MEXICANA SCHOLARS IN THE MAKING:
TESTIMONIOS FROM THE HEARTLAND

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DISSERTATION
Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies
with a minor in Latina and Latino Studies
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

The last decade has seen an increase of research on the Latina/o educational experience spanning from Kindergarten to the undergraduate level. Scholars have also documented the experiences of Latinas in the academy in their role as faculty. However, there is still limited work on the lived experiences of Latinas in graduate school and more specifically the doctoral journey. Research on Latina/o subgroups, such as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and/or Salvadoran, is limited with the exception of interchanging labels such as Latina/Mexican American/Chicana. This research is also limited by the overrepresentation of geographical spaces such the Southwest – California and Texas in particular. In response to this gap in the literature this study focuses on first generation, low income, Latinas of Mexican descent in doctoral programs at public, Research I, Predominately White institutions (PWIs) in the Midwest.

Using life history and testimonio as method(s) through Community Cultural Wealth model and a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) len(s), this study explores the ways five Mexicanas scholars develop strategies for navigating higher education and beyond such as the doctoral journey at a public, Research I, Predominately White institution (PWI) in the Midwest, also known as the Heartland. Taking into consideration the role that family, culture, gender, class, generation and their intersectionalities play in their formation as scholars. Furthermore, explores the impact of K – 16 experiences play in preparing them to navigate the graduate school experience and how current and past experiences influence their completion of the doctoral degree.
Este tesis doctoral es dedicado a las tres grandes de mi vida - Martha, Marcela y Daniela

Para mi gordis, mi madre, Martha. Usted no solo me dio vida si no también me dio las lecciones de más valor que ninguna escuela me podría enseñar. Una de las lecciones más grandes a sido que mi género, ser mujer, no limita mis oportunidades. Todos los logros que usted a realizado, me han motivado para seguir adelante, para seguir luchando. Por usted y sus palabras, “ya empezaste, ahora acaba!” es que este logro académico se ha echo posible.

Para mi tía Marcela, usted fue mi primera maestra. Gracias a usted aprendí a leer y a escribir. No era la mejor alumna pero las lecciones tuvieron éxito. Gracias a usted hoy tengo el título de Doctora.

My dear little sister, Daniela, you have always been my motivation and inspiration to be a better woman and human being. With all my heart I hope that I have made you proud and that I, too, inspire you to be the best you can ever be. Your financial support, all those dollar bills you mailed along with the letters of love and support, have paid off. I love you more than you can ever imagine.
Acknowledgements

To the mujeres that took part in this study I thank you for trusting me with and letting me share your testimonios. You are an unbelievable group of mujeres - unas guerreras. You remind me that we come from strong roots. Our familias and communities are so much more than the outside world deems them to be. We are because of them. Mil gracias. The pseudonym names I used in the study are of powerful mujeres that have made an impact not just on my life but that of other mujeres; Gloria for Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe for Cherríe Moraga, Sor Juana for Sor Juana Inez De La Cruz, Emma for Emma Tenayuca, and Maria Felix for Maria “La Doña” Felix.

To my U of I familia – Dra. Shantel Martinez, Dr. Moises Orozco, Dr. Derek Houston, Dra. Rufina Cortez, Francisca Mata, Dra. Gabriela Romo, Dra. Norma Marrun, Dra. Melli Velazquez, Dr. Gabriel Cortez Dra. Gianina Taylor, Dr. Brandon Common, Dra. Aide Acosta, Dra. Julie Dowling, Dr. Alejandro Lugo, Dr. Gilberto Rosales, Dr. Jonathan Inda, Dra. Alicia Rodriguez, Laura Castañeda, Dra. Judith Estrada, Dra. Sandra Osorio, Dra. Nicole Brown, Mayra Bailon, soon to be be Dra. Sarai Kova, soon to be Dr. Soo Mee Kim, soon to be Dra. and Wonder Woman aficionado Sheri-Lynn S. Kurisu, soon to be Dra. Socorro Morales, soon to be Dra. Holly Herrera, soon to be be Evelyn Perez, soon to be be Dr. Jonathan Hamilton, Dra. Tamekia Wilkins, Dra. Aisha Griffith, Dra. Shameem Rakha, Dr. Laurence Parker, Dra. Wanda Pillow, Dr. William Trent, Dra. Erin Castro, Dr. Miguel Saucedo, Dra. Casey George-Jackson, Ms. Sophia Buxton, Dra. Lisa Cacho, Dra. Edna Viruell-Fuentes, Dr. T.J. Tallie, Dr. Jamil Johnson, Dra. Maria Jimenez, Dra. Angela Slates, Dra. Marjorie Dorime-Williams, Dra. Antonia Darder, soon to be Dr. Gabriel Rodriguez, Dra. Karen Roybal Montoya, Dra. Lizette Rivera, Dra. Teresa Ramos, soon to be be Dra. and new momma Yaejon Kwon, Ms. Xochitl Casillas, Ms. Trini Villegas, Ms. Laurie Brooks, you all have directly and indirectly played a role on my being able to finish this degree. I am extremely grateful to have shared this journey with all of you.

Critical Race in Education Studies Association family – Dra. Theodorea Berry, Dr. Marvin Lynn, Dr. Mark Giles, Dr. Dave Stovall, Dra. Danielle Cook, Dr. Chezare A Warren, Dra. Subini Annamma, Dra. Rema Reynolds, Dra. Dolores Delgado Bernal, Dr. Daniel Solórzano, soon to be Dra. Lisette Torres-Gerald, being part of this association helped me see the world in a way that forever has changed me. You are all amazing scholars, I am truly blessed and feel humbled having been part of this group. Subini, thank you for being my partner in crime as graduate representatives and thank you Lisette for carrying the torch and making sure support and guidance was there for future Critical Race theorist.

My conference familia, colegas and amigas – Dra. Emily Calderon Galdeano, Dra. and new momma Susana Hernández, Dra. Mayra Olivares-Urueta, Dra. Ruth López, Dra. Michelle Espino, Dra. Desiree Zerquera, and Dra. Blanca E. Vega, you all made each conference feel less isolating and that the work we do matters. You are amazing mujeres and I am so glad to have met you and continue to be on this journey (academia and research) with you all.

