentee's success and well-being" (p. 309). Thinking back to

my youth, I can see many of these scenarios playing out in the lives of my friends and myself by marginalizing, stereotyping, or dehumanizing our communities and, ultimately, our beings.

Figure 1

Innocent Youth

My Parents

Mi madre (my mother), with one brown eye and one green eye, has been my biggest lifetime supporter. Mi madre, young and single, had me 9 days after her 21st birthday, old enough but too young in many ways. We grew up together, she and I, a team, and in recent years, have often felt this way again as the leaves turn with the seasons of life. As a young single madre, she sacrificed her dreams of a college degree and possible law career to raise me independently. She was lucky to have the support of my maternal grandparents, with whom we lived and where I spent most of my adolescence. As the child of a single madre, I did not often see or realize how much she sacrificed financially to send me to private school from kindergarten to high school. The importance of this investiture has played a crucial role in my personal, academic, and spiritual realms throughout my life thus far. Altschul (2011) mentioned that the

lack of educational achievement is an ongoing issue Latinxs face. It is also noted that Hispanic youth have the highest academic dropout rates of any ethnic group at 8.6% (NCES, 2019). While these values and sentiments were afforded to me growing up, I always felt somewhat responsible for her inability to complete her college path and have the glamorous career she craved. I had a perfectly balanced blend of Christianity and grade school education while she sometimes worked two jobs to support us as a single mother. As I have grown, I often find myself reflecting on the sacrifices she made for me, even to this day, as a doctoral candidate in graduate school. One never realizes at a young age that things in adolescence have the most profound impact on one as an adult.

My Bonus Dad

I met my "bonus" dad when I was about to turn five years. I use the word bonus as I find the term "step" parent a harsh, objective title to which society implemented alternative or additional male figures in the father role. He was a gentleman, well-educated, always up for an adventure, and valued higher education. Growing up in a large family, he was the fourth of 13 children. The son of a first-generation Mexican American and WWII veteran, my dad had a different perspective on life and living. His father was sickly for many years due to the war and ailments conceived from communistic genocide ideology, which led him to live unhealthily thereafter because of the consequences of war as a criminal defense attorney who served federally and locally within the chambers of the law. Nevertheless, those stories and the reality of his father's battles as a veteran were learned principles that he carried with him to uphold the constitution of the United States as a counselor of the law.

My dad is identified as one of my familial mentors. He had a very different outlook on life, the happiness and the misfortunes one can endure. Maybe it was because of the type of work

he was surrounded by, his health struggles as a young law student, or possibly because of the pressure he felt as a first-generation college student as one of the oldest children in his family to go to college for the sole purpose of eventually being a source of financial support for the rest of his family. His guidance, while parental, was profoundly influential in my life and still is years after his untimely passing. His views on education and educational attainment were concrete in the benefits as an individual, a scholar, and a professional. He carried an unyielding passion for education because it was an open door for him to experience many forms of learning through other cultures, travel, languages, and other differences. Education was one of the many things he often explained to me growing up. He often said: “College is not just schoolwork; it is the entire experience and who you are because of it at the end of the program.” There is a collective change and growth in any experience you have as a human being. He would point out: “You do not give up!” Even if the world is caving in, you never give up. Whether I was competing in sports, performing in a school play, or taking my entrance exams for a particular program, this was a sentiment he drilled into me even into my adult years.

Some of my fondest memories as a student were when my dad would show up on field trips. He always made it a point to go on every field trip, even if he had to meet the bus at the event. As a private practice attorney, he would often schedule his cases and court docket around my mother’s and my needs. Family and bonding were just as important, if not more important, than anything else. I admired this about my dad and even missed it since his passing. As a young college student studying criminal justice, most of my classes were held downtown at the university, close to the courthouse, jail, and district attorney’s offices. It was also a hub for my dad’s work environment, allowing us to have breakfast or lunch with one another. As we would sit and eat a couple of breakfast tacos, he would ask me how school was going and what I found

challenging then, and even ask, “Are you happy?” a question he would often ask, no matter the time or situation. It was his way of teaching someone that it would not end well if happiness was not found in your actions. The lesson of what happiness is, was a lesson that I have seen play out in others’ lives where happiness has never been a necessity or an option. My dad was never happy as an attorney; he wanted to be an engineer, but his father wanted him to study law and become a lawyer, and he obliged. On more than one occasion, I asked him why he went to law school if it was not his dream. His answer was always: “It was what had to be done then.” Furthermore, while he had more opportunities than his parents, he still had fewer than I did.

Figure 2

Happy Family

When I reflect on these conversations and my journey as a doctoral student and a businesswoman, I often think about the choices I made along the way that led me to where I am today. Unfortunately, throughout research, stereotype and stigma often follow brown individuals, highlighting “failure and deficit, not successful or strength-based perspectives,” leaving many high-achieving stories under-told or under-documented in research (Paik et al., 2020, p. 2). Though I was lucky to have an individual like my bonus dad in my life, there were and still are many girls of color who do not have mentors to show them a different path.

While mentorship from a familial cycle is noted as a non-formal style (Holt et al., 2016; Ramalho, 2014; Reeves, 2022), for the Latina culture, it is often the only mentorship women have until one of two things happens: they leave the family home to go to school, or they get married. Often, it is the latter of the two, and in other cases, it is a combination of both scenarios at various times in one's life. Gender is one aspect that varies in education (Castellanos et al., 2017). It is one of the differences between my dad and me and how we became the first in our family to attain college degrees and work professionally in our respective fields.

As one of the oldest males among his 12 siblings, there was inherently a financial responsibility to help his parents with the bills. This would continue to be a cultural reference, as it would continue after his dad's death. He continued to help his family financially and with other means even after he married my mother. It was a general obligation to the family that education and work were essential parts of his responsibilities to his kin because he was male. For him, an education in the law was a way to provide but not his passion for learning; he would have leaned toward engineering if he had had a choice.

Growing up, I was not given choices for my grade school education or a choice when deciding whether to attend college. Although my undergraduate studies were not a choice, it was a must. As my dad told me, "You are going, and that's it!" I am pretty sure that at this point in my life, considering my age and stupidity, I probably would have caravanned around Europe and smoked a lot of weed, despite my parents or, in typical fashion, married my first love straight out of high school and had children young.

Let us be honest; I was not the best undergraduate student. In typical fashion, I sometimes did not attend class, ran late, and dropped a few "A" courses just because I had no drive to be part of college life within the classroom. I had very low self-esteem in the classroom

as a student. Alternatively, my dad had very high self-esteem in and out of the classroom. He could do mathematics calculations in his head like no other, which I found very frustrating and often intimidating. He debated with such conviction that I often stumbled through my arguments. I graduated with a degree I seldom use in my current career. However, I chose to pursue my master's degree and my PhD without the influence of my dad or any other family members. I chose what I believed was right for me as an individual and a lifelong learner. In a way, I see my dad's sadness of not standing up for his dream to be an engineer as my strength to say what I wanted and how I would do it, ultimately an indirect-subconscious influence of cultural progression.

Trust in research and mentoring is described as a process of enabling a person to depend on another individual, usually built over time through positive interactions, kept commitments, honesty, and direct communication, but is often one of the hardest things to build between people (Burkett & Morris, 2015; Erdem & Aytemur, 2008). I recognized this within my dad's mentorship toward me and his daughter on many levels, directly and indirectly. As a bonus parent, there were times that we did not get along or had a big difference in opinion. However, we were able to build a relationship where we valued each other's company and opinion as I grew and matured. I did not often see the outcome that he saw, but I somehow knew he meant well through his actions and words.

Commitment is an agreement, pledge, or act toward another individual or cause (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). Our relationship was an act of symbolism and action as his career and personality helped individuals who were taken advantage of by the legal system through the abuse of power, something I repeatedly witnessed throughout my adolescent years watching him

practice law. However, this very thing gave him the understanding to give his child the freedom to choose their educational path and career after college.

My Maternal Grandparents

Not many individuals can say their grandparents are their best friends. It is a unique bond between a grandchild and a grandparent that few can experience. Practically acting as my parents when growing up, along with my mother, I lived in their home for many years after my birth. Luo et al. (2012) mentioned that Hispanic grandparents are often a second set of parents within the cultural context. Their home was the only one I knew in the foundational years of my adolescence. It was a place of refuge and reference where many life lessons were learned and debated. Zachary and Fischler (2009) stated that many "spaces and places" or points in time, such as this, are considered mentorship moments because of who or what is involved within that moment for that person (p. 6). This is the case when I think back to my grandparents' home, as it was a point of certainty and refuge; it had its own soul.

Figure 3

My Grandparents' Home

My Maternal Grandfather (Popo)

My popo, a first-generation Mexican American, retired from the U.S. Air Force and later from his second career as a deputy sheriff in South Texas. With his authority and awareness, let us say that none of us children, grandchildren, or practically anyone got away with anything; it would have been presumptuous for us even to think we could! Popo was incredibly strict as a parental figure internally and externally in our family dynamics. He was the type of man who took no bullshit from anyone, and lying would quite possibly mean the end of you. He took these types of infractions very seriously as he wanted to be the protector of his family, a job he took very seriously. This made him respected by many in his family and community as he tended to be the family patriarch on both sides of his and my grandmother's extended families and siblings.

Born in 1933, he faced many socioeconomic hardships that many other Hispanics in San Antonio faced: social oppression, racism, poverty, a lack of educational improvements, and overall community awareness, typical for many individuals born during this period. Sadly, 83 years later, research by Foxen and Mather (2016) revealed that while there have been social and economic improvements within Hispanic communities, those issues still leave Hispanics far behind their white counterparts. My popo was a visionary; this is a sentiment many people in my family share and a sentiment more recently expressed at the time of his passing in 2021, which later reaffirmed many of my experiences with him when I sat to write these reflections.

While eating a taco at lunch with him one afternoon, he reminded me of his upbringing. His parents were Mexican immigrants who came to the United States from Mexico for the American dream, a common experience for many Hispanic families in South Texas and throughout the United States. He was one of five children, but he was the boundary pusher, the

curious one, and possibly a mischievous troublemaker. He never shied away from questioning or trying something new or intimidating as he made his way through the world. As a child growing up in the early 1930s, he spent most of his adolescence in the Alazán-Apache Courts, a government housing complex for low-income families, deep in the barrio of San Antonio, Texas. The Alazán-Apache Courts, still in existence today, were and are known as one of the lowest economic and educational income areas in the San Antonio metro area. This was his home and the home of many other first-generation Hispanic American families and friends who came to the United States during this time. As a young boy and in a generation growing up during the Great Depression, he would recall how next-door neighbors would pull together to share their resources, such as rice, beans, or other foods they may have had, and how everyone would come together for the benefit of the community. If someone had extra rice or beans, they would share and exchange them for vegetables or other groceries. Going hungry was not something anyone in his community wanted to do. He and his closest cousin, my *tio* (uncle) Jim, would collect tin cans and sell them for money, a norm for many children living in the housing system. As they both recalled, one pound of metal would pay for a ticket into the Aztec Theater to watch the daily newsreel of events, a cartoon, and a short film, as there were no personal televisions at the time. My grandfather always had many words of wisdom or comedic antics to make sad or bad situations seem like a breeze. For example, when the COVID-19 outbreak started, his reaction was, “We will be fine; I have been through worse.” So, I knew we would be, just with his reassuring voice.

As a young girl, I learned many lessons related to hard work, the value of a dollar, the importance of faith and family, and many more to fill a lifetime. My grandfather was an individual who saw the potential of a particular situation or human being. He often had a distinct

vision to see things through and unlimited opportunities given and sometimes not given to him often because of a social injustice such as a lack of respect from other individuals in higher ranking positions, racial injustices in numerous settings, or a lack of financial support for his community from others with authority or connections to do so. Because of these injustices, he learned how to do things independently at an extremely young age. This mindset was passed to me as a young child when I wanted to learn to do something or was challenged by something greater than me. My grandfather had, for the lack of a better term, a "no bullshit" policy. If you were going to do something, you better never have an excuse for being late, lying, or doing something halfway. Furthermore, everyone in my grandparents' home under their authority was aware of his mindset and expectations. I recognize this as the start of my type "A" personality, which many doctoral or professional students are presumed to have.

I recently returned to the Alazán-Apache Courts and stood on the corner of Colima and San Jacinto St., looking at the cinderblock building of my ancestral past. The same building from the 1930s still stands and houses people in the 21st century. Looking across the street, I see children getting out of an after-school program with a few adults watching over them. I think of my grandfather selling brooms door to door, and I see these children who still live below the poverty line. Nevertheless, the visionary, my popo, got out, then moved until he felt he could give his children and grandchildren a better opportunity.

The sense of responsibility and accountability are both values that I have witnessed in my grandfather's mentality and mentoring moments, which have been passed down to me. In Hispanic culture, there is often a *machismo* mentality within many older generations of men, and prominent among Latino veterans, such as my popo (Cancio, 2020). Machismo is a male mentality of showing strength, authority, and male leadership within the family, essentially the

head of the family or having the last word, which sets expectations of male duties or roles within the family (Falicov, 2010; Núñez et al., 2016; West & Zimmerman, 1987). While machismo culture was undoubtedly alive in my community and upbringing, my popo was not as strict as other men in other extended families I witnessed as a young girl. Fortunately, this was also one of the cultural ideas I saw slowly fall to the sidelines as he aged into his late 80s. He would not let me forget he was the head of our family, but in a way, he shed machismo ideas such as expressing pain or emotion, which are usually held back by men (Sobralske, 2006). Solid and authoritative, he was also sensible and understanding of conditions. These are traits that other Latinos have verbalized, in which they recognize the importance of helping with chores at home, modeling strong work ethics, and the importance of faith in one's life (Paik et al., 2020).