My University of the Pacific family that helped me navigate through a space I was not used to. To you all – my little Veronica Chavez, Martha Valadez, Chanda Chinn, Dra. Marisela Ramos, now Dra. Ines Ruiz-Huston, and now Dra. Lisa Cooper, THANK YOU! Lisa, you opened opportunities for me and have been a true friend and mentor for the last 8 years.
My Sonoma State *familia* – Dra. Elizabeth C. Martinez, Dra. Patricia Kim-Rajal, community college president Dra. Lorraine Morales, you have been amazing mentors throughout my higher education journey. I thank you all for always taking the time to listen, provide feedback and celebrate with me. Such powerful *mujeres*, I am grateful to have met each one of you. My mentors when I began my journey at SSU – Juana Reynoza, Maria Orozco, Liz Hinojoza, *gracias mujeres* for being there when you needed us, for being our support system and having the courage to be on a college campus. Special shout out to Jennifer “Lil One” Giang, thank you for choosing me to be your first roommate at SSU. Grateful we are still friends and that we survived that 10-person suite. My *colegas* and friends – Gina Geck, Magali Telles, Ariana Aparicio, Ariana Diaz de Leon, Ivonne Manriquez, Eloisa Colin, Christina Zapata, Dr. Ron Lopez, Gustavo Flores, and Giselle Perry, while it shouldn’t be this way I am glad we are in the struggle together, fighting for our students and making every day count towards raising the number of Latina/o college graduates in our community. All of the MEChistAs from 1998 to 2003 – because of you I am wiser y de conciencia política, I am a proud Xicana. Brown is beautiful! My past (Upward Bound programs) and current (McNair Scholars and CALS) students – Diana Cruz, Donaciano Botello, Sulma Guerrero, Lauro Vazquez, Zuleima Tailele (formerly Vazquez), Jessica Cruz, Ariel Huerta, Laura Gonzalez, Juanita Tenorio Ruiz, Veronica Vences, Fabiola Espinoza, Oscar Salinas, Saba Haile, Berhana Fekadu, Simon Semere, Patricia Ayala Macias, Yolanda Ayala, Seiri Aragon-Garcia, Griselda Madrigal Lara, Monica Robledo, Vanessa Alcala, Kagemuro Jeremiah, Jesús Guzmán, Donald Williams, Stephanie Segovia, Juan Soto, Ana Lugo, I am inspired and motivated by you all. In Lak’ECH!

My Upward Bound family from my mentors like Morena Taylor, Gloria Miller, Blanca Herrera-Benitez, and Howard Willis to all my students that I have had the fortune to work with as their academic advisor. You all are the reason why I needed to pursue a post graduate degree. Dr. Natchee Blu Barnd for taking the time to drive this crazy girl around and sit with me as I applied for graduate programs. You proved that UB is family always, thank you! Dr. Brian Aguilar, Manuel Salazar, Angelica Ochoa Tran, Caren Fernandez, Sam Blanco III, and soon to be Dr. Silvester Mata – thank you for being more than colleagues and thank you for continuing to fight a good fight! #TRiOWorks!

To my Elsie Allen family – Mr. Edwards, Mr. Petty, Mr. White, Ms. Conley, Ms. De Carbo, and Mr. La France, thank you for taking on such a challenging career. May you always push your students to challenge themselves and the system. Proud to be a Lobo c/o 1998.

Extremely grateful for the support of my community that helped me raise funds for the doctoral regalia – Donna Zapata, Ray Cahill III, Gabriela Cervantes Powell, Violeta Cuevas, Elizabeth Tinoco, Rosa Rincon, Jenni Klose, Herman G. Hernandez, Esther Lemus, Lauren Elmore, Jack Tibbets, Dr. Francisco Vázquez, soon to be Dra. scholar momma Christine Vega, Robert “Bobby” Lee Verdugo, Robert Edmonds, Alicia Sanchez, Tonya Johnson, Chanda Chinn, Omar Medina, Isabel Lopez, and Martha Contreras: We Did It!

Friends that have been more like *familia* that have been there for me, cheering me on, believing in me when I did not even know I had it in me anymore, to you all – María Aviña, Isabel “Chabe” Lopez, Karla Marroquin, Rosa Lopez, Omar Medina, Guillermo Garcia, Omar Gallardo, Jazzy Stavrou (formerly Guerrero), Raúl Pasamonte, Mayra Ramirez, Jessica Avalos,
Jessica Ruiz, Moises Fernandez, Briana Gonzalez, Maria (Mayi) Zavala, Rafael Vasquez, Bobby Verdugo, Katie Blue Austin, Leticia Guerrero, Benjamin Borrelli, and Davin Cardenas, gracias from the bottom of my heart. I am so lucky to have friendships that have span over 20 years. I am grateful to be growing up with you all. We have shared so many memorable moments, have had some rough spots, and shed tears of joy and sadness. We all get to make the world a better place because we do what we love with out heart on our sleeve. Thank you for allowing me in your lives. I am grateful my little human is part of this universe because you all exist in it. Now we can all say that we know someone in the 1%, SI SE PUDO!

To my committee - Dra. Yoon Pak, Dra. Cris Mayo, Dra. Susana Muñoz and Dr. Lorenzo Baber, thank you! Thank you for all of your support. Dra. Mayo I want you to know that you saved me from dropping out. I left your office that one day with more than just an orange, I left knowing that I would be moving forward and would be completing this degree. Dra. Pak thank you for your support especially as I was away and shared my “I’m sort of pregnant” news on Skype. Thankfully, that lit a fire and we got this done. Dra. Muñoz, thank you for taking the time to meet with Blanca and I at ASHE a few years back and being open to mentor and guide us. Above all, thank you for being on my committee for inspiring me to think critically but most importantly to thinking with my heart.

To the mujeres that walked this journey with me and who forever will have a place in my heart – Dra. Blanca E. Rincon, Dra. Michelle Flores, my wifey Dra. Joanna Wu and soon to be Dra. Joanna B. Perez, SI SE PUDO!

Finally, I honor and thank la familia Martinez y la familia Velazquez, all from the small town of Ixtlahuacan de los Membrillos, Jalisco. I would like to say that the Martinez blood runs deep and I am blessed and honored to be a mujer de esta familia. Gracias abuela Eulogia por quererme y cuidarme.

To my dad, Jose, I thank you for being a brave man and taking the role of father to an almost teenager 25+ years ago. You and your family have taught me that familia is more than blood. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for being an amazing father and now grandfather. To my brother Chris, I have been fighting the good fight because the system failed you. I promise that I won’t let that happen to other bright and loving boys like you. I love you.

To my sun and light, - Xoaquín Yolotli, you are the most amazing thing that ever happened to me. You are named after a human being that fought for justice for the people. I hope to teach you and instill in you love for your familia and cultura, and respect for humanity and justice. Te amo!

"I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you" - Gloria Anzaldúa
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Chapter 1:

Prologue/Introduction

As a daughter of an immigrant, Spanish speaking, single mother, a future in academia, or beyond a high school diploma for that matter, was slim to almost unrealistic. At least that is what most of the data pointed towards. Therefore, when I first began my graduate school experience as a master’s student at a predominately White\(^1\) private university in Northern California, I felt that I was not equipped with the necessary tools to complete the degree. As a first-generation, low-income, immigrant woman of color\(^2\) I came with limited tools and preparation on how to survive and meet the expectations of graduate school. In contrast, my peers in the program were from middle and upper class backgrounds. They were expected to go to college and even graduate school, had attended well-ranked high schools and universities, and a majority of them went straight from undergrad to graduate school. It also happened that they were all predominately White students. Meanwhile, the handful of students of color in the program were on track to earn a Master’s of Education (M.Ed.) degree that would enable them to get raises in their current teaching positions as elementary school teachers. I do not state this as something

\(^1\) Predominately White Institutions (PWI) are institutions enrolling majority White students, tend to be four-year, selective institutions, research institutions, and are more likely to offer up to doctoral degrees. Critical race theorists in education scholars suggests that referring to PWIs as historically White institutions (HWIs) instead of PWIs would distinguish that the high percentage of White student enrollment has less to do with the majority population than with the historical and contemporary racial infrastructure that are in place, the current campus racial culture and how these modern-day institutions still benefit Whites at the expense of African American and other groups of color (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006).

\(^2\) Woman of color, students of color are within the context of People of Color, as defined by Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (2008), "People of color explicitly suggests a social relationship among racial and ethnic minority groups. ... [It is] is a term most often used outside of traditional academic circles, often infused by activist frameworks, but it is slowly replacing terms such as racial and ethnic minorities. ... In the United States in particular, there is a trajectory to the term — from more derogatory terms such as negroes, to colored, to people of color. ... People of color is, however it is viewed, a political term, but it is also a term that allows for a more complex set of identity for the individual — a relational one that is in constant flux” (pp. 1037 – 38).
negative; however, at that moment, none of them planned or aspired to pursue a higher degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D) I, on the other hand, did.

As such, my situation in the program became a unique one. I completed the master’s degree in less than a year, a short period of time that included writing a qualitative master’s thesis, changing my thesis chair at the last minute, and managing to find only one faculty of color to be on my thesis committee – a Chicana from the Department of History. Once I graduated, I was back in the workforce, working with doctoral students of color in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields while still dreaming of going back to get a Ph.D. A year later, I found myself accepted into a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest. With limited to almost no understanding of what a Research I PWI meant, I did not give it further thought since I was admitted into a program where students and faculty of color were the majority. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, the daily challenges of the move – including being at a Research I institution located over 2,000 miles away from home and whose dynamics played out in a Black/White paradigm – would simply change the way I lived and understood the graduate school journey, family relationships, ethnic/cultural identity, language, living “in-between,” and the meaning of first-generation and low income.

In my first semester as a doctoral student I read Anna Sandoval’s (1999) article *Building up resistance: Chicanas in academia*; I was taken aback. She argues that “nobody gives you strategies. Even the most supportive committee is unable to prepare you for the psychological challenges of writing the dissertation” (Sandoval, 1999, p. 92), an argument that resonated heavily with me. She then elaborated on how graduate students, specifically Chicanas, are not

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3 Defined by Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2011) as politically charged identity, used by those of Mexican heritage and the term was created in the 1960s during the Chicano Right Movement and is often associated with resistance that one “consciously adopt[s] later in life” (p. 100). Some
prepared for the graduate school application process; once they are in the academy, there is a lack of mentorship and guidance, especially if they are choosing to write about work that is connected to their racial/ethnic and cultural identity. Adding, “[from] personal experience, I have found that Chicanas and other women of color are met with unique challenges when pursuing higher degrees” (Sandoval, 1999, p. 92). She highlights how past conocimiento (beliefs or customs) of resistance and survival that has been handed down – consciously and unconsciously – by non-academics (family, friends, and/or other students) has usually not been welcomed or valued. Instead, this conocimiento and tools of resistance and survival are often considered invalid in the academy.

Similarly, Laura Rendón’s (1992) From the Barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American “scholarship girl,” written as a form of reflection of her own experience(s), states, "to become academic success stories we must endure humiliation, reject old values and traditions, mistrust our experience, and disconnect with our past”, adding “Scholarship ‘boys and girls’ are left only with what Rodriguez (1982) calls ‘hunger of memory,’ a nostalgic longing for the past-the laughter of relatives…the feeling of closeness with one's own parents" (Rendón, 1992, 56). The work by Sandoval (1999) and Rendón (1992), both written over 20 years ago spoke to me in ways that no other pieces of literature had ever done. It felt as though they had taken the words out of my mouth. Their work tried to explain the mixed and contradictory emotions I was feeling at that specific time, as a first year doctoral student. I felt that their work who categorize themselves as Chicana do so because it rids itself of the White America term “American” and therefore deny that privilege. However, often times in some regions like California Chicana is used as a more common term because California was the birthplace to many of the Mexican political movements such as the Migrant Farm Workers movement and the Chicano Rights Movements. Yet, places like Texas, Mexican American is the term most commonly used as a result of Texas’ rich history. Nevertheless, while there are distinctions amongst the terms, a large portion of society uses these identifying terms interchangeably. For the purpose of my research I will separate the terms as needed.
had fallen into my hands for a reason, because neither of these scholars’ work were part of assigned readings in any of my classes. I just happened to begin to have interest in Latina women in higher education. Their work in some ways implied that students of color, more specifically Latina/o students were entering academic spaces empty, with no prior knowledge or capital. Yet, in my mind I was boggled and concerned about this implication because when I started school in the United States I skipped 2nd grade. When I came to this country, I knew how to read and write, in Spanish, and also knew higher levels of math, such as multiplication and division. And so, while I did not know English, my Mexican schooling had prepared me enough to be able to skip a grade.

However, as I reflected on my own experience(s) as a first year doctoral student, I began to feel as though the academy in many ways was pushing and punishing non-traditional doctoral students out of their programs, in particular if they could not find strong networks or support systems. Non-traditional students meaning that they were not White men of middle to upper class backgrounds. Furthermore, the academy also seemed to invalidate the knowledge and survival tools brought by these non-traditional students such as living and surviving with low wages from assistantships or balancing scholarship and their continuous social justice agenda when working with the community. And instead they are often considered invalid tools for survival in the academy. These feelings, observations and thoughts led to questioning what were the experiences of other Latina⁴ women in the doctorate journey.

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⁴ Latina/o is an umbrella term that is inclusive of other terms/labels such as Chicana, Mexican American, Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, etc. For the purpose of this study the term will not be used interchangeably because some people may not identify as Latina but instead by their national origin.
Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

While, I have pushed through and forward, the work by Anna Sandoval (1999) and Laura Rendón (1992) continue to be of concern and of great importance, especially as I not only understand their words but I have been living them throughout my doctoral journey. Their scholarly work on the issues faced by Chicanas and other Latinas in graduate school (not being prepared – the application process, lack of mentorship – navigating graduate school) is troubling and make it a necessity to study Latinas in the doctorate. In particular, if we consider the enrolment of Latinas in graduate school – master’s and doctoral level programs, has rapidly increased in the last two decades. From 1990 to 2010 there was over a 50% increase of Latina women graduating with a doctoral degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and in the last decade, 2003 to 2013, the annual number of doctoral degrees earned by Latinas (U.S. residents/citizens) has grown from 768 (in 2003) to 1,225 (in 2013) (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015), just in the last decade the number of doctoral degrees awarded has doubled. However, in that same year, 2013, in comparison to white females who had earned doctoral degrees (12,161), Latinas were still underrepresented (1,225), earning even fewer degrees than African American females (1,627) (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). That means that Latina/os had earned .5% of doctoral degrees and 3% of master’s degrees in 2013, that is less than 1% of the total Latina/o adult population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The larger picture, in 2013, Latina/os represented 17% of the entire U.S. population, about 56 million or so. In that same year, a total of 141,000 Latina/os had earned a doctoral degree as the highest degree earned, compared to Whites (2.6 million), Asians (502,000) and African Americans (192,000) (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). This data coupled with my own personal experience(s) in a doctorate program has led to questioning if this
experience is across the board among other Latinas in the doctorate journey. Leading to the development of this study that explores if and how life history and testimonio as methods can assist in understanding the ways Mexicanas develop strategies for navigating higher education, in particular doctoral education, in the Midwest. Specifically, this study considers:

1. What strategies do first generation Latinas of Mexican descent employ when navigating their doctoral studies at public Research I Predominantly White institutions (PWIs)?
   i. What role, if any, do family, culture, gender and class play in the formation of first generation Latinas of Mexican descent scholars?