Through all his adventures in life, one thing he never did was quit! Perseverance was a quality and ethic he taught his children and many others. I have often looked back on this value as a child and an adult. Quitting was never an option; we were to see things through to the end and sometimes beyond. When I was a child, he told me, "If you quit now, you will always quit!" It was never an option. This was ironic, as he never graduated from high school. He always reminded us, "I went in the front door and out the back door." My grandfather was not a stupid man; I would say he was above average and was possibly not stimulated enough in the classroom due to a lack of resources such as IQ tests, which can determine learning disabilities or exemplary abilities. However, I believe he had what is now a standard and manageable learning curve in the form of attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactive disorder. He flourished in everything he did outside of a formal classroom, from joining the military at the age of 15 years to battling Hansen's disease, joining the sheriff's department, founding an American Legion post in San Antonio, Texas, and fighting for Latino and Black rights within Veterans of

Foreign Wars postings in the 1960s. He never quit, and he always followed through. I was blessed to witness his zest and passion when he worked on a project or a specific job. Nothing was half-assed! However, similar expectations were often made of others, and I learned accountability very early and quickly.

One example of expectation is detailed in a story from his childhood. One day, my young grandfather and several friends visited Elmendorf Lake, near his neighborhood. You could rent paddle boats in the 1930s and 1940s and go out on the lake. My grandfather and one of his best friends arrived with two young women ready to impress them, and as they went to rent the boat, they were declined. The boat rental owner told them, “No, we do not rent our boats to Mexicans”! Well, my grandfather and his friends left, and later that night, my grandfather, unknown to the owner, returned and drilled holes in every single boat on that dock. The next day, as boats started to go out on the lake, they quickly began to sink, along with all their non-colored guests on the lake that day. My grandfather was one of the first junior League of United Latin American Citizens members in San Antonio. This was his protest and message. The principle was necessary, and racism went against principle for him; it was a continual occurrence throughout his life but one he met with courage and firm conviction of principle.

He mentored me through every stage of my life until 2 years ago when he passed from COVID-19. When I look back on those lessons, I see what an immense amount of time, love, and pain he spent to ensure that I was self-sufficient. As a Latina, this is not something I have often seen in others in my culture. That is possibly why he made sure I was somewhat eclectic in my understanding of numerous things, from budgeting, tiling, roofing, typing, roofing, being vocal about civil rights, and plainly and simply, the importance of my education and how that helps a community.

My Maternal Grandmother (Nana)

My grandmother, born in 1930, was a stunningly beautiful Anglo woman who experienced many hardships as a child—hardships that, out of respect, I will not share in full detail in most cases, but to paint a better picture for you. My grandmother started her life by being named after her father's mistress as my great-grandmother lay unconscious after childbirth. Plagued by hardship, pain, and generational alcoholism, my nana was a woman who knew that life was not her future. My grandmother was a retired teacher's aide in special education for over 25 years. Both were the epitome of the American dream as they had General Education Development credentials and later skilled certifications in their respective fields. I seldom heard stories about her upbringing because it was a painful reminder for her in different ways. She grew up in east Texas on a small farm where her parents struggled to feed her and her younger brother. Her mother suffered from many things but ultimately was nonexistent for much of her childhood. Her father, a traditional, Southern Baptist, blue-collar man, was no exception. However, he maintained a homestead and raised his children, although they often fended for themselves. My grandmother and her brother would cut out pieces of cardboard to cover the holes in the soles of their shoes. She was keeping their feet warm in the winter and somewhat dry on the rainiest days—a long way from me, learning to tie my shoelaces.

She completed her education in the 9th grade, then stayed home and helped with chores and bills until she was married off at 16 to a man 10 years her senior. She became a mother at 17, and 5 more children followed closely. My grandmother was born in May of 1930, which means she was married in 1946. There were few choices or accommodations for women in 1946, as she often reminded me; women did what had to be done. After 10 years of marriage, my grandmother left her first husband, who was verbally and physically abusive, something some of

her children resented her for. Why? I could never understand, except when you never witnessed something, it is hard to see the other individual in a different light. However, through strength and courage, she still left.

Having never worked in a business setting or completed her education, she went to work for a telephone company in Houston, Texas. My grandmother enjoyed the freedom that working gave her. In many ways, I see how she pulled herself through to have a better life and gain self-respect. For a woman in 1956, leaving her husband was taboo, rare, and self-paralyzing. I often reflect on this part of my grandmother's journey, her as a female, mother, and uneducated woman because of social influence and lack of respect for female independence. I also reflect on my grandmother's authoritarian personality and traditionalist ideas when, underneath, she was a strong feminist. In Spanish, this is known as *familismo* (loyalty or a bond), which highlights nurturing, discipline specifically toward youth, parental shadows, concern, and solving problems (Falicov, 2013). As the backbone of our familia, my grandmother always instilled a sense of care, discipline, and a nurturing spirit in all our circumstances. Despite her lack of education, she set out to educate herself with the means she had, eventually making a career in education. She was a mother and grandmother to many individuals, including myself. Paik et al. (2020) called this a unique generational bond, as grandmothers often hold Hispanic families together. As a young Latina, hearing the struggles of my grandmother's childhood and young adulthood were often moments of motivation for me and what I wanted to accomplish. A study about mothers and grandmothers that explored the impacts on their Hispanic children showed that because women are often the center of their world, young Hispanics grow up with the mentality to provide a better life for their elders, a stronger sense of responsibility toward the family, and a strong stride and completion in educational backgrounds (Paik et al., 2020).

As an adult, I often wonder how two individuals, such as my grandmother and grandfather, had such extraordinary life circumstances yet could accomplish what they did without a guiding hand. While their biological parents were present in their lives, they were not influential individuals in the sense of education or financial stability. However, I did recognize that both had a personal sense of determination never to take no for an answer. Having learned from those stories of experience, this type of strength is often an internalized force when someone is facing hardship or adversity.

Being an Anglo woman who left her first husband and later entered what was considered an interracial relationship with a Latino took guts. It was not the most common thing at this time concerning what civil unrest the United States faced in the 1950s and 1960s. However, my grandmother's strength and determination for her circumstances not to dictate her future was prominent in her choices; she completely undid her shoelaces. She saw what could be and went for it. She was brave, a braveness she never noticed within herself or boasted about but is recognized by her legacy.

Mixed Environs

Growing up in a mixed cultural environment can be confusing and exhausting. I had a mix of Mexican and Anglo heritage. If you look at me, you probably could not pinpoint an ethnic background. Like a chameleon, I often blend into my environment, but growing up in a diverse community, it is often that very community that pulls out all those parts of you. I have often felt too brown or, to be politically correct, Mexican, around my grandmother's family and too white around my Hispanic family. I have also heard this sentiment from others with similar circumstances.

The inclusion of race is not done just by outsiders but is often an internal issue within one's cultural ethnicity. Regarding mentorship, much of my surrounding community, including my schools, church, and social activities, was generally populated by Hispanics. While San Antonio, a large military city, has a diverse population of many ethnicities, the majority are Hispanic, which is prominent on the west side of San Antonio, where I grew up.

Latina women had traditional roles in the community. Most were mothers, wives, daughters, tias, and compadres, but many others added on to those roles, being Mom and Dad, an employee, a friend, and a community organizer. When I think of my grandmother, she was an Anglo woman who married into a Hispanic familia. There was a cultural adaptation between my grandfather and the rest of the family at the beginning of their relationship. Traditional in her sense and for the time of the 1950s, the stereotypical housewife was still a driving force in how she operated. As a grown woman, I look at this now and see so many differences between her and my life. I also see the struggles she faced. She would share these later and closer to her passing about the lack of a feminine role model, mentorship, and the affection she lacked as a child, wife, and young mother. Upon marrying her second husband, my grandfather would give her a different support system and sense of community, as Hispanic communities are notoriously interconnected. The women on my grandfather's side of the family were multi-taskers in various roles—strong women who shared their opinions and were unafraid to push the limits. My grandfather was one of five, with one older brother and three sisters. I vividly remember all my great-tias being vocal, loving, curious, and highly involved within our community. They ran the community from the shadows of a man's world. As a young girl and woman, I saw how these women would come together and organize a plate sale or a silent church auction in a matter of hours, or if an illness of a family member or friend came up, they rallied around the family

cooking food, cleaning, and taking care of another mother's children, with no questions. While these traditional caretaking roles are at the forefront of their stories, these women were also balancing their cash flow, educating their children, and, in many cases, being employed outside the home. In my experiences of mentoring and seeing mentoring as a child, this was the extent of it. There were no frills or scientific pairings of zodiac signs or interests. These were real women who impacted many individuals in many profound ways.

Mentorship for Latinas is often experienced in familial ways first, a family dynamic or relational connection that often starts with the *abuelas* and *madres* (grandmothers and mothers) (Paik et al., 2020). Latinas with mentorship opportunities often convey how those positive experiences are associated with their overall achievements (Sánchez et al., 2020). Acevedo-Gil and Madrigal-Garcia (2018), who focused on the experiences of Latinas through the lens of socialization, asserted that familial bonds and self-validation are essential elements to creating and having solid mentor relationships. While Latinas are noted as outnumbering Latinos at the university level, Latinas still face pressures dealing with gender roles and responsibilities from family as they tend to worry more about females than the males who are leaving the family home (Excelencia in Education, 2021; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Suppose they still decide to pursue their academic dreams or enter the workforce. In that case, Latinas then face various forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism), which further limits their identity and stereotypes of Latinas because of cultural nuances (Crenshaw, 1991; Zambrana & Hurtado, 2015; Núñez, 2014; Solórzano, 1997; Truong et al., 2015). Having opportunities to be mentored proves invaluable as an adolescent throughout one's lifetime. Sánchez et al. (2020) showed that an association between ethnic identity and quality mentoring relationships over time proves helpful. In another study, Martinez Thorne (1996) showed that mentoring helped negotiate the individual's family

demands, expand the female's role, and provide exceptional motivation for the mentee, which led to better outcomes. Almost 30 years later, a more recent study by Holloway-Friesen (2021) showed that mentoring gave Latinas a strong sense of belonging and built self-efficacy throughout their experiences. They reported better classroom experiences, were productive and inquisitive while in class, and had better communication and overall relationships with their peers, faculty, and staff (Holloway-Friesen, 2021).

While there is no one particular reason, there is information that explains a lack of individual motivation, cultural backgrounds, familial environments, and family dynamics or input and how they impact academic achievement (Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; Rumbaut, 1997). Through these lenses of the home environment, we can first find helpful information in understanding academic achievement levels, motivation, and mentorship through family interactions as a learning experience (Lechuga-Peña & Lechuga, 2018). Latina mentorship has excellent and challenging outcomes, as in any environment, and not every Latina has positive experiences (Reddick, 2015). Because there is such a high focus on gender roles within Hispanic culture, Latinas are more likely to experience social isolation, a feeling of personal disrespect, and the need to prove their value to others (González, 2006). It is noted that outside of a role model, there is "troll modeling," which is an individual who can be "dismissive or dehumanize" another's experience (Reddick, 2015, pp. 125, 126). Acevedo-Gil and Madrigal-Garcia (2018) explained that there are overlapping areas in mentoring that produce encouragement first through support from others in familial groups, support from non-familial groups, which stresses professional or career advancement, and how supportive mentoring relationships should be personal and reciprocal. When individuals experience these positive mentor relationships, they are then more likely to understand cultural familiarity, stand on their

own identity, create humanized environments that are brave and safe, and further the representation of color within their fields (Santa-Ramirez, 2022).

My Side of Town and Mentorship

Sitting in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, surrounded by the lavish gold leafing and century-old pews, on Fifth Avenue, is far from the tiny spot of the world where I grew up. As I sat there for the first time in my early 20s, I prayed that one day I would be able to return, but I also thanked God for how far I had come in my life and my education. I did not grow up on the worst or the best side of town. It was my home and all I knew; growing up at my grandparents' home was my normal. It was not until the first time I took my soon-to-be husband there that I may have realized the impression from outsiders.