2. What impact do K – 16 experiences play in preparing them to navigate the graduate school experience?

3. How do daily and past experiences influence their completion of their doctoral degree?

**Purpose & Significance of the Study**

Before moving forward, it is imperative to note and understand that while Latina/os, in particular those of Mexican descent may not have high percentages of college graduates in comparison to the dominant group, Whites, today’s Latina/o students are more successful than the earlier generation. In the 1980s almost 75% of Latinos had less than a 9th grade education by 2013 the number had declined to 62%, the number of college degree attainment has doubled from 7% in 1980 to 14% in 2013 (Stepler & Brown, 2015). Therefore, there has been great strides made in high school graduation rates and college enrollment and thus the participants in this study are deemed successful as they have enrolled and graduate from college, an accomplishment that is very limited to previous generations.

Yet, ensuring a brighter and more economically stable future for Latina/o youth is

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5 For the purpose of this study the use of Mexicana refers to Latinas of Mexican descent and both terms will be used interchangeably.
imperative. At the highest level of the education pipeline, the doctorate, in 2013, U.S. academic institutions awarded 52,749 research doctorates, over one-third were to U.S. citizens and/or permanent residents (33,942). The growth in the number of research doctorates awarded in 2012 (4.3%) marked the largest single-year increase since 2007. At the same time, the number of doctorates awarded to women increased from 37% in 1991 to 46% in 2011 and have earned the majority of all doctorates awarded to U.S. citizens and permanent residents each year since 2002 (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). In 2013, women earned 51% of all doctorates. Latina/os earned 6.2% of all research doctorates, Latina women earned over 50% of all doctorate degrees among their Latino peers (1,225 versus 903), yet Latinas earned 7% of all doctorates earned by women. Latina/os earned the majority in the disciplines of Social Sciences (8.5%) and Humanities (7.6%) (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). That means that of the total 52,749 degrees awarded (regardless of citizenship status) 33,942 were awarded to domestic students, of which 2,128 (6.2%) doctoral degrees were earned by Latina/os, and Latina women earned only 1,225 (3.6%) of all doctoral degrees granted in 2013 (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015); taking into consideration the fact that Latina/os make up 17%, of the entire U.S. population a number of 1,200 plus doctoral degrees earned is minimal. This has societal impacts, as a work force of educated Latina/os in diverse disciplines, especially the sciences, is in much need for the economic survival of the country.

As Latinas begin to earn the majority of Bachelor degrees and enter graduate school at higher rates than Latino men, the study of Latina women in higher education and beyond is a critical one. This study in particular explores the entire educational experiences of Latinas of Mexican descent, from elementary school to the doctorate. An emphasis is placed on Latinas of Mexican descent because the Latina/o population is a broad and heterogeneous group. Latinas/os
of Mexican origin are the least educationally successful when compared to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans, yet Mexicans comprise 64% of that Latina/o population (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013). While Latina/os of diverse national backgrounds share similar trends of under-education, the largest group, of Mexican origin, is most at-risk (Contreras & Gándara, 2006).

Furthermore, the “Making Education Work for Latinas in the U.S.” study funded by the Eva Longoria Foundation, suggests that while Latina/o enrollment in higher education has increased, it is not in parity with the growth of the Latina/o population as a whole (Gándara, Oseguera, Huber, Locks, Ee, & Molina, 2013). The increase of enrollment in higher education also suggests that there are more Latina/o students graduating high school. However, that same graduation rate is not reflected in higher education. As such, graduate education becomes a dimmer reality to access for Latina/o students. In the last two decades (1995 – 2015), Latinas have made strides in both higher education and graduate education, and made their presence known. Nevertheless, narratives of their experiences have been limited in the literature. In particular, little attention is paid to the knowledge that mujeres have and bring with them to the academy (Sandoval, 1999). Latina/os have had a long presence in the United States, pre-U.S. becoming a country in fact. And yet, the rise in enrollment of Latina/os in higher education, in particular that of Latina women, does not necessarily mean that their experiences, both negative and positive, have been researched in depth. The research on Latina women has been a recent phenomenon, at least for the last 10 to 15 years. At the same time, scholars of color have focused on the successful strategies from these students and debunking myths of the lack of educational attainment as a familial and individual problem (Gándara, 1982; 1995; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Gonzalez, 1998; Moreno, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002; Orfield, 2004;
As such, this study complicates such beliefs about Latina/os of Mexican descent and in particular of the women. The increase of Latina women pursuing doctorate degrees has shifted the focus on issues that affect women, placing an emphasis on leading factors for Latina student success at the K – 12th grade level and higher education. This study will add to the limited research on the pursuit of graduate education and more specifically the doctorate.

Research on the education of Latina/os, specifically first generation Latinas of Mexican descent, beyond a bachelor’s degree is a necessity for multiple reasons. As the number of Latina women head of house holds increase, higher levels of educational attainment are necessary. For Latina women, higher levels of education can mean opportunities for better paid employment, that can facilitate economic mobility and likelihood for their children/families to be in better financial and educational standing by the next generation (Kerby, 2013). To pursue beyond a bachelor degree is a must for Latina women, as they make up the largest ethnic group in the United States. Latinas of Mexican descent are the largest national group within Latinos and they outnumber their Mexican/Mexican American male counterparts (Hurtado, et al., 2010).

Furthermore, crucial is the need to examine and understand the role that race, ethnicity, national identity, class, gender, language an/or citizenship (intersection of all) play in their experiences as doctoral students. It is also important to understand the role that being the first, first generation, plays as amongst first generation Mexicanas pursuing the doctorate. Current scholarly works often highlight reasons, whether that is financial aid, underprepared academically, etc., of why Latina/o students struggle to succeed, without discussing overarching power structures of race, class and/or gender. Therefore, examining this issue would contribute to understanding how the academy has facilitated or blocked educational equity for women of
color, particularly first generation *Mexicana* doctoral students.

By examining the success of *Mexicana* doctoral students, in their voice, as *testimonio*, I “tell the stories of their life, document silenced realities, and help reveal complex and ‘politicized understandings of identity and community’ (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p.3). Most of the existing literature rarely discusses the difference between Latino men and women or between Latino sub-groups (Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, and so on) for that matter. Particularly, the lack of discussion on the unique familial, cultural and societal expectations that impact *Mexicana* women who are first generation college graduates and graduate students (doctoral students). As such, in places like the academy,Latinas are viewed just as women, absent of their ethnic or racial identity, or gender identity, or other identities or intersection of various identities, and thus are ignored by administrators, faculty, and other peers. Therefore, this research will contribute to the representation of Latinas of Mexican descent in the academy who are first to be accepted, enroll, navigate, and graduate from a doctoral program.

Theoretically, this study uses Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCW) (Yosso, 2005; 2006) rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) framework to uncover and expose the larger structural powers that limit equitable schooling and social mobility for Latinas of Mexican descent. As such, CCW offers the opportunity to explore the tools, from the marginalized point of view, brought to the academy for survival and that leads them to continue to succeed even when they are not meant to be in this space in the first place.

Furthermore, the importance of the study is exacerbated by the fact that even though women of color comprise 36.3% of our nation’s female population and almost 18% of the entire U.S. population, Latinas in general comprise lower percentages of those with any economic
power (Kerby, 2013). As of 2013, women overall earned 77 cents for every dollar the average white male makes. On the other hand, black women and Latina women only made 70 cents and 61 cents, respectively. The Center of American Progress (2013) suggests that these gaps impact women of color far more than white women because women of color have less job occupation diversity, are paid lower wages and face higher rates of unemployment. Women of color currently make up about 33% of the female workforce and are twice as likely as their white female counterparts to be employed in lower-wage sectors such as the service industry (Kerby, 2013). Additionally, women of color are paid less for the same amount of hours worked, have a lower median weekly earning, higher rates of poverty, and greater unemployment. For example, black women’s weekly median earnings are of $595, Latina women earn $518, while white women earn $703. Income earnings matter, because women of color are living at higher rates of poverty, in particular Latina women with rates of 26.6% in comparison to white women of 10.3% (Kerby, 2013).

If these trends continue, women of color will be left behind and their families and communities will be negatively affected, especially as more women become breadwinners (Kerby, 2013). As of 2010, 40% of Latina/o households were headed by women, almost double the number since 1975 (Kerby, 2013). As such, the educational attainment and the higher incomes associated with additional schooling greatly matter for Latina women. It is not only a matter of parity but of ensuring future generations are able to move away from poverty and have the same opportunities as other students (Gándara, Oseguera, Huber, Locks, Ee, & Molina, 2013).

Finally, the limited research of Latinas in higher education has been conducted in specific regions excluding the Midwest. Most research on Latina/o students has taken place in the
Southwest, Texas and California in particular (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gándara, 1982; Gándara, 1995; Rendón, 1992; Segura, 1993; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Villalpondo, 1998, Gonzalez, 2006). However, in the last decade there has been a shift on the geographical spaces where Latina/o populations are found. Due to immigration reform policies that affect where Latina/os can live, Latina/o are relocating to new areas such as the Northeast, East Coast and the Midwest. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, while Latinos are predominately located in the Southwest, as of 2011 Latinos also resided in states like Illinois, New York and Florida. While, some places in the Midwest are not as unfamiliar Latino/a spaces such as the state of Illinois, the lack of high educational attainment is of concern. As such, this research would also contribute to the representation Mexicans in the new geographical spaces like the Midwest.

This study is purposeful in selecting the geographical space it is concerned with studying. The Midwest as a geographical space lacks research and in particular of Latina/os in higher education and beyond is of urgency. Furthermore, by focusing this study on what some consider an “invisible” group due to their triple oppression (race/ethnicity, gender, and class)– Latina women of Mexican descent, is an opportunity to put forth their voice and make them visible. Until recently, the educational journeys of successful Latinas were not even considered an important topic of research (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Thus the research has focused on examining the educational barriers and challenges experienced by Latinas/Chicanas (Gándara, 1982; Segura, 1993), their identity formation as young Mexicanas/Chicanas in high school (Gonzalez, 1998), and their marginality/(in)visibility as Chicanas in higher education to the college choice of Chicanas (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara, 1995; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). Nevertheless, the literature is still limited on highlighting the experiences of
Mexicanas, or Latinas of Mexican descent, that have successfully completed high levels of education – the doctorate. Even more rare is work that uses a life history and testimonio approach in exploring and examining Mexicanas from the Midwest experiences through out their entire educational journeys, particular at the doctoral level regardless of professional career chosen. The rarity of work on Latinas, and more specifically on first generation graduate students, from low-income/working class backgrounds, Latinas of Mexican descent from across disciplines at public Predominately White Institutions outside the Southwest becomes necessary scholarship.

Latinas/os, as a group, have very distinct educational experiences due to their relationship with the United States. Although there are similar issues faced by the various groups under the term Latina/o – language, immigrant status, gender, etc., the relationship between their own country of origin, their parents, or the country they may associate as home, and that of the United States creates a diverse relationship shared with the United States and therefore the needs for each of these groups will vary. Latina/os of Mexican origin are the largest Latina/o group in the United States and their experience through out the educational system can be very different from a U.S. Mexican born and a Mexican immigrant. Mexican immigrant children are the next largest Latina/o group in the United States attending public schools from K – 16 and graduate school. In the Midwest, Mexican immigrants are the fastest growing group to enroll in the public school system making this group the next group to hopefully enroll in public universities and eventually in graduate school. However, the way that they may see themselves and their relationship to the academy may be different than that of U.S. Mexican born.

**Chapter Overviews**

Chapter one introduces the problem, research questions, purpose of the study,
significance of the study and discusses its overall major contributions.

Chapter two briefly reviews the literature on doctoral education, students of color and doctoral education, narrowing of the review to Latinas in doctoral education. Provide a brief review of the pre-collegiate and collegiate literature of Latina/os and a focus particularly on both barriers encountered and successful strategies applied by Latina women in their educational journeys. Finally, concluding with a review of literature of Latina women at the doctoral level.

Chapter three discusses the methods used to construct, collect, and inform the testimonios of the study participants. The chapter begins with a discussion of qualitative methods and moves to a discussion on the transition from life history method to testimonio as method as the most productive method to collect data for the study population. Followed by the research design of the project, discussion on how participants were selected, the conceptual framework used, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005), and finally a discussion the analysis process.

Chapter four introduces the participants of the study and provides context and insight into the lives of each mujer through testimonio.

Chapter five, is the findings from carefully selected excerpts of the mujeres testimonios using the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model. These excerpts were both impactful and significant. Through testimonio, the mujeres in the study addressed and reflected on the research questions proposed by this study. A CCW model, offered the opportunity to highlight the various capitals that CCW is built on and how they are connected, used and developed throughout the educational pathways of the mujeres in this study. The excerpts from testimonios within CCW offered insight on how the mujeres successfully managed to navigate and move towards the final goal, the PhD. These mujeres bravely shared their testimonios so that their experiences be acknowledged, valued and recognized, because too often they are silenced and pushed to the
sides.

Chapter six offers a discussion on the value of Community Cultural Wealth as well as consideration of adding another capital to the model – persistence capital. This chapter also offers thirteen recommendations based on the *mujeres testimonios*, moving towards policy recommendations that span from the local to the federal level. This chapter includes my final thoughts and gratitude to the *mujeres* that participated in the study.
Chapter 2:
Review of the Literature

The review of literature of Latina/os in education/schooling is intentional and as such extensive. I intentionally aim to highlight and demonstrate early on resistance from the Latina/o community for equitable schools and schooling, that challenges notions of cultural deficit thinking. These are notions that Latina/o culture and people do not value education and as such schools have used the low academic achievement of Latina/o students, in particular those of Mexican descent, as evidence to support those assumptions. Therefore, in this review I present both examples of struggles and challenges that the participants in this study have had to overcome and/or continue to deal with as they navigate through their schooling. And most importantly debunk notions of cultural deficiencies. As such, it is imperative to understand that the participants of this study are already success stories within their families and communities in context of educational attainment. The rise of educational attainments in the last 40 years, with the increase of 13.9% to 23.5% of 2-year community college degrees and 7% to 14% of 4-year college degrees in 2013 (Stepler & Brown, 2015), highlights that success in the education pipeline is happening, slowly but still happening. Furthermore, understanding that the participants are coming from backgrounds where the highest level of educational attainment of their parents is at most middle school, with some exceptions. Therefore, when success is measured it needs to be within that context. Nevertheless, as the review of literature will also highlight the gains are not to parity with the growth of Latinos, 6.5% in the 1980s to 17.1% in 2013.