I am a brown-skinned female raised in a *Spanglish* (Mix of both English and Spanish) speaking environment, reminded daily of my long brown, frizzy hair as a young girl when I looked in the mirror and saw my reflection. I was raised in a strict cultural environment but with the aspirations of an adventurer to move far from my circumstances and travel the world. I grew up fast and, in many scenarios, had to act as an adult in certain life circumstances. I will be candid; my grandparents were profoundly strict with me and others who lived with them. We were not allowed to socialize with many others unless they knew their parents, their background, or came to our house. As a child, I never understood this. It was rare that I could go past the sidewalk without getting yelled at. As I grew older, I realized that many of my childhood neighboring friends were continually in trouble at school and home. Their parents were often absent and left alone, sometimes for days at a time. The sheltering I experienced was not what other peers had. I was 17 years old when the young man across the street whom I went to school with went to prison for murder; his young sister had her first child at 14. These stories were

prevalent but not the only ones, I am sure. Many situations surrounded me at that time in my life until I moved out as a young college-aged adult. Yet, they reminded me every time I returned for my weekly visits to the old neighborhood, a place they still live and call home. In many circumstances or periods growing up, mentoring was not known as such, nor as coaching, influencing, or anything else. If I were to be honest, as a young child and teen, it probably was considered more as superior nagging or strict parenting, often explained as love from my family or abuse by some of the kids I grew up with. As previously mentioned, this was possibly due to the machismo culture, generational teachings, and parenting ideology. Nevertheless, the people who surrounded me in my youth had a strong sense of community and respect for each other, which I still instill in my daily activities and character. Recently, I was able to return to St. Patrick's with my husband and experience this feeling again, but now, as a doctoral candidate, a little older and slightly wiser but with the same drive for success.

Chapter V: Educational Mentoring

Mentoring during my grade school education is not something I can recall. I often think back to who or what I admired and often associated with pop culture, my family, and social influences such as my childhood friends. I attended a small Christian academy from kindergarten through my senior year in high school. An intricate part of my journey that would significantly affect my choices in continued education as an adult. I struggled in school and often felt insecure about my abilities, specifically related to mathematics and reading, which followed me as a young adult starting my college education at a local community college in my hometown. Both were struggles in my academic learning in which I had to face a literal fear of defeat and sometimes peer embarrassment I had to face head-on.

The perception of brown youth, specifically females, is usually depicted as less than average, generally affecting our education, career, and financial circumstances. While historically, this could be true, a significant amount of information still needs to be examined and learned from a new generation of Latinas who have been expanding the horizon for future generations. The significance of this is found in understanding that there are interrelated developmental processes dealing with youths' identity, cognitive and social development skills, education expectations, educational aspirations, and intrinsic academic motivation, which are related to formal and natural mentorship (Liao & Sánchez, 2019; Rhodes, 2005; Sánchez et al., 2008). While outside individuals, including teachers or counselors, may have lower expectations of brown female youth mentors, mentors can still counteract those stereotypes and help these youth fulfill their potential (De Los Reyes et al., 2022; Padilla, 2007). Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) found that mentees with strong family connections and families with higher educational backgrounds had a solid academic achievement success rate. Liao and Sánchez (2019) showed

that 74% of mentees with at least one natural mentor, usually a family member, had lower education advancement. However, those mentees had a much higher respect for people in authority or superior positions. Mentoring is a start to understanding the depiction of Latina youth from other perspectives because this is important to understand as we build the growth and importance of Latina mentorship. Mentoring was also noted in a study by Behnke et al. (2019), who reminded us that all members of a Latina community benefit from mentoring experiences because those connections have a theme of promoting personal growth and educating self.

Undergraduate Education

The culture shock of a public university was like a wave rolling over me when I transferred to the University of Texas at San Antonio to complete my bachelor's degree. As a first-generation college student, I had to learn about the college experience independently.

I attended the University of Texas at San Antonio, a local university with HSI status, which was on the brink of growing and expanding when I was attending. As a first-generation college student, I often had to rely on friends who had the same experience. While I was attending one of the largest universities in the state of Texas, I experienced a substantial lack of faculty and staff support while attending. As a transfer student from a local community college, there was the opportunity to have a two-by-two degree plan, meaning my first 2 years of college were at the community college, and the final 2 years were at the university level.

During my time as a community college student, I had two instructors who significantly influenced me. Economics was a mandatory course for my transfer degree plan during this time. As a mandatory course and somewhat related to mathematics, it was nerve-racking because numbers, percentages, and ratios were not my vital subjects at any point in my life. As a grade school student, I always had to have tutoring, additional instruction, and even many summer

school supplements. I refer here to my economics instructor as Mr. Consuelos. Mr. Consuelos was a businessman who knew numbers and believed in good business. He was a Latino from South Texas who grew up in the barrio and went on to earn his bachelor's and master's degrees long after his success with restaurant ownership. He was highly personable and often mentioned his graduation from Hamburger University as he owned two multi-million-dollar McDonald's locations. I admired his teaching style for two reasons: application and realism. He always had a story to go along with what he was teaching. This was a massive help to me and other students unfamiliar with economic lingo. I admired his methods of pedagogical teaching application, in addition to his ability to separate fact from fiction from various business methodologies. When I took this course, I was a full-time student and employee trying to balance those two parts of my life. It is easy enough to say I did not earn my best grades in his course, but I was devoted to my attendance and enjoyed his lectures—something he recognized and took an interest in me. One day after class, I explained how I was balancing work and school yet struggled with the material in his course. While I enjoyed hearing the stories and reflecting on business, something I was interested in, I still struggled with the theory and formulas of economics. Mr. Consuelos took it upon himself to check in with me every week that semester. He would ask where I was with the material, what I did and did not understand, and if he could explain any of the material further. It was the first time I experienced this in my academic career as a college student. His taking time to check in, explain, and recognize me as an individual and then a student profoundly influenced me in continuing my education. I finished the semester passing the course, not with an A, but with a better understanding of self-respect and appreciation for individuals who identified like me and saw my potential. I recognize Mr. Consuelos as an undergraduate mentor who took the

time to invest in my future and is still impacting how I interact with other individuals and invest in their future.

Dr. Star was my Anglo-female professor for English Composition II. She was stunningly beautiful and intelligent. This woman with a PhD in English spent her time writing poetry to complement her husband's professional photography as he traveled around the world, shooting material for *National Geographic* and other publications. In our very first class, she stressed the importance of being able to write well and how this carried into multiple formats, not just academically. I respected her because she had multiple offers to work at some of the best universities in the world and instead chose to work in South Texas to focus on her young children and invest her time and energy as a tenured professor at the community college. In her class, I felt a different investment in energy. As a student, I always felt a positive energy and investment in her time and experience. She made writing feel like a breeze, a critical part of what we leave behind. While her course was mandatory, her assignments became reflective pieces of my historical context throughout my life and, more so, who I was as a young Latina at that moment, figuring out the academic world and life. Her teaching philosophy was like that of Dr. Consuelos, who believed in application and student interaction, which I responded to as an investment as an individual. It was the first semester I received an A+ in a course, even though I was not the best student.

I look back and thank God for placing me in that class at that specific time. I learned the importance of writing with passion and purpose, in addition to how doing those things leads to good writing and how that carries one's career in various forms of achievement and scholarly form. I have been thankful to her for many years and credit her kindness and expertise in writing, which pushed me this far as a scholar.

Transferring to university for the final 2 years of my undergraduate studies was another culture shock. Going from a community college to a university was difficult for me. I was finally getting the hang of community college and now needed to transfer to complete my studies. I did so at the University of Texas San Antonio (UTSA), which at the time was still a smaller HSI university in the city, much less in the state of Texas. It is now on the verge of reaching tier-one status as a research institute, with roughly 34,000 students enrolled (UTSA, 2022). Presently, the research states there are 559 (18%) HSIs in the United States, of which two-thirds (66%) of the undergraduate population identify as Latinx, a population that is projected to continue to increase in the next few years and possibly beyond (HACU, 2022; IPEDS, 2021; NCES, 2022). Upon my acceptance and enrollment, I had one meeting with an advisor during my entire year and a half of attending and completing my bachelor's degree. I remember this specifically because I was working a full-time job as a manager for an optometry clinic right across from my campus and was taking a full course load between 15 to 18 hours per semester, plus working 40 hours per week. While I had an advisor assigned to me, I never heard from them via phone, email, or any other method of communication.

My courses were large and consisted of 25 to 100 individuals, depending on the subject and time of day. As a junior and senior, I found it difficult to create relationships with faculty, much less the staff, unless you were involved in their research or as an intern. I had no professional accountability from faculty or staff as a first-generation Latina at an HSI. At the time of my enrollment, I did not have one Latina professor or instructor; there was only one graduate teaching assistant in one of my last courses in the program, who often was left to teach the course on her own and would communicate more than our assigned professor for the course. Remember that I was attending an HSI circa 2009. I remember thinking I admired her because I

had never seen someone my age so far in their education, and how she was taken advantage of as a teaching assistant by her supervisor. She graduated with her PhD and is now tenured at the same university. I witnessed directly what a PhD student endured and possibly what the outcome would be if the individual could not stand up for themselves. Through this, I learned that Latina women in a graduate program were few to none, a minority group because of gender, color, and generalizations.

Graduate Education

When I applied and returned to graduate school, I was in my late 20s and newly married. That summer, I entered the program and worked full-time in corporate America. Life as a student was not something I looked forward to as I thought about continuing my education. However, my familial mentor, my dad, and the added boost of educational benefits from my employer were the main reasons I decided to return and complete my master's in administration. At this point in my career, there was a substantial pay increase and leadership role in which this degree was required but also a creditable source of educational benefit. Therefore, it only seemed fitting to use the benefits allotted to me and return to school, something I had attempted to do a couple of years before my acceptance into the university of my choice.

Previously, I had applied for admission to my alma mater within their graduate school and was accepted. So, there I was, ready to start the semester, preparing for the next phase of my academic career. Then, I received an unexpected call. They were eliminating my specific concentration due to a need for enrollment. Although, at the same time, I could continue to attend, I would have to change from adult learning and development to another concentration. I had to think hard about it and consider whether this would help me or affect me and what I envisioned for my future and professional goals. I decided to forgo enrollment and postpone

graduate school; I knew this was the right decision. Going through this experience previously, my admission to the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) came at the right time and while I was in a suitable space. As a full-time employee for a local Fortune 500 company, I could use my employee education benefits to cover half of my tuition while attending a completely asynchronous master's program online at my own pace, which my alma mater's program would not have afforded me. This was a substantial educational barrier; I heard from other individuals in similar situations who expressed interest in returning to university for an advanced degree. This was only in 2014-2015, not very long ago, but really at the forefront of online degree adaptation. The research recognized an estimated drop of 9% from statistical data by 2024 in college education despite multiple efforts to make education attainable and connective through multiple platforms (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022). The World Economic Forum (2022) advised that some primary reasons are the cost of education, lack of financial support, and a change in feelings or the worth of having a college degree. This contradicts how, today, some see a degree adding no additional gains in the workforce and, most recently, the COVID-19 global pandemic. These were at the forefront of my return to graduate school, as they still are for other individuals just starting their journey.

I was a newly married woman in May of 2015, applying to the master's program in June, and enrolled and started online courses by August. My experience with mentoring was almost foreign in my academic career, except for my community college experiences. Mentoring programs and mentor experiences followed me on and off in the corporate world. Although fast-paced, they used a black-and-white working path and utilized quick responses and high expectations. However, I could figure out my graduate journey independently with minimal guidance and support. As the first in my family to go to graduate school, it was an arduous

process with questions no one in my family could help. My grandmother, a retired teacher's aide, would also ask, "Is there something I could help with?" As much as I wanted or possibly needed help, I knew she couldn't because I was experiencing a first in our family.

I recognize this portion of my experiences as a lack of mentorship and impressionism by others who identify with me. However, there was a superior level of personal growth because of the lack of mentorship, which made me (a) learn from my failures and accolades, (b) seek to tell my own story as a Latina in graduate school, and (c) advocate for myself. Reflecting on my childhood, I recognized this as something my familial mentors, my family, purposely taught me as a child. However, as an adult, I now see this in the realities of sexism, ageism, and overall cultural awareness in new spaces, such as graduate school.

I am proud of my work while in the program, and being boastful about oneself is not acceptable by many in the Hispanic culture. It has taken a long time for me not to feel guilty saying these things aloud or writing them down. The asynchronous format was telling for many of my peers because it forces you to exercise your abilities to multitask, prioritize, and be proficient in your diligence as a student. In retrospect, it is the ultimate way to prepare for a doctorate. This is because I learned those things mentioned before; it was the real expectation that most doctoral students only understand sometimes years into their programs or even the dissertation phase. This is a form of mentorship in the shape of an experience or formatting, not an individual action of traditional mentoring involvement between two parties, in addition to recognizing that it has a reflective mentoring experience (Zachary & Fischler, 2009). This is a critical point I would like for others to reflect on in their own experiences and recognize as a form of mentoring. It was because of my overall attitude and even personal drive from a lack of current mentoring that I pulled from experiences from the past to get through this phase of my

academic career. I completed my master's program in four full semesters, taking two courses every 8 weeks. While challenging, there was a sense of completion and a newfound passion for school that I had never experienced before. Unlike undergraduate degrees and strict or structured academic rigor, graduate school was much more relaxed in self-reflection and personal application to theory, something I appreciated as a way of self-expression and a newfound writing appreciation. Graduate school allowed me to focus on topics I was passionate about and exercise the information and skills I had learned post-undergraduate degree and work experience.

While I had a good experience in an asynchronous classroom, the administrative staff needed more support and mentoring. For example, I had not met with an academic advisor or counselor about academic planning or general timeframes. This was a disadvantage as I needed a sense of immersion into university culture as a graduate student. As a first-generation Latina in graduate school, this was a challenging journey because I did not have a mentor to follow up with for guidance. Even without the circumstances, I have found that this is often a self-driven program that Latinas seek out for themselves.