In this section, I will review briefly the literature on doctoral education, students of color and doctoral education, narrowing of the review to Latinas in doctoral education. I will provide a
brief review of the pre-collegiate and collegiate literature of Latina/os and a focus particularly on both barriers encountered and successful strategies applied by Latina women in their educational journeys. Finally, I will conclude with a review of literature of Latina women at the doctoral level.

**History Early Schooling Experiences and the Struggle for Educational Equity**

“Although contemporary school segregation of Chicano students is complexly related to social, economic, and demographic factors over time, one should not ignore the historical blueprint of forced segregative practices of the early 1900s... What this study means is that Chicanos and other [Latina/o] students now have the unfortunate distinction of being the most segregated group in the nation. Given the current and future dramatic increase in the Chicano school-age population, segregation is predicted to intensify” (Menchaca & Valencia, 1990, pp. 243-244).

Unlike other students of color, the relationship between the school system and Latina/o students has been a unique one with a long lasting impact. Multiple scholars have argued that this relationship is linked closely to the U.S./Mexico turbulent history, the Mexican Revolution and World War I, driving mostly Mexicans (now Mexican Americans) across the border to escape the effects of war while others were recruited as contract laborers (Sanchez, 1997; McDonald & Garcia, 2006). Prior to these events, 1910, little attention was given to the educational, health, economic or political status and well being of Mexicans/Mexican Americans (Sanchez, 1997). Yet, this has led us to the current state and critical need to understand the educational attainment of Latina/os in the United States. Where Latina/o students are either pushed out or dropout before they even reach high school (Yosso, 2006). Tara Yosso’s (2006) study based in California suggests that out of 100 [Latina/o] students that start at the public school elementary level, 56 will be pushed out or will drop out by the time they reach high school and only 44 will graduate high school, that is less than half. In a follow up study by Huber, Malagón, Ramirez, Camargo Gonzalez, Jimenez, and Vélez (2015), *Still Falling Through the Cracks: Revisiting the Latina/o Education Pipeline*, these scholars suggest that there has been
some improvement, with 63/100 (females) and 60/100 (males) finishing high school in 2012. Yet, this is still far lower than that of Whites (92/91), Asian Americans (84/88), African Americans (85/82) and Native Americans (83/80). Both Yosso (2006) and Huber et al. (2015) highlight that there is a crack in the educational attainment of Latina/os before they even start high school and begin to think about college. Ultimately, only a quarter (25%) or about six Latina/o students, of the original 100, will graduate with a bachelor’s degree with less than one attaining a doctoral degree (Yosso, 2006; Huber, et al., 2015). Regrettably, Nora and Crisp (2009) argue that these figures presented in California appear to be reflective of Latina/o students throughout their schooling and eventually narrowing the educational pipeline across the country. Thus, Latina/os graduate high school at lower rates than their white counterparts, enrolling in college at higher rates than their African American and Native American counterparts but not having the same graduation rates and therefore less enroll at the graduate level (Gándara, Oseguera, Perez Hueber, Locks, Ee, & Molina, 2013; Contreras & Gándara, 2009; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura; 2006, Castellanos & Lee; 2003).

The low educational attainment, is linked to the historical relationship between Mexico and the U.S. MacDonald and Garcia (2003) argue that it is “of critical importance [to understand that the] collegiate participation [is] deeply rooted barriers of segregation and discrimination that have generally accompanied the Latina/o elementary and secondary experience” (p. 16). Adding that in order to understand low rates of higher education attainment “is to realize that the pipeline to college for Latina/os has generally been blocked at the lowest levels of schooling, often prior to high school” (p. 16). An example of this is that during the 1930s and 1940s, while the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NACCP) fought the racial hierarchy system of public higher education, the main desegregation cases regarding Mexican
American children were at the elementary school level (Gonzalez, 1990; San Miguel, 1987; Moreno, 1999). Critical cases such as the *Roberto Alvarez vs the Board of Trustees of Lemon Grove School District* (1930) that fought for Mexican American children to attend school alongside white children. The judges’ ruling was clear, there was no legal reason to segregate Mexican children. Arguing that the school district was in the wrong and that separating students only delayed the process of Americanization, that included English language development, since Mexican children were in schools with other Mexican children.

The second case, the *Mendéz v. Westminster* (1946, 1947) in California became the first federal court case with a decision on school segregation and marked the end of *de jure* segregation in California (González, 1990). Both González (1990) and Wollenberg (1974) argued that the importance of this case rested on the judge’s ruling and his interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment of “separate but equal” clause. González (1990) further added that the decision on the legality of segregating Mexican Americans on linguistic grounds was critical. The court concluded that the school board had segregated Mexican American children on the basis of their “Latinized” appearance and had gerrymandered the school district in order to ensure that Mexican American students attend segregated schools. The court concluded this was an illegal action, as there was no constitutional or congressional order that authorized school boards in California to segregate Mexican American students (González, 1990).

Both of these cases were before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that by law ended *de jure* segregation. However, while both cases were critical in highlighting the difference between *de jure*, “by law”, and *de facto*, “default”, segregation for Mexican Americans in a time when African American and Native American were explicitly discriminated against through the “separate but equal” laws, *de facto* segregation persisted. For Mexican
Americans, the Méndez case highlighted that segregation for Mexican/Mexican Americans was taking place via *de facto* and so treated as second-class citizens (Menchaca, 1993). Haro (1977) argued that “*de facto* segregation [was] based on patterns of residential segregation [which] has been found to be widespread in the Southwest” (p. 7). The impact of this type of segregation “reappeared in the form of gerrymandering neighborhood school districts [where] the majority of [Latina/o] students [have notably] increased” (Moreno, 1999, p. 72).

The ramifications of *de facto* segregation are still present today and contribute to a great deal of pre-collegiate factors that impact college enrollment and completion rates for Latina/o students. In 2005, 39% of Latina/o students attended schools where the student enrollment was 90% or more minority and 78% attended schools where total enrollment was 50% or more minority (Orfield et al., 2014). As a result, Latina/o children have been attending some of the most segregated schools in the United States. More than two-thirds of all Latina/o students are enrolled in public schools in which 50 percent of the enrollment is minority (Orfield et al., 2014). The high level of Latina/o student segregation only intensifies educational inequalities and accessibility to a college-preparatory curriculum that makes higher education an elusive goal (Olivas, 1987; Moreno, 1999; Castellanos, Gloria & Kamimura, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). As such, students of color (particularly Latina/os) are more likely to be concentrated in overcrowded, under-resourced schools that have the highest number of unqualified teachers (Oakes et al., 2004). These students remain drastically disadvantaged in terms of receiving a high-quality education in comparison to their White and Asian American counterparts (Carroll, Krop, Arkes, Morrison, & Flanagan, 2005). Schools with high concentration of students of color and low income, receive less funding and fewer resources to support student learning (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2004).
The impact of segregation practices of Latina/os is clearly evident in the push-out/dropout rates at the high school level and with the low number of Latina/os at four-year colleges/universities, particularly at selective research universities (Gonzalez, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1999; Moreno, 1999; MacDonald, 2003). Even after the legal wins of the early 1900s, *de facto* segregation is very much alive today. Latina/o students continue to attend the most racially segregated schools that tend to be under-resourced, with underprepared, high non-credentialed and high teacher turnover, schools attended by high numbers of minority student with poor and/or inadequate English Language Learners (ELL) programs, that lack rigorous academic courses and programs (Oakes et al. 2004; Gándara, 2010). A rigorous curriculum of college preparatory classes that includes mathematics is essential for meeting the academic eligibility requirements for four-year institutions. As a result, students that don’t have access will miss out on the most influential factors in increasing opportunities for attaining a degree from a four-year college/university (Oakes et al., 2004). In particular Latina/o and African American students have limited access and sometimes no access to a rigorous academic curriculum and so limiting their college-going readiness. Even when there is access to college prep curriculum, almost 59% of Latina/o students are categorized as “not qualified” for postsecondary education (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Swail et al., 2004). The availability of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, high-level courses that are tied to college admissions and can provide college credit, for Latina/o students is limited and barely 16% of the total student population take AP courses in high school (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). To this, Gándara and Contreras (2009) add that Latina/o students are more likely to be assigned and/or placed in low curriculum tracks than Whites, that affect their opportunities. While Latina/o students are not overrepresented in AP courses at the same rate as their White peers they are overrepresented in the number of students that are held back in
school, special education, having grade point averages (GPA’s) of C or lower, and are more likely to change schools more often (Swail et al., 2004).

The forced segregatory practices endured by Latina/o students, including neighborhood segregation has been prevalent in the community due to multiple factors such as poverty and gerrymandering limiting access to postsecondary education. Latina/o students are more likely to attend schools, from primary levels to high school, with majority racial/ethnic minorities and/or predominately an all Latina/o student body, schools that are under-resourced, high rates of non-credentialed teachers or teachers teaching outside their areas of study, lack access to rigorous academic coursework including AP classes, as well as schools with inadequate bilingual education programs for ELL’s (Orfield, 2001; Oakes et al., 2004; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara, 2010). These issues are heightened by the fact that a majority of Latina/o students tend to be first generation, come from working class/low-income backgrounds and a large portion are immigrants, in some cases undocumented immigrants. The non-academic related factors limit access because of the unfamiliarity of the college going process and so information on how to get through high school (e.g. classes to take, benefits of AP courses, college entry exams, etc.), college choices/differences (e.g. two – year community college versus fours – year college/university, etc.) financial aid process, and citizenship status impact on cost of attendance, then make access to postsecondary education critical and limited.

The early cases such as *Alvarez vs Lemon Grove* and *Mendez vs Westminster* are examples that debunk the idea that Latina/o communities, more specific *Mexicana/os* do not value education and that it is in the culture. It highlights that non-minority scholars of education would like to erase acts of Latina/o/Mexican resistance against school and in doing so furthering the cultural deficit thinking discourse of Latina/o families and children. Furthermore, I would
like to add a more recent act of resistance, the East Los Angeles Walk Out/Blow Outs of 1968, that took place in East Los Angeles. After months of lack of support from the school(s), district and school board, over 10,000 Chicana/o students took to the streets (Muñoz, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Garcia Martinez, 2008). Chicana/o students presented a list of demands to the school personnel, the district and the board, including offering bilingual and bicultural education, more focus on Chicana/o history, provide more materials in Spanish, expand library facilities and time to use the library, smaller class sizes, better guidance counseling, improved student-counselor ratios; ending the sorting of students into slow, average, and high ability using flawed IQ tests (tracking), ending corporal punishment, and more, a total of 36 demands were presented (Garcia Martinez, 2008) for better educational opportunities. At the 40-year anniversary of the Walkouts, a then student that walked out, wrote in the Los Angeles Times, “We stood up, and it was important. The Chicano walkout of 1968 was about dignity and fundamental change” (In Garcia Martinez, 2008). The 1968 Walkouts is another example of resistance and a marker of the need for progress and change in the education system for Chicanos.

**Latina/os and Higher Education**

*Like students of color in the university, guests have no history in the house they occupy. There are no photographs on the wall that reflect their image. Their paraphernalia, paintings, scents, and sounds do not appear in the house* (Turner, 1994, p. 356).

The literature of Latina/os at institutions of higher education, suggests that pre-college factors impact actual college degree completion. As the recent study by Huber et al. (2015), suggests as of 2012, 66% of Latina/os completed high school. More than a decade ago, in 2000, only 49% of Latina/o high school graduates enrolled in college immediately after graduating. For the graduating class of 2012, 69% of Latina/o high school graduates were enrolled in college in the fall, higher than whites but not Asian American (84%) high school graduates (Fry & Taylor,
2013). Suggesting, once again that education matters for Latina/o families and communities. Even though, Latina/o students are not enrolling in college proportionally to the total Latina/o population, there has been a numeric increase in college enrollment (Gándara, 2013). Unfortunately, Latina/o students enroll in colleges that are less selective schools than those they can actually qualify to attend, and where they would be more likely to complete a degree (Gándara, 2013; Fry, 2011; 2004).

Nora, Barlow and Crisp (2006) suggest that there is still very limited literature on Latina/o persistence at four – year college/universities. Though there is research on persistence and academic and social integration of students on campus (Pascarella & Terenzin, 1980; Berger & Milem, 1999; Cabrera, et al.,1999), the types of resources and support systems for students (Nora, 1990; 2004; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), student finance and or cost for a postsecondary education (Olivas, 1986; Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1992; St. John, 1990; St. John, et al., 1994; Cabrera, Nora & Asker, 2001; George-Jackson, Rincon, & Garcia Martinez, 2012), as well as discrimination, campus climate and microaggressions (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Solórzano, Yosso, & Ceja, 2000; Yosso, et al., 2009), the literature still falls short on Latina/o student persistence beyond the first year, at selective four-year colleges/universities.

Of what is known, factors that impact Latina/o students at the undergraduate level are coming from a working class/low socioeconomic background that affects persistence because Latina/o students are more likely to enroll part-time in order to meet family responsibilities such as having a job (Fry & Taylor, 2013). In the fall of 2011, only 78% of Latina/o 18- to 24-year-old college students were enrolled full time. By comparison, 85% of similar White students were enrolled full time. The issue of full time and part time enrollment is tied with college choice and
the financial aid process familiarity (St. John, Paulsen & Starkey, 1993; St. John, 2003). Students’ SES influences the number of hours they will enroll at the college/university level. Latina/o students are far more likely to drop out if their financial aid packages are insufficient and working-class students are more likely to drop out if the work-study and loan amount are not adequate (Castellanos & Jones, 2006; George-Jackson, Rincon, & Garcia Martinez, 2012). Attending a college on the basis of financial cost and other reasons related to finances also leads to Latina/o students going to colleges near home and so limiting their options of academic rigor, support programs, and whether or not they get to transfer on to a four-year college, receive an associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree (Castellanos & Jones, 2006). For undocumented student, a large number being Latina/o and of Mexican descent, cost of attendance is critical for persistence. As Latina/o students and their families continue to be segregated and live in high levels of poverty, almost 40% of undocumented children live below federal poverty level, unlike U.S. born children (17%) college persistence can be low (Perez, 2012).

In addition to financial aid, other factors plague the Latina/o undergraduate experience such as the precollege factors; not being prepared for college coursework. Multiple studies conducted in an almost ten-year span examined college withdrawal and academic performance (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hu & St. John, 2001) found that for Latina/o students making less than “good” grades made them question their ability to attain a college degree.