Doctoral Education

My doctoral journey seeking my PhD in education started in the fall of 2017. I had recently graduated from UIW with my master's in administration, a program in which I excelled and completed asynchronously and within precisely 2 years. This experience built a passion and love for learning, which I had not previously experienced in all my school years. I credit this ambitious spirit to the format of graduate school, specifically at the master's level of education, being that its primary focus is to empower students by adhering to a self-imposed individualistic style of learning. This empowered me and let me explore my interests in a way I had never been able to.

Entering a PhD program was never in my sight. Earning a PhD was never a goal for me, nor did I believe it was a possibility based on many factors ranging from socioeconomics, perilous "isms," and stereotypes, to a personal lack of academic enthusiasm. Finally, however, there I was, applying at the recommendation of one of my graduate professors who thought I had enough potential.

My family also instilled education as a window to personal and financial security. However, at this phase of my academic career as a PhD student and then as a doctoral candidate, it has not been easy or, in some situations, healthy for me. I have always felt like the underdog or even a black sheep in the classroom, never worthy, even if I had a special invitation. The truth has been that when it comes to academia and being female in a predominantly and historically male field (never mind race or ethnicity, just yet), I have worked harder than many of the men in my program to be taken seriously at this level of education. When compared to other women who identify like me or can relate to these experiences in academic spaces, we also find ourselves competing with one another to gain ground instead of building comradery.

I recall, in one of my very first semesters in the program, I had a course with a Latina female professor who looked like me. It was the first time someone looked like and identified as I did, her brown skin, dark eyes, and dark hair. She was a married female with no children, a dog lover, and a badass female. Her words of wisdom on that 1st day were the ones I carried with me throughout this journey. She explained an assignment that had us take a very in-depth look into our lives and religions. As many of my peers were nervous about messing up or needed specific instruction to complete the assignment, she said, "The goal is not to be me; the goal is to be *you*!" I knew I was fortunate to have encountered an individual with this mindset, someone who could see past mine and my peers, my worlds, and the choices and non-choices we had made so

far in life. Her words have been like a fire for me, and I often repeat to myself, “I can only be me.” I often reflect on others who have not been able to have that same experience and the lack of representation of self and how that is for individuals in higher education who have not had that same encounter, for instance, those who have not seen another woman of color in their tenured or even non-tenured faculty. Because it is still a reality, we must face that Latina females are a minority.

Stephen Covey (2022) stated, “Trust is the glue of life. It is an essential ingredient in effective communication. It is the foundational principles that hold all relationships” (para. 1). Independent of what type of relationship, trust is, in one sense, the most expensive thing you can give to other individuals, especially when it comes to your emotions. Suppose you are lucky; in these academic programs, you build many relationships with staff and faculty in and out of your department/college. Through these formal relationships, which are the ones that grow and develop over time, you learn many lessons that are beneficial or sometimes detrimental to your academic career. However, in those cases where there are instances when trust cannot be built, or students feel it is them against their committee or a faculty member, it can lead to a whirlwind of self-doubt, stress, and academic and personal anxiety, among other things. So, developing positive, trustworthy relationships is essential to having a quality experience as a doctoral student and completing the program requirements as a doctoral candidate.

As time passes from semester to semester, then year to year, one can become more isolated or hesitant within their experiences, as I sadly have. Self-motivation is the essence of the dissertation phase but not what someone expects or rarely is prepared for after years of peer-to-peer interaction and coursework with a daily social presence. Early in my doctoral journey, I heard horror stories about the competitive side of academics, especially at the graduate or

professional level of education, whether a PhD, MD, or OD. I felt lucky to have not experienced these situations until much later and after a few years into my program.

Ageism

There are different dynamics in these types of academic programs: ages of students, professional interests, military, or civilian, academic interests and foci, institutional focus, drive, and designation, which are related to my experiences.

Mentoring in a doctorate program has been a whirlwind experience for me personally and professionally. It has broken me and built me back up more than any other experience. As a 1st-year student, you are just getting a sense of your surroundings and a feel for the time, work, and dedication it takes to succeed in that program. You do not have time to mingle, much less find a mentor in that 1st year. I set one primary goal at the beginning of that 1st year: to listen and observe. Where was I? Who were my peers? What were my motivations for getting through that year? Listening and observing have strong foundational practices toward what someone hopes to accomplish because there is a difference between listening and hearing what someone is communicating to you and interacting with someone vs. watching someone (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021; Zachary & Fischler, 2009). It is often harder to listen than to immediately respond because, as humans, it is our instinct to interact with someone vs. stare at them in their environment. Communication is mentioned as one of the top relationship roadblocks between people, then add observing them, which can become overwhelming to researchers because of the number of details to note from their experiences (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021, p. 127; Zachary & Fischler, 2009, p. 71). In my upbringing, children only spoke when spoken to; that was the cultural, traditional, and respectful way. Children were to be silent and unheard, a boundary I pushed as a strong, growing Latina. Through familial mentorship, this method taught

me the important lesson of active listening and good observation. As a scholar, I had to relearn lessons early on in my doctoral program.

In graduate school, I was one of the youngest in my program when I entered and closer to the middle age line when I finished. Age is a dynamic that can affect your experiences in a doctorate program. Not all my peers were vocal about this, but there have been situational circumstances when I faced this issue. For example, I was often seen as too young or needing more work/real-life experience to make a clear argument in a discussion. This would often lead to more considerable disagreement; mind you, this was despite my working in corporate America for years before having my master's degree and being over 30 years old. Several other peers and I, with similar circumstances, were also, on numerous occasions, overlooked or labeled naïve and too modern for the more mature doctoral students in the program.

Sexism

On another occasion, I sat and listened to grown men I refer to here as Joe and Harry. Joe and Harry openly spoke about and generalized women's "antics" because we are "hormonal creatures," as they mentioned. The conversation continued with their analysis of only dating foreign women because they did not like American women as they were not "submissive" enough to men, and "women cannot be trusted!" This commentary was then followed by the busily used "We are only joking." All were in a graduate classroom before the start of our evening class as they advised a young man who was also in our program. Again, an environment meant to be equal and academically fed was tainted and filled my heart with the most infuriating conversations I have ever heard that still boil my blood.

As a 1st-year doctoral student, I did not have a mentor or even an emotional ear at this point in my academic journey. I wondered if I was in the right place, with the right people, and

how this could have been a conversation with highly educated men. The benefits of prior mentoring at the professional level in my career led me to listen and observe, not to react in that moment or space. Yet, the newbie student in me said, “Keep your mouth shut. You have no seniority here.” Men in a tenured male professor’s classroom dominated me, many with a military background and seniors in the program. It was not until a couple of nights later, during the same semester program, that I saw this dynamic was specific to the classroom. I was also enrolled with this group of men in another core class led by a soon-to-be tenured female Latina’s classroom. I refer to her as Dr. Mindful. Well before there was room to think of these types of conversations, Dr. Mindful would quickly get into the evening plan and protocol, leaving no room for outside conversation, only room for the academic space of thinking on our planned lecture. One fall evening, Dr. Mindful had a schedule conflict with Joe and Harry. They explained their situation, and she explained the course requirement and the dean’s expectations of her doctoral students for this course. They must have debated this for at least 30 minutes in front of other students. At that moment, I wondered if she were a white male, would this have gone into such a long debate? Moreover, from experience, I knew it would not work because of the previous lack of repercussions from their other conversations in different classrooms.

Gmelch et al. (1998) wrote a chapter entitled “Sexism in the genderless classroom” roughly 25 years ago. However, in my own experiences, it is a piece of my puzzle that shows sexism still exists in academia and often unshared experiences. Gmelch et al. (1998) explained “males often dominate classroom discussions, are often more assertive than women, and resort to gender stereotypes in their arguments” (p. 28). I know for many master’s or doctorate students, this is not the case, or not all would suggest the type of behavior being this raw and emotional in such an atmosphere. I praise you and envy you for never having to experience such things. It is

essential to know “masculinity and power are intertwined in such a way that men represent the standard; they naturally represent the norm against which the performance of women is measured” (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012, p. 85). I gave an example when I dealt with two peers, Joe and Harry. Joe and Harry commented on stereotypical perceptions about women in American society and how those stereotypes, despite being highly educated men, affected their overall respect for American women. This is an issue I have witnessed in and out of the classroom throughout my life as to the difference in genders and having or not having mutual respect for the professional’s position or the educational or professional setting they are in. The more complicated part is how many of these situations women like me experience, do not talk about, are taught to sweep under the rug, and are dismissed as normal conversation. In truth, it is condescending and sexist in and out of the higher-education classroom.

Power

Kaplin et al. (2020) discussed this unspoken but repeatedly felt power dynamic in higher education. In the last 2 years, I have seen three women of color (two Hispanic, one African American) leave their tenured positions after 1 or 2 years because of the lack of leadership support in diversity and compassionate mindfulness toward females. This left a significant and impactful gap in mentorship opportunities for female students of color who connect with those faculty who resemble them and seek mentorship and academic support from other women who have been through similar situations or can understand cultural circumstances. I will not be the first to tell you that women of color in higher-education faculty positions, much less tenured, are hard to come by. Many of these women feel a substantially heavier burden than their male counterparts in their departments (Flaherty, 2016). I do want to recognize that racial solidarity and female professors do exist and can be found, but in many instances, there is a significant

amount of work to be done to improve the overall experiences in these areas for this population. Academic seniority, hierarchical leadership, and gender issues pin faculty of color and various genders against each other in professional settings (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). This also leads to micro-aggressive experiences for female faculty of color, as Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. (2012) shared in their personal and professional experiences.

Women of Color and Higher Academia

Women of color are underrepresented in academia even though many female scholars are completing their undergraduate education and outranking the ratio of men enrolled at universities in the 21st century (NCES, 2021). Women remain a minority in faculty departments within higher educational settings (NCES, 2021). For many scholars, selecting to teach and research as a professor is a time-honored and respected accolade. However, it is one career that is becoming tougher and trickier, and some may say, even harder to attain, especially when it comes to women and those women who may identify ethnically like me (Axios, 2021). In a time when Millennials and Gen Xers are achieving much higher education levels than any previous generation, these prestigious academic positions have become more challenging. Research suggests two reasons for this. First, there has been a change of "declining in-person class enrollment, increased faculty who are at retirement age, and institutional tenure caps," meaning universities are moving away from creating these full-time positions as full-time faculty retire (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). Second, there needs to be adequate pay for the work that goes into an academic field position. Within academia, the standard 40-hour work week does not exist. Making the general competitive nature of merely wanting the job means individuals are more likely to accept the position with less compensation to get their foot in the door and, with any luck, have a long-term, eventually tenured career in academia.

Women within academia are not a new concept but are less common in higher education, specifically when you look at the master's and doctorate level of program completion, even though we are well into the 21st century. Again, it is a familiar idea but tends to have a more substantial turnover and less relativism in most colleges. Ironically, there is a commonality between individuals who decide to go forward with these types of advanced degrees and scholarly abilities. Academic scholars or individuals who go after advanced degrees have specific characteristics: competitive, perfectionist, achievement-oriented, and conscientious (Vaughn et al., 2020). Because there is such a small group of women with advanced degrees or in higher educational settings, comradery and competition come with these groups. There is often a commonality of resilience and perseverance in women's stories of higher education (Polenghi & Fitzgerald, 2020). Vaughn et al. (2020) mentioned a connection between impostor syndrome and academic motivation among women in higher education. This suggests that many women often feel that they are not worthy or relevant in their environment while they are active academic community members. There is often much questioning of self-worth and academic worth within academia to compete and stand out from peers.

Coetzee and Moosa (2020) stated that while women are breaking the glass ceiling in higher education, retention is an area in desperate need of improvement. In addition, unknown yet spoken expectations are expected from women, often including multi-tasking with family, professional, and other responsibilities (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). Women of color are especially needed in higher education within faculty roles because they provide mentorship to those who identify like them and serve as strong role models within the university (Bartels et al., 2021). However, female scholars also need faster promotion or leadership advancement within institutions; because of this, many female scholars grow frustrated and leave academia (Bartels et

al., 2021). Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. (2012) stated, “Women of color are celebrated, encouraged to academically strive in publication and merit yet frequently find themselves presumed incompetent as scholars, teachers, and participants in academic governance” (p. 1). In 2020, 26.5% of faculty identified as Hispanic women who accounted for faculty between adjunct employment and full professor (NCES, 2021). Despite how much women’s rights and educational backgrounds have grown (not counting the recent overturn of Roe vs. Wade), substantial systemic issues plague women in academia. Most are swept under the rug or rarely openly addressed and resolved—the ever-growing elephant in the room, which no one looks in the face and addresses during the weekly meeting. Sexism, ageism, trust, lack of power dynamics, and construction of the overall academic space are not always practiced within the classroom.

University is a unique place of scholarship and leadership where many future leaders are educated and evaluated yet stressed. This academic space changes within each level of student advancement and becomes more complex and isolated the higher you go within your knowledge base as a scholar. Often, these experiences occur at the graduate level and from experience felt during the dissertation process of many doctoral programs. This is ironic as this is when most students are learning how to research individual personality, community aspects, involvement, and individuals at the leadership level. Graduate students are often isolated from their peers, faculty, and staff while writing and reflecting on their texts, research, and scholarly publications. The loss of these real-life experiences with others outside their program can lead to a confusing and isolated time during this learning process.

Competitive Spirits

Through experience, I have found that men and women are equally competitive in academic circles. However, women are often left to advocate for themselves and their worth within academic walls. This is because of two things: one I have been discussing, which is power, and the other, which is competition. I see two aspects in this conclusion. Previous scholarly research suggests women are often left behind, tend to be labeled unfit for the job, and often face a lack of gender equality within professional scholarly settings (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012), leading to a much more aggressive, competitive nature in female scholars, which must be stronger than the males to maintain survival in such academic programs.

As a 3rd-year doctoral student, coming to the end of my coursework, publishing was at the top of my goals. As with any doctorate, students are often required to be published academically before graduation. In addition, publication is sometimes the prerequisite for scholarly recognition if one plans to stay in higher education or academia.

As a teaching assistant in the summer of 2020, I was able to work closely with a class of master's and doctoral students, taking an introductory course in qualitative methodology. I worked closely with the professor to develop the course outline and class strategies during this time. In addition, the summer of 2020 brought on many teaching opportunities and creative designs as we worked remotely with adult learners and tried to survive a global pandemic. This experience became a publication opportunity for me and my co-author/instructor the following fall semester. I was selected to write a chapter for a textbook about digital learning. While the excitement and pride of your work are celebrated, it often comes with criticism and flak from your cohorts. It then drives competitive spirits to become, in some cases, more hostile toward the author than in the previous context. At the same time, there are often congratulations that come

from many for your diligence. However, some individuals socially isolate others from their inner circle for any non-specific reason. I can tell you dozens of individuals I have lost touch with after my first publication, a handful of individuals who were sincere in their congratulations, and a couple who called and asked about everything I had been accomplishing.

While I know this will make some uncomfortable, I share this part of my story because it is an experience others have had and have not shared or who are just fearful of sharing such bad memories because of potential retaliation from their peers. I do not share these things lightly; I share them with deep solace and concern. I share them to show why the effort, work, and sacrifice into academic programs, such as a doctorate, should not be overlooked or considered easy. In addition, it offers an enhanced picture of this female scholar's experience and whether it has been different from or like your own experience.

An example of this is having witnessed older academic women in my program treat the younger academic women like children by speaking down to them or even minimizing their contributions in academic discussions in front of other peers. In many cases, it is often a fear of change or ageist intimidation that gets the best of the older academic. Then factor in a potential lack of people of color or, in general, female representation in the faculty and lack of hiring interest, which creates job security in higher education for newbie PhDs. Despite what some individuals will tell you, there is power in who you know academically, especially if that individual is in a leadership position. This power effect also counteracts a lack of connection, meaning power if you have less of a network of scholarly contacts with the secret password to the gate. As an academic, I know these last few sentences will be challenged by someone reading this. However, let us keep an open mind once again that this research is a SPN that pushes a deeply reflective piece of critical analysis through one's experiences.

On one occasion, Dr. Flowers, a female Anglo, a tenured professor in a neighboring department, sat and had coffee with me. We debated working together on some research but wanted to get to know each other better. So, I sat and told her about myself, my academic history, the research I had done, and what I hoped to accomplish after graduating with my PhD. I was at a point in my journey when the reasons I started my PhD and what I hoped to accomplish were significantly changing because of my growth as an individual but also because we were in the middle of a global pandemic, which, at the time, was changing traditional learning styles and environments. I told her I would still love to teach at the university level but knew it was becoming harder and harder to secure a full-time position, much less tenure. Then, before I could even finish, she told me flat out, "You probably will not get a job in academics after this, so what is your backup?" Furthermore, while I heard her make some valid points, another woman told me my research was interesting, but where would I be able to teach that? As we finished the meeting, suddenly, the coffee was not the only bitter taste in my mouth. It was as if someone who barely knew me shattered my whole plan and world. It is safe to say that while a female, Dr. Flowers had very different experiences and perceptions of academia and the world of research than I do.

Sense of Self

Statistically, only 8.8% of Latinas complete a doctorate, and we are statistically grouped into one percentage representing MD, DDS, PhD, and EdD as the most common (NCES, 2022a). I know from an outside perception, and possibly even internally, some other women and men think that at this level of academic accomplishment, academic women stick together through thick and thin within the university walls. In some cases, I have seen where this is the case, but it is also from a cultural collective, meaning Hispanics help other Hispanics, Blacks help other

Blacks, Asians help other Asians, and so on. However, a competitive spirit dominates the male and female gender roles, which also take place, male vs. female, and from here, yet another competition. I have found that as a Latina graduate scholar, I had to find and build a powerful sense of self, which, from my stories and circumstances, is not easy. My research, for example, is based on the need to understand mentoring, specifically Latinas. However, it is also based on passion, which does make some academics uneasy or even angry.

What I have had to learn and trust is that it is through that passion that I have built my fierce competitive drive. I realized very early on that I was not going to be celebrated by all my peers or possibly even not by faculty or advisors in my program, which led me to question many of my methods early on in my program, including my sense of self and respect for myself as an academic. I would often ask myself. Am I making sense? Is there something I am doing wrong? Why do I feel alone or like I stick out like a sore thumb? Who you were at the beginning of this type of program is not necessarily the same person you are at the end. Therefore, there is an analytical portion of tugging on my conscious to analyze my surroundings to search for truth and explanation. While my first intention was to educate myself for financial gain and better my chances as a young undergraduate, I never thought I would go this far academically. I am different; my thinking and social reflections differ, but I still live like many academic individuals in-between two worlds, sometimes more depending on the situation. Code-switching, considered a sociolinguistic phenomenon, is one's ability to quickly change one's thought process, including language structure, context analysis, and synthesis (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). This is a daily reminder of cultural differences and adaptations in a never-ending cycle of being a brown female in the academy.

From experience, self-doubt and impostor syndrome are real and contributing factors in finding who you are as a scholar/researcher in academia. However, as if my olive skin with a yellow undertone is not enough, my physical, mental, and spiritual being has continually learned, grown, and hurt within this journey. Gutiérrez (2022), a licensed therapist who focuses on cultural and personal trauma, wrote in her book *The Pain We Carry*:

> We're taught from early ages, through lack of representation, restricted access, and being told we're not welcomed, to not take up space. Our needs, feelings, and presence don't matter. And when we feel like we don't matter, we feel vulnerable and write ourselves off in one way or another. We might dismiss our own needs and internalize the cultural burden placed on us that says we just don't matter. And that message continues to have ripple effects on the generations that come after us, becoming legacy burdens. (para. 1)

I have learned that self-doubt, impostor syndrome, pain, and fear are more common within the Latina academic community than we let on. Ideas such as fear of retaliation and even fear of oneself, whether they fail or are successful, are common, more common than research has documented.

Summary

The importance of my experiences is to show the importance of many other stories; whether Latina, non-binary, Asian, or anyone else, they are all important. Reading and understanding the journey for a Latina doctoral student or candidate is not accessible by any means. While there have been moments of immense delight and happiness with my research and coursework, there were many moments of confusion, competition, and even some tears and hopelessness in finding where I did or did not fit. However, I worked with a few of the most intellectual females in university just by chance and with a small amount of faith. Scholars who are like me did not have many, if any, mentors who identified with them or had similar barriers as a female in academia. Their devotion to research makes a difference in the community. It is applicable, one of the many reasons I chose the program and the university I attend. Attending an

HSI was essential to my story because of my ethnicity and cultural values. However, what I have discovered was the opposite, in the sense of learning with other minorities from the Middle East, Asia, and all around the world. Despite this, Latina females are still considered a minority in my cohort, but this is the reality of many Latinas' experiences in academia and the workforce.

My doctoral journey started with an impression of the financial gain coming from the thought process. The more education, the greater the job opportunities and financial security, both of which I am still searching for. While there is a sense of pride in my academic accomplishments, there is also a tremendous sense of lost time—personal time that I cannot get back with loved ones who are no longer here physically. There is also a deeper understanding of my self-worth, who I am as a scholar and a professional Latina, and how I would like to continue to grow.

Chapter VI: Building a Career

Hispanic Business Professionals

From the historical perspective of Hispanic ethnicity, it is important to recall several points of interest as to why these individuals stand out from other business professionals: character, educational means, community, and the social norms that do or do not exist within each Hispanic community (Blancero et al., 2007). Twenty-five years ago, a documentary geared toward Hispanic business professionals and entrepreneurship emphasized the importance of having passion, vision, discipline, integrity, flexibility, extensive experience, or an education (Films for the Humanities & Sciences et al., 2006). If this was true in 1996, it is even more prominent in today's business culture and this research. Hispanic American culture is a vital part of the historical foundation in this region, and generational lineage also matters (e.g., first, second, third, Hispanic American). It is a culture involved from previous generations to today's society (Knight et al., 2010). Cultural and interpersonal values are highly embedded within the family dynamic of the culture and how Hispanics develop themselves as a unit and as individuals (Knight et al., 2010). It is something you will witness within this testimonial.

Second is the spoken and unspoken social norms in Hispanic culture. There is significant value in realizing why these are essentially one of the foundational pieces of our SIT. Hispanic culture's social norms also cross over how Hispanics grow, develop, and categorize themselves in and out of their organizational setting (Burleson et al., 2019; Mansyur et al., 2015; Uhlmann & Heaphy, 2013). Diversity within the Hispanic community is another factor to consider, as it comprises many individuals from many countries in North, Central, and South America and beyond these borders.

Statistically, many individuals identify as Hispanic because of the historical context of their family origins and current or prior geographical location. Living in South Texas, one can see how much it has grown in population and career opportunities, both of which have increased the overall economic outlook of the area. According to McNamee et al. (2021), the Hispanic population currently leads this growth by four-fifths of the population. Texas' rate of population growth surpasses that of the United States in its entirety. The total population in the state of Texas currently sits at roughly 30 million, and Hispanics make up the largest share of that population at roughly 40.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Even with all this information, throughout my exploration of peer-reviewed literature, the term *Hispanic business professional* is not well defined or found in a dictionary. Instead, it is divided into individual words; even though it is used in many articles or conversations, it has been left without a definition or specific literary distinction.

For this study, it was crucial to explain and define Latinas as a part of Hispanic business professionals because there is a need for a more scientific definition. Also, this is a distinctive group I am a part of that contributes significantly to my region. In recognizing many similarities and differences within my academic, professional, and personal life, which have made me who I am today, I also acknowledge that these experiences are relatable to others who are and possibly are not like me. This is because Hispanic business professionals' overall U.S. Census Bureau (2019) trajectory shows growth in the coming years. In South Texas, the overall population identifies as Hispanic. While this varies from county to county, over 50% of the population in most counties agree. However, there needs to be more understanding and education on how important a role and critical aspect of successful business practices Hispanics bring to any organization (Texas Demographics, 2020). To understand the complexity of this point, this

testimonial covers personal, academic, and career-oriented mentorship experiences. Hispanic ethnicity's historical background and current-day perspectives include genuine parts of informational and experiential learning, critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis.

Work Philosophy and Career Moves

I come from many generations of hardworking individuals, and my grandparents were highly significant in instilling many of the foundational practices of the definition of hard work and work ethic. Their parents were the start of this familial trait, and these work ethics included a strong initiative, dedication, responsibility, self-discipline, dependability, honesty, integrity, and fairness. These work ethics were a part of my journey in my adolescence and have continued through my adult life. However, although I hold these values in my professional career, they have yet to be something I have experienced on my professional path. This is why, when reflecting on my mentoring journey, I found I could not do this research only focused on the higher-education aspect of my mentoring experiences and needed to include those of my professional business career to get an entire picture of my encounters.

This portion is divided into two sections: first, as a student and second, as a professional businesswoman. The decision to separate them is centered on the types of experiences that reflect the environments in which they take place. In certain circumstances, research shows individuals will sometimes change their view of themselves in different settings and are often dependent on the social factors of that moment (Gardner-Chloros, 2009), a recognition of many different experiences and social environments I have been in and now as I have noticed through reflective practices.

As a Student

The evolving concept of higher education helping my career advancement has always been at the forefront, and why I have continued to complete degree after degree. As a graduate student at the master's level, I quickly realized my experiences in grade school and undergraduate years differed significantly from those of graduate school. For an independent-minded individual, this was an actual test to see how I could apply what I had been learning away from the classroom for the 5 years before I returned to university. From a developmental perspective, I experienced a level of achievement, having a college degree and working in corporate America. This was a substantial jump in my professional role and compensation from my pre-college degree job. This was by no means my first full-time job. I always worked full-time as a student; I have been employed since I was 16 years old. This made my ability to apply concepts of administrative components in theory and real-life experiences to give me a better understanding of the application of a master's degree. I credit that to a solid foundation in administrative skills from previous jobs during and after my undergraduate program and throughout my lifetime. The time between university programs was significantly rewarding and teachable, and that is why I chose to return to school after working several years in a corporate position and letting some time pass. One of the primary reasons I returned to the university was the financial incentive from my employer at that time. The company I worked for paid half my credit hours each semester, almost unheard of in other companies and even rarer today. Tuition reimbursement was a positive incentive for my decision because it allowed me to focus more on the curriculum and stress less about the financial burden of paying for the semester. I give the second credit for returning to university to the academic institution with a fully asynchronous online program for the degree plan I was applying for. This advantage of completing the program

entirely online was a game changer because I could work at my own pace and cut out travel time and possibly miss time at work if I needed to leave early for a weeknight class or another circumstance. In this case, there was no need to worry about changing my work schedule, which was more critical without making additional sacrifices. Other than these two reasons, there was no direct mentoring or individual I admired so profoundly that it pushed me to return to school.

My dad had always stressed the importance of education, but once I was done with my initial college education, he was content with my level of success. A Latina woman, there were no other women in my direct network who had attained this level of education. Other than a few distant, twice-removed cousins, I did not have someone who looked like me, spoke like me, and thought like me who was on that path. So, deciding to return to school was scary. I was blindsided by what it meant to ask a question; I had to answer it. In addition, there were very limited, if any, resources for the type of program I was enrolled in, and fewer women were enrolled with me. While my family supported my decision, there were many instances when I felt they could not understand what I was dealing with or how I felt in my position as a graduate student. Many of my professors were male, Anglo, in other states teaching remotely, or simply unavailable to mentor another individual. This part of my life was entirely on my own. I found my resources; I found my answers, and I placed an immense amount of light on my identity based on who I already was and what I knew I was capable of, yet I felt, at times, completely incompetent.

As a Professional Businesswoman

As a young corporate American employee starting in an entry-level position, I often went into situations feeling my input and interests were second to the company, even as a college graduate in her late 20s. However, my experiences varied between male and female superiors.

Within my roles, if I had a male manager or supervisor, my responsibilities were often calmer and less stressful or dramatic. For example, when I was scheduled for a coaching session with one of them, I would be asked during our sessions how I was doing and where I felt I needed improvement and was met with the support I needed to move forward with my decisions. With female managers or supervisors, I was, on more than one occasion, shadowed or watched at my desk or by screen share to confirm I was moving my work along adequately.

Additionally, given more caseloads or handled more responsibilities than just my work, if I went to a female's desk for a manager's approval or needed a second opinion on a client issue, I even had women get up from their desks and walk off or tell me they were not my manager and I needed to ask someone else for help. There was always an issue or an episode of disappointment, fear, or overwhelming anxiety when interacting with female supervisors or leadership.

Before leaving corporate America, one of my last experiences was dealing with my last manager, who had just moved to Texas on a transfer assignment. On her very 1st day, she advised me that I was not being considered for the promotion I had been anticipating for several months after numerous interviews and back-and-forth negotiations. She reasoned that I did not have enough support from the all-female panel in my department who knew me and happened to all be white. I was overwhelmed with anger, sadness, and frustration, and this situation solidified that I would no longer be in a corporate life. Whatever the reason for them not hiring me, I also knew these individuals I would have to work with as "acting" managers when my manager was out of the office. Unfortunately, they were also the same individuals who never gave me the time of day in direct lines of business and comradery.

As a career woman, in moments like this, I have seen my professional identity grow within positive and negative mentoring opportunities. As a young undergraduate student,

working full-time and maintaining full-time student status, I recognized then and now how lucky I was to have secured a job where my priority was being a student yet being able to provide for myself financially. My supervisors and practice owners of the optometry clinic where I worked understood that I was a student. I wanted to go further in my career and, as a professional, at that time, an undetermined field. Because of their understanding and flexibility, I spent many years working for them and devoted my professional loyalty to them. I knew everything about them, possibly things I should not have, but because of their built trust in me, I was unaware this motion was starting to teach me in building my professional identity. This was also the first place I ever experienced gendered racism from another woman as a disgruntled patient was upset about a medical co-pay due at the end of her visit.

As she became angrier and more upset, she told me I was a stupid Mexican Latina who should return wherever I came from! Luckily, a Hispanic male co-manager quickly removed me from the situation and removed her from our office. This was the first and only time in my career that I have ever cried at work. While I had witnessed other scenarios and heard stories from others who had experienced racism, I now was a victim of another individual's violent words and thoughts. I vowed never to let another individual, much less a white woman, treat me in such a way ever again. Lessons like this and many positive ones molded me into the business professional I am today. I like to look back on those times as challenging and rewarding. The skills I learned from being a technician, secretary, insurance specialist, office manager, and eventually a clinic director were skills I am sure no other employer would have allowed me to learn as a young undergraduate student. I have often wondered why they invested so much in me as an employee and human being. Was it luck, me being in the right place at the right time, or was there a deeper connection and purpose to our time working together? What was it that made

our relationship different? Their implementation of trust and a work ethic was vital for me to grow as an employee and eventually a confidant within the workplace. While we served a diverse community within the optometry field, we could still understand one another despite various backgrounds and upbringings. As for most individuals, ethnicity and race are inherently a part of who we are, how we identify, and often how or whom we work with or for. These are intricate parts of building a professional identity, even during a global pandemic. The idea of knowing oneself continues to evolve with time. Ashforth (2020) suggested that even in a post-pandemic world, identity is at the root of organizational and professional change because "major crises are moral inflection points which make us rise to an occasion" (para. 5).

Setbacks and Acceptance

One of the lessons I continue to apply from my familial mentors is the lesson of assumption. Assumptions can be helpful yet detrimental to one's career. The more experiences I have had, the more I see my assumptions as realistic metaphors for people's actions and true intentions. I see these through two complex angles that I regard as race/ethnicity and my age. First, as a Latina business professional, I have seen how my gender, age, and ethnicity have silenced challenges in my career. I recognize LatCrit theory throughout my experiences and testimonials as an informed individual.

LatCrit theory provides the framework to focus on Latino/a/x experiences and show the "multidimensional identities Latinos have and addresses the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression" (Bernal, 2016, p. 108). Through its evolving movement, many professionals in multiple groups of scholarly individuals have joined to fight for Latino rights (Aoki & Johnson, 2008). Many of those rights are employment or education-related opportunities such as mine. One of the reasons LatCrit theories were essential to this

study is because of issues such as race, gender, age, and socioeconomic variances, which impact personal, professional, and academic identity (Valdes, 1997). According to Valdes (1997), LatCrit theory operates under four primary functions: "(1) a production of knowledge, (2) the advancement of transformation, (3) the expansion and connection of struggles, and (4) the cultivation of community and coalition" (pp. 7-8). While most of the previous literature focuses on higher education and law experiences, it is crucial to understand that these experiences could be like those of careers like mine or other Latinas with similar experiences. Fernández (2016) examined Latino/a/x experiences in urban schooling. Various personal narratives through the experiences of the students, administration, and faculty were found because of the research. A personal narrative is a different perspective from the other. One way LatCrit has been used previously is to explain the experiences of Latinos through the application of social injustice or discrimination. While this may be a different case in the business field, it may be a reason to explore how LatCrit recognizes the lives of Latina Millennials. It will add to and further develop a unique way of examining LatCrit theory, how it can be applied in the business environment, and how it is used as an emergent subgroup for business management and organizational development.

The second aspect of my experiences was age. I am considered a Millennial with many positive and negative connotations from various groups. Millennials were born between the 1980s and the mid-to-late 1990s (Caraher, 2015; Merriam-Webster, n.d.-e; Milligan, 2016). Millennials are said to be 80 million strong and are one of the largest within the population, next to Baby Boomers who, by 2030, will retire from the workplace (Taylor, 2014). Millennials, the next leaders, are among a vast transition of individuals learning business, assuring organizations continual successes, and preparing to be the next in charge. Millennials, such as I, are the

primary age group advancing to mid-level positions in organizations and need to build up a business and ensure it is viable and flourishes long term (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). A dominant factor for consistent urgency in organizations is to stay ahead of their competitors for two reasons: (a) to ensure the viability of the business long term and (b) to advance employees in their careers sooner than later.

Millennials have been labeled as coddled, diverse, lazy, entitled, liberal, volunteers, and tech-savvy, to name a few descriptors (Boesche, 2017; Kadakia, 2017; Taylor, 2014). While Millennials are still relatively young, they are aging. Therefore, creating successful strategies for Millennials to feel empowered or produce a higher quality of input into their organizations is vital to creating new opportunities. As many organizations continue to adapt or adjust the required skills of their associates, more than moderately advanced knowledge is needed. For most organizations, technological advancements are a vital component of the jobs they offer. As we communicate more online, human connections are lost; human-to-human connection is a part of our human experience (Brown, 2021). This lack of connectivity has been even more evident after the 2020 global pandemic because organizations had to transition to at-home work environments. Workspace diversity is complicated and sensitive; yet, it should be intentional, practical, and tailored to each organization's needs (Triana & Gu, 2021). Millennials are a part of the diversity, inclusion, and integration protocol. They can offer much more advice on adapting this in their workplaces, as they are known as "the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in American history" (Taylor, 2014, p. 26).

For example, as an older Millennial, I lean more toward a mixed work environment, blending tech and face-to-face experiences. I grew up in a world where we still learned how to type in typing class, yet we transitioned into computer 101 in college. Somewhat to my

advantage, adaptability within situations is often uncomplicated. However, I am often still the youngest one in a team of employees with opinions that are over-shadowed or looked at as elementary or too new-aged. Because of the Millennial label, there have been instances where I sat silently in meetings with my older co-workers because of smirks or opinions in the past, which is the most ageism I have experienced.

One of the most joyous yet stressful opportunities I have had was to be a part of a sample team that released drones to surveillance for insurance claims. At the time, I was working for a corporate insurance company leading this initiative. I was excited to use this technology because it would decrease our turnaround times, payouts, and customer experiences almost half the time. After natural hurricane disasters such as Sandy, Harvey, Katrina, and the devasting tornado in Joplin, Missouri, I had the unfortunate firsthand experience of how terrifying, emotionally, and financially straining these types of events had been on people's lives. Therefore, I found it a privilege to work and develop this type of system. However, when it came to the implementation and action in using this technology, I was 1 of 3 people on a team of 12 who utilized the equipment. Most who chose not to use it referenced it was too much work, confusing, or there needed to be more compensation for them to include in their daily routine. The three who did use it, me included, were able to experience insurance claims from a different perspective and understand the future of the insurance industry, which is now in full effect.

Millennials have been and continue to be the talk of the town. In many respects, we are one generation that has substantially impacted the world, like the Baby Boomer generation, born after a time of great despair in a war-torn world. Millennials have lived through inflation, recession, one of the larger single-parent-driven generations being raised, and the height of terroristic propaganda, in addition to now a global pandemic in their adult lifetime (Kadakia,

2017). Yet, we are still considered children well into adulthood in further education and employment. As early Millennials begin to cross the threshold of 40 years old, there is still a significant amount of work to do to understand this generation, how they have changed business education, and what we will continue to do in the future. Ageism, race, gender, and often spaces are still a work in progress for Millennials like me, who have felt underappreciated or devalued in their workspaces as grown adults. It is a foundational piece of my reasoning for leaving the corporate world and building something from the ground up for myself vs. feeling under pressure, exhausted, and stressed because of a condonation of other generations' expectations or perceptions of the Millennial generation. This lesson in mentoring came to me at one of the peaks in my professional career. Yet, I untied the laces of corporate restraints and ran like hell.

Chapter VII: Loss and Resistance: Mentoring Through Grief

Grief is a roller coaster of emotions. Add this to trying to finish a PhD, a different stress level. In the fall of 2018, my dad, 61 years of age, was diagnosed with glioblastoma, a rapidly developing, aggressive form of brain cancer. In the blink of an eye, my world turned upside down. I still remember sitting in Tuesday night's class, the cold air slightly moving the papers on the table before me, asking, "What the hell am I doing here?" doing group work as my dad lay in a hospital for a diagnosis. The choice to go to school that night was not one I looked at with excellent recommendation.

Nevertheless, I did it because my dad told me to. For the following 7 months and 13 days, he would fight this aggressive form of cancer with radiation, chemotherapy, holistic and prescribed medication, and many prayers. However, it was a journey my family and I knew would not have a happy ending. Throughout those months, there were very few conversations about death, and they had been hard to swallow. Finally, one afternoon while in the hospital, he called me to his bedside. His eyes filled with tears, he said, "I need you to take care of everything," a simple request that made me realize I was going to be on my own very soon. As a child growing up, you see your parents as these mystical characters who continue. However, when you realize they are human and subject to illness and death, your years change, and you are a grown-up. It was in these moments that I found every single conversation, lesson, lecture, and everything else taught to me by my dad flash through my thoughts.

In the summer of my 3rd year in my doctoral program, I lost my dad to this aggressive and incurable form of brain cancer. There I was, in a summer II session, learning or at least trying to learn "writing for publication," and I was losing my dad. From the beginning of our program, research scholars were taught to adapt, yet in this circumstance, the adaptation was

forever. Dr. Garcia, the course facilitator, was more than understanding of my loss and what lay ahead for me. One of the reasons I chose the university where I am studying was the community's appeal and the faith-based historical journey of the Sisters of Charity, who founded UIW in 1881. There was a real sense of understanding and sympathy toward the situation and how this would affect me as a student and an individual. She took the time to ask me how I was personally and if there was anything she could do. As a student, I tried to find a solid professor-student relationship related to academia. However, in this case, she saw me at one of the most vulnerable points of my life as a human being. However, as a student, I had the academic obligation to try my best to meet the course syllabus requirements at the end of an 8-week summer II session in a mandatory course required for my core curriculum credits. While Dr. Garcia was not one of my formal mentors, we both found ourselves in a life predicament, which enabled us to learn more about one another and me to lean on her more than I would in the average semester and course. I completed the course requirements in the 6th week, the tail end of the semester. She guided me by breaking down the long-format manuscript into several individual parts, which were written as I could, reviewed in three segments, and then mended together. She explained a method of writing for publication that could sometimes be constructed as a backward process. Traditional formats of pre-search, literature review, analysis, and synthesis must sometimes be reconstructed for the sake of the situation. I had not encountered this but appreciated it because it was the first time I felt a sense of independence as a student researcher and author. She explained the process of multiple manuscripts and writing in a way that benefited the researcher, which is what you hope is the least stressful. Organization and mindfulness went into the writing process because of understanding the obligations and situations of the whole person or persons involved. Through this, I gained a deeper

understanding of Dr. Garcia's sincerity toward her students and her work as a scholarly researcher. Through this, I learned that direct and indirect mentorship could come in many forms. Often, as students, we seek out a specific individual we identify with or admire for the research or work they are involved in. However, we often need opportunities where others are ready and willing to share their experiences and expertise. Amid immense sadness and confusion, Dr. Garcia saw my determination to see the course through and try my best to create a final work worth the grade she determined.

After losing my dad, life felt like one big blur of the infamous blackhole often used in analogies or stories of no escape. I was in my 30s, one of the best seasons of adulthood, a doctoral student wanting to be present and successful, a business professional who had to make the tough decision to leave my career to focus on my family and the loss we were enduring. A persistent nightmare that would continue making my personal and educational journey would become more challenging than ever.

In February 2020, I sat in my advanced qualitative methods course for the last time. After spring break, my cohort would never physically return to campus for classes. The COVID pandemic had made its way to my little part of the globe. Still in the middle of grief, we needed to isolate ourselves from as many individuals as possible.

Acknowledgment of Self

Internal Strength

In a study by Tan and Andriessen (2021), university students were divided in the amount of support they received or that they sought from their university services after experiencing a personal death and often felt "independent grieving" was more appropriate (p. 9). I experienced a strong sense of community after my dad's passing at university. Two years into the program, I

had a good sense of my institution, peers, faculty, and staff within my college. MacCourt (2017) suggested that caregivers or individuals in these situations who have a support system via a coach or support group show more vital coping skills, resilience, and a feeling of empowerment. I recognize this in my ability to share the most vulnerable parts of my personal life and the challenges I faced as a grieving individual. There were days when I felt I was wearing a mask, forming myself into someone I did not even know anymore. The ability to be vulnerable came from the ability to trust and the sense of compassion my professor and academic supervisors felt during the summer II session in 2019. Only a crazy person would take an 8-week summer course during this life transition. I also credit attending a smaller private university, which allowed these more personable experiences between my faculty mentors and peers in addition to the element of a faith-based university mission.

Grief is not a discrete object. Its characteristics can be vague, changeable, or varied from individual to individual. It is unique and can also vary culturally, historically, and educationally; therefore, it cannot be boxed (Rosenblatt & Bowman, 2013, p. 83). When there is a feeling of immense power or bursts of energy, or even positive outcomes during grief, this can be understood as a means of personal growth that stems from a traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). For some, there are proven opportunities for a sense of self-worth and positive effects before and after experiencing death, such as heightened courage, strong determination, circumstantial acceptance, humor, and profound empathy (Hughes, 2015). I found this true in my journey as I would soon lose my maternal grandfather to COVID-19 in 2021 and my maternal grandmother precisely 1 year later to late-term dementia and advanced age. Silverberg (2007) explained how caregivers adjust and manage these relationships. Sometimes, reversals of roles determine how well they will eventually deal with the post-mortal grief of their loved ones.

Higginson et al. (2020) noted that 70% of their respondents were women caring for their loved ones. In addition, 4.7 % of the total were daughters, 22.4% were wives or female partners, 12.3% were husbands or male partners, and 11.7% were sons of the terminal patient. They concluded that patients' sons and daughters reported much more of a sense of burden than other participants caring for a loved one (Higginson et al., 2020). While going through my caregiving and grief journeys, I enrolled every semester in school during and after these events. Continuing my academic studies brought a sense of being or meaning when everything else seemed to be slipping away from my world. My closest family unit, my original mentors, were now leaving, gone, and not returning. However, mentorship continued to play an active role in my life at this point of destruction. Through that mentoring, I recognized my strengths and opportunities through other individuals' words.

On multiple occasions, I would talk to my mentor, Dr. G, about what I was experiencing and how I felt during each of these passings. Our conversations would start with her asking me, "How are you doing?," "How are you feeling?," or very often, "Is there anything I can do?" This simple sentiment was beyond comforting and reassuring that I had someone who saw me first as an individual, then as a student, and was trying to understand my trapped cycle of losses that felt never-ending. During these conversations, I would talk about where I was with my obligations, the harsh feelings I had toward family, or the anger I had in the stage of grief I was in. Eventually, I would get the academic side of what we were supposed to be talking about, but being heard was the primary focus of the sessions she granted me. While death education was not a regulated part of my degree plan or in my curriculum as a doctoral student, my university has a view placed on faith, and one of those aspects is death. Helping students, faculty, and staff in their journeys as students in bereavement was something I recognized personally and

academically through the outpouring of support from my closest mentor down to my peers as they gave their condolences time after time. I recognized through those experiences that I could find a central focus in my academics and what I still wanted to achieve in the future.

The Impact and Opportunity of Grief

Grief can change any individual for better or worse, affecting an individual's role as a student and a professional in the field (Balk et al., 2010; Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010; Tan & Andriessen, 2021). As an individual in grief, I found myself mourning multiple passings of the three individuals who shaped me in many ways and molded me in three different aspects: personally, professionally, and academically. First, I longed to return to a life I knew would never be such. Second, there was the physical loss of the individuals being present in daily life and the ability to communicate with them, such as them being able to give me advice that I had always considered or contemplated in various situations. The third was the loss of home and physically being able to go to these spaces of refuge that I had until this point in life. Many people tell me these are just material things; however, losing a life of meaning, support, and belonging in such a short time was harder to process. It was making my grief a roller coaster of monstrous proportions.

I made it a point and found opportunities to connect with others who had also experienced a profound loss in their own lives. I randomly met individuals battling brain cancer like my dad and individuals who had a grandparent with Alzheimer's or dementia as my grandmother did, often just needing a sounding board to vent the frustrations of these horrible diseases. I have met parents who are grieving the loss of a spouse. They share that they are learning how this affects their relationships with their children. Through these experiences, I

have found new ways to reflect on my life experiences and chose to share the most vulnerable parts of myself and what I have learned through these situations.

As a student, I had my closest colleagues reach out to me after losing my dad. We were still in the pre-pandemic era, but as time went on and we moved to virtual learning systems for dialog, it became harder to keep these relationships going, with fewer than half of the students who came into the program around the same time holding onto those bonds. Testing for doctoral candidacy in 2020 was highly stressful, being one of the first cohorts to do so wholly virtually. So, without many directions, I created a support group that met once every 2 weeks to check in, vent, run ideas off one another, chat, and do anything we needed to do. During these meetings, we would often have one or two people, me included, talk about their struggles with death, grief, and all the civil unrest in the United States. The commonality in these conversations was a sense of weary minds, fear, pain, and loss, which circled back to grief. In these moments, I found a sense of understanding and belonging that pushed me to continue my path as a hopeful doctoral candidate.

As a professional, I made sacrifices in my career to maintain my sanity and familial bonds during these challenging times. After much contemplation and prayer, I left my corporate career to focus on my schooling and family. While it was not the best financial move, it was a necessary change to make to be available to them and what I saw for my future. One of the primary reasons I left my job was to oversee the liquidation process of my dad's law firm, which was a significant task, as he was still practicing law full-time at the time of his diagnosis and passing. Having finished my undergraduate degree and working for the district attorney's office at one point, I understood the processes and steps to oversee this. While an opportunity of obligation at the time, I look back on this as a goodbye period necessary to process losing him. It

helped me grieve what I was losing and eventually lost while exercising skills I ultimately had learned from him as a child, a young teenager, and then an adult.

Becoming More of Me

After what I have been through for several years, I always say, “You are not an adult until you lose a parent.” At least, this is a sentiment that others I have spoken with, who have also lost a parent, agree with. There is a new level of responsibility for yourself and an overwhelming awareness of not having a covering to run to. You can no longer call Dad to run ideas by or get frustrated when they disagree. Suddenly, you realize it is just you, and no superior or parental authority can show or tell you what you should do anymore, even if you choose not to. During these times, I have thought about walking away from everything I am working toward: my doctorate, my marriage, my professional obligations, and things that were supposed to bring me joy in my everyday life. However, it would be easy to minimize the stress of completing something that has felt far from my reach, primarily this doctorate. Paik et al. (2020) mentioned that healing often starts with “family engagement, community, reclaiming personal power, and consciousness through ancestral and cultural teaching” (p. 47). In many similarities or unconscious realization, I have been able to do this through the teachings of my family, who have passed by pushing forward and trying to prevail for several reasons, the opportunity to educate others and share these hardships, to become a part of the 1% of Latinas who have a doctorate education, and to prove that Latinas are more than the statistics that label and stigmatize so many of us. I have continued because there is another woman, like me or not, who feels this way and can still overcome and be whom they are meant to be; this is what grief has taught me.

Chapter VIII: Me to We: The Paths We Lead

In this chapter, I discuss the outcomes of this exploratory research into my life as a Latina in the workforce and academia. As mentioned in various parts of this manuscript, strength, faith, resistance, drive, and motivation have been the foundational pieces of my life that mentorship has proved to me directly and indirectly in various stages of my journey. I explain those in the following concepts of research implications, what other mentors elsewhere can take from these acknowledgments, how mindfulness is an intricate part of that process, possible opportunities for future research, and final thoughts or, more traditionally, the conclusion.

Research Implications

Much of our work in SPN is an intensive reflection of specific experiences and how those experiences shape, change, and mold individual lives. Through those experiences, interpreting and acknowledging the environment, other human beings, culture, and values take us to a deeper level of understanding and growing into whom we become. Once again, Robert Nash (2004) called this the "opportunities and risk into a benefit" because there are "three qualities his SPN students possess: faith, resilience, and passion" (p. 131). Lieblich et al. (2008) stated that holistic approaches to the analysis allow for those qualities to be identified as significant themes within the overall text versus a traditional approach, which often depends on categorical or formal analysis.

Reflecting on the experiences I have shared, it is inevitable that several values or key references have continually been a part of my mentorship journey and what I have endured as a Latina. These are the central themes identified.

Strength

Strength was identified early on in my youth with the passing of my beloved uncle at the height of the AIDS epidemic. As an extremely young and vulnerable child, I experienced the loss of a loved one and the grief within the family dynamic in the days, months, and years after. Ultimately, strength was built on the foundation of death and moving on in life because that is what we are supposed to do. Right? I struggled to continue throughout my academic time as a student at all levels of higher education. It often felt like a burden to complete the requirements for graduation. Through instances of mentoring and guiding, whether by family or outside influences, I learned what strength meant or looked like from an outsider's perspective and took bits and pieces of their stories or influences to build my perspective of what that meant to me. Strength can have various meanings; physical strength, mental strength, and emotional strength are some that come to mind. However, having strength does necessarily mean you are strong. There is inherently more that leads to one having strength. Those are discussed further below.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to become strong again after something terrible happens (Skillsoft, 2020). As a Latina Millennial, I have lived several lifetimes through personal family drama and grief, professional acquisitions, and an academically challenging time as a first-generation college graduate at all degree levels. There is little that I have not experienced. Yet, somehow, I am sure I am wrong about that. This testimonial often identifies resilience throughout my professional career dealing with racism, ageism, sexism, and all the other "isms" by keeping a positive approach to my work with ethics and value in who I was as an individual and what I had to offer as an employee. More recently, as a graduate student at the doctoral level, it has been dealing with harsh criticism of what I research and how I conduct research as a

scholar. Through both times, I often go back to the strength I learned from my familial mentoring as a child and stand firm in my convictions as a person and professional when I am against a wall. Using those tools has given me an assurance of self, which is part of the generational growth and overcoming of the "isms" I have encountered.

Faith

There are two perspectives, but one overall knowing of my faith and how I practice that. From a religious perspective, faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Holy Bible, 2015, p. 1449). For me, faith starts in the familial sense with my parents, my dad being an individual who showed up, was present, and followed through, creating a powerful effect of the sense of safety and positive appeal in my experiences with him. My mother provided faith through her desire to provide me with a Christian education in my adolescence and throughout my adult life. It was set in stone in her parenting style and outlook on life and beyond.

My grandfather stirred a conviction of faith similar to how my dad was in my life, being present and ensuring safety in various aspects. Finally, my grandmother showed me faith through action. Her outlook on faith was from a religious context, where she used those convictions daily. These four dynamics, similar to each other yet different, gave me the experience of building faith in another individual with solid convictions toward another human being.

From a more formal humanistic definition, faith is a belief or trust in something or someone, a complete trust, often associated with religion (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). The familial foundation of my experiences with faith led to the understanding of faith in education, faith in others, and in the world. My faith in education stems from the positive experiences with people in higher education who mentored me through my circumstances; through that faith is an

understanding that education can lead to better circumstances and outcomes in educated lives. Faith in others is an affirmative conviction to understand others better and accept them for who they are, which is hard for many to do. Finally, my faith in the world has changed my understanding that there is a mutual human connection that I have experienced through positive and negative connections throughout my experiences.

The two perspectives of faith by thinking (reason) and an internal state of mind are foundational to my understanding of religious faith. Then, the perspective of faith by experience, which is what I have lived through, has led me to think deeper about the experiences and why those have possibly happened in my life.

Motivation

Motivation can be identified throughout this testimonial from experiences with mentoring at all levels. On a familial level, it is seen through the efforts of my grandfather's life and his dreams for his family coming out of poverty and making a better home for his children and grandchildren. I reflect on my dad's experiences of familial obligation and recognition of his motivation for education from his father and the overarching reality of financial stability that he was able to provide within his family. There have been various reasons in my life why I have done certain things or not; money, space, time, faith, family, friends; all those are a combination of motivation. Kapp (2019) explained in a training video how "motivation is temporary," and ultimately, there must be an additional spark or drive within a person to continue to move their passion, vision, or dream forward. Internally, the desire to complete my education was a personal goal because I often heard that women do not often reach such a high level of education. Specifically, Latinas are further down that line of success. I wanted to prove cultural ideology wrong. I wanted to show others that women can be successful in academia and career by seeing

and not just reading about historically profound women—the external desire to be a physical form of the visions and dreams of my ancestors. In this case, recognizing internal and external motivation fed my visions.

Drive

The most asked question as a doctoral candidate that I continually get is, "How do you do it?" It is probably one of the most over-asked questions of this chapter of my life. I often answer, "I do not know; I just do!" Through this reflective practice called SPN, I have a strong sense of drive. It started with building a foundation of strength, which taught me resilience. It led me to seek faith and understand that from two perspectives, leading me to various experiences with culture, different people and places that motivated me to see what else the world had to offer. Ultimately, having a personal drive to succeed has been a combination intrinsically ingrained by thought and experience—the most incredible opportunity for a human to feel. I have felt joy, pain, grief, happiness, satisfaction, wealth, poverty, and so much more, which has continually built a drive within my desire for more experiences.

Mentors and Advocacy for Mentorship Elsewhere

"You can do this!" are words from my doctoral mentor that have kept me floating, even with just a life vest. There are many types of mentoring opportunities to have these days. Of these, the most traditional are one-on-one, distance, group, peer, reverse, situational, career, and familial mentoring (Reeves, 2022; University of Arizona, 2022; University of California-Davis, 2022). However, from this list, a new advantage to mentoring stems further and more inclusively to what a particular individual needs or looks for in a mentor, for example, featuring foci on female mentors who apply feminist studies or ideology based on female experiences and perspectives in their respective concentrations (Bernal, 1998; Solórzano, 1998). New age spins

on mentoring are reshaping whom we work with and learning from one another despite differences such as age, gender, experience, or even location. These are ideas being used to "navigate and approach the needs of Millennials and younger generations" to ensure a quality workforce (Reeves, 2022, para. 8). By acknowledging these new age ideas and implementing various ways to mentor and be mentored, we are ensuring that precisely for this study, Latinas will have more quality experiences and opportunities in the future. In addition, the opportunity to further this research in the future will allow more storytelling and other experiences to be told in greater detail and length. The opportunity to expand the method of SPN is of great need for others, more traditionally trained, in the academy to recognize the significant role SPN plays in qualitative research and research methodology as a whole.

Mentoring Mindfulness

Along this journey, one of the critical elements of my focus was the principal research, and the subject was mindfulness. As Armstrong (2011) explained, mindfulness is a form of meditation as we move through our daily routines, enabling us to be more self-aware and aware of our surroundings. Be mindful of self, others, those, and you. I defined these as: (a) myself, the one sharing my experience as the subject and myself, the principal researcher who sheds light on research through experience, (b) others I define as my mentors, whose guidance I have shared (familial and non-familial), (c) I defined those as the individuals within academia who will question, rebut, or degrade the quality of qualitative research or more specifically, subjective reflection as the center of research, (d) you, my audience, the reader, are in the midst of my words. I am mindful that, once again, SPN is not for everyone. This writing style exposes one's most exciting or dreadful experiences related to a specific topic in the face of creating content

that starts a conversation about Latinas and their experiences in their career and academic mentoring lives.

Final Thoughts (Conclusion)

I started this doctoral journey with many expectations but needed to figure out what the journey would be. As one Latina in a growing community of educated professional women in the workforce and academia, it is hard for me to continue to understand why we Latinas are still a minority in both fields I have mentioned. This manuscript has gone through numerous variations, two restricted committees, hundreds of drafts throughout my years as a student and doctoral candidate, and finally, my pre- and public defense.

Because of SPN, I have a platform to explore this research and shed additional light on the experiences of my life with mentorship and how that has helped or paused my direction. This researcher hopes that SPN is a variation of narrative inquiry and storytelling that becomes more prominent and respected in academic research. Telling these experiences in written form behind the quantitative regressions or the general qualitative form of group narrative or outcome shows that personal storytelling is a crucial part of the research process, which can lead to a deeper understanding of concepts, values, and culture to which other types of research methods can often overlook of miss during interpretation. The analytical part of the SPN process is a very emotional and challenging endeavor that, much like other methodologies, requires researchers to go deeper within the information and find the value and meaning within the data. SPN is not short or easy; I can attest that it is a complicated and emotionally straining process to be as reflexive as I had to be, often removing my emotions to speak my truth in the experiences I share. Throughout the synthesis of this manuscript, there were moments when the words flowed out of me like lava from an active volcano and other moments when I could not even open my

computer for days or weeks. I want to state that SPN is not for everyone. Let me repeat: SPN is only a method for some. It is an extraordinarily taxing yet completely rewarding experience of telling your experiences in the written word. My goal is that this SPN has spoken to you and will encourage you to use SPN as a type of storytelling for your academic endeavors and in informal spaces to learn from one another's journeys. This is because the truth is that my story is only one; there are many other stories out there that we have not heard yet and deserve to know. In a time of civil unrest, cultural questioning, fear, and uncertainty in our various settings, SPN can help us unite by tying the laces together.

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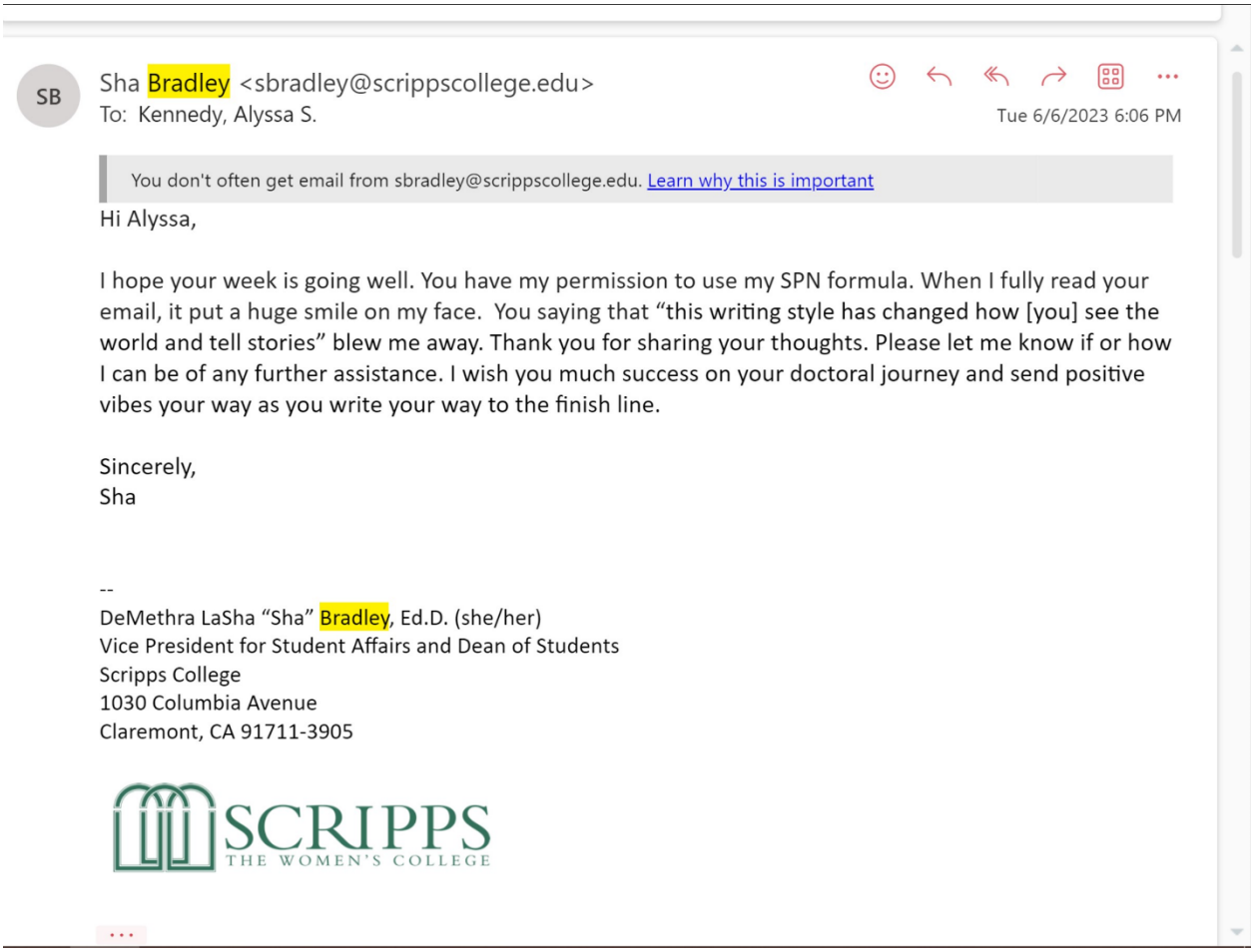
Appendices

Appendix A

Permission to Use Research Formula



SB

Sha Bradley <sbradley@scrippscollege.edu>
To: Kennedy, Alyssa S.
Tue 6/6/2023 6:06 PM

You don't often get email from sbradley@scrippscollege.edu. Learn why this is important

Hi Alyssa,

I hope your week is going well. You have my permission to use my SPN formula. When I fully read your email, it put a huge smile on my face. You saying that "this writing style has changed how [you] see the world and tell stories" blew me away. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Please let me know if or how I can be of any further assistance. I wish you much success on your doctoral journey and send positive vibes your way as you write your way to the finish line.

Sincerely,
Sha

--
DeMethra LaSha "Sha" Bradley, Ed.D. (she/her)
Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
Scripps College
1030 Columbia Avenue
Claremont, CA 91711-3905

SCRIPPS
THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

Appendix B

Research Compliance Letter

August 31, 2022

PI: Ms. Alyssa Kennedy
Protocol Title: Mentorship in Academia and Career: A Personal Testimonio of a Latina Millennials Experience
Project link: https://uiw.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/Project/Index/5540

Hello,

Your project described above has been reviewed and found to not meet the federal regulatory requirements for human subjects research. Keep this document with your project records as proof of the "**Not Regulated Research**" determination.

Please use IRB number 2022-1212-NRR when inquiring about or referencing this determination. Should you determine at any point you wish to add additional elements to the project, please contact us before initiating those components as they may impact this determination.

Please contact us with any questions or for information regarding the IRB or the review process.

Sincerely,

Office of Research and Graduate Studies
Research Compliance
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3555
irb@uiwtx.edu

IRB #: 00005059 / FWA #: 00009201

Appendix C

Definitions

Abuela. Spanish for grandmother or grandma (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-a)

Compadres. Spanish for godparents (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-b)

Familia. Spanish for family (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-c)

Familismo. A Spanish term meaning loyalty or a tight bond that entails nurturing, discipline specifically toward youth, a parental or guiding shadow, a show of concern, and familial or involved problem solving (Falicov, 2013).

Hispanic. An individual who identifies as being of Latin American descent, including Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Spanish culture (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c)

Latina. A woman of Hispanic descent (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d).

Madre. Spanish for mother (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-d)

Millennial. An individual born between the 1980s through early 2000s (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-e).

Mentoring. The act of the mentor. It is when individuals interact within the process as mentor and protégé, requiring a relationship and lending a guiding hand. It can be a formal or inform process and relationship depending on the dominant factors and scenario. (Luecke et al., 2004; Palmer, 2002; Zachary & Fischler, 2009).

Mindfulness. A form of meditation as we move through our daily routines where we enable ourselves to be more self-aware and aware of our surroundings (Armstrong, 2011).

Reverse mentoring: A type of mentoring where the younger or less seasoned individual teaches, training, coaches or advises new methods or knowledge to the tenured individual in the

mentoring relationship, empowering the younger individual's knowledge (Jordan & Sorell, 2019).

Spanglish. Is a combination of English and Spanish words or dialogue mixed together when speaking. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-f).

Testimonio. Spanish for testimony (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-e)

Tia. Spanish for aunt (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-f)

Traditional mentoring. A top-down mentor approach where a hierarchy is in place and is an interactive process between a mentor and a protégé(s) which does require a relationship or guiding hand (Luecke et al., 2004)