Furthermore, a hostile environment is also cited as a critical factor in persistence for Latina/o students at the postsecondary level (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Solórzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009). Gloria and Castellanos (2003) found that the experiences of racial/ethnic minority students, such as Latina/os, African American, American
Indian (Native American) and Asian/Pacific Americans, attending predominately White institutions (PWI) present unique challenges in understanding the educational system as a whole (p. 71). This is partly because the proportion of racial/ethnic minority population in the educational system is not parallel to that of the national demographics. As racial/ethnic minority groups struggle to learn the educational system that is founded on White or European American culture and values and despite their progress in access to and even graduating from U.S. institutions of higher education, the graduation rates of Latina/o students in particular, are still very low (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003).

Gloria and Castellanos (2003) find that students of color, in particular Latina/o and African American students, feel alienated and “tolerated” rather than welcomed. A few students shared, “I lack a sense of belonging here, a feeling of an outsider” (African American female) (p. 78), a Latino male stated; “I try to adjust to it the best I can, but mostly I just mind my own business and keep to myself” (p. 78). Furthermore, Gloria and Castellanos (2003) add high levels of microaggressions experienced by the students. As a group, Latina/o students’ experiences are very much racialized and function within structures of exclusion. Latina/o students’ underrepresentation at selective four-year institutions of higher education (PWIs) places them in uncomfortable and lonely environments that influence their college setting adjustment, feeling that they belong (integration), and their sense of satisfaction (Solórzano, 1998; Hurtado, 2003).

Unfortunately, Latina/o students have faced racism, hostility, prejudice, discrimination, isolation, and alienation at high levels that it leads them to self-questioning and doubt about their educational preparation and belonging (Kamimura, 2006) affecting persistence, in particular at PWIs. Critical race scholars in education, Yosso, Smith, Ceja and Solórzano (2009) argue that not enough qualitative researcher examine how racial micro aggression impact and/or shape a
negative campus racial climate for students of color. They do, however, cite Solórzano’s 1998 study that documents the endurance of microaggressions by Latina/o scholars as stunning “acts of disregard” that included nonverbal gestures, stereotypical assumptions, lowered expectations, and racially assaultive remarks (p. 661). An example of this they suggest is concerns with comments such as;

“You’re not like the rest of them. You’re different.”
“I don’t think of you as a Mexican.”
“You speak such good English.”
“But you speak without an accent.” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 125)

Early research has suggested that the campus climate in which Latina/o students experience college has a direct effect on both the learning and social outcomes of these students (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, & Carter, 1997). Gloria and Castellanos (2003) add that Latina/o students’ feeling isolated within the academic college environment has a negative relationship between Latina/o students' intellectual self-concept and attending diversity-related functions/activities. Although a racial campus climate that centers race in the context of inclusion and/or culture of the college/university, could possibly promote high levels of academic outcomes and graduation rates for all students, too often contributes to lower levels of students' academic performance and high dropout rates for students of color, particularly Latina/o and African American students (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Solórzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009).

The literature on Latina/os and higher education is limited to persistence as the numbers dwindle down and but few graduate. Factors such as being first generation of working- and/or low-income backgrounds, from a majority of segregated public schools affect Latina/o college persistence at selective institutions of higher education, PWIs in particular. The factors that they overcame to gain access into these institutions trickle down all through out their educational
journeys after high school. Latina/o students are then continuously working towards overcoming the precollege academic under-preparation tied to academic ability and performance, the financial aid packages that determine the number of hours that they may need to work, family obligations, the racial campus climate and micro aggressions they experienced, coupled with the level of institutional commitment to Latina/o student retention have played a role on persistence and more than anything on college degree completion. Thus, making a college degree another factor they must overcome. Yet, most of the research emphasizes how the lack of institutional support is in fact a big reason for student failure and drop out, not the students’ abilities, values, or intellect.

**Latina(s) and Schooling**

On the other hand, while more Latina women are graduating and going on to college and eventually to graduate school, they still are not up to par with their White female counterparts and definitely not even close to that of White men (Gándara, 2013). The literature attests that Latina women are not immune to the negative factors impacting their male counterparts, however they do differ in how they overcome some of those factors. Some studies on successful Latinas currently completing a doctoral degree or part of the faculty ranks have found that parental support, in particular that of the mother was critical in breaking away from the stereotype of Latina women as passive and home-bound, less familial responsibilities giving them more time for school, having a strong cultural/ethnic identification, high level of academic achievement, fighting for access to college preparatory courses and commitment to family and community are amongst some of the factors that have led to their success in their early schooling, K – 12th and then in college (Vasquez, 1982; Morales 1988; Achor & Morales, 1990; Cuadraz, 1996; Gándara, 1995; Orozco, 2003; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005; Gándara,
El Doctorado

In the United States, holding a doctoral degree means an expertise of one’s field. The doctoral degree is also perceived as the pinnacle of educational achievement. It is the highest level of educational attainment possible. Through doctoral education future faculty are trained, and future leaders in business and private industries are developed (Millett & Nettles, 2006). Doctoral students create “the new ideas and knowledge upon which future educational activities can be built, sustained and nourished” (Davis, Evans, & Hickey, 2006, p. 236). Graduate education, and doctoral education in particular, is an integral part of higher education, providing not only the next generation of scholars but also the creation and transmission of knowledge to communities both within and outside of academia. As such educational institutions play a large role in shaping the doctoral student into the future academic or practitioner. Furthermore, to attain such a degree proves one with opportunities to hold vital influencing positions in our society. For students of color, their relationship to the institution and the academy play a huge role, since they become bearers of knowledge that will be reproduced in their communities.

Much of the literature on graduate education has focused on six predominant themes: 1) Teaching, 2) Doctoral program design, 3) Doctoral writing and research, 4) employment and career, 5) the student-supervisor relationship and finally the 6) doctoral student experience (Jones, 2013). Jones (2013) defines the doctoral student experience as a discussion of the impact on progress and completion of a student’s experience during the PhD program. Adding, that “student socialization is the key to a positive experience and is most influential in positive outcomes of the PhD” (p. 99).

Similarly, Gardner and Barnes (2007) find that high rates of student attrition, excessive
time to degree, inadequate training for teaching and research, limited academic job market in some fields, and lack of attraction to pursue the professorial career in other fields, as well as funding difficulties, take front row on doctoral education research today. These concerns have led to a number of studies that seek to better understand the purposes, processes, and outcomes of the doctoral education experience (Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Fagen & Suedkamp Wells, 2004; Nettles & Millett, 2006); nevertheless, still much is not known about the doctoral education experience more specifically that of students of color and in particular that of Latina women, is also fairly known and researched.

Over the past 30 years there has been very little work done on the graduate experience and training of students of color in the academy (Gay, 2004). Most of the literature on students of color focuses on the recruitment, retention, enrollment patterns, funding and mentoring of graduate students. However, the intellectual, social and professional development of these students is rarely examined and thus the students remain in the margins of the academy (Gay, 2004). Gay (2004) suggests “a careful study of the obstacles they [students of color] encounter [would lead] to strategies for dealing with them throughout their programs of study” (p. 266).

“[T]he academy has a history of exclusivity [and] racism ... that works against people of color . . . to preserve the status quo” (Gonzalez, 2007, p. 298).

Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011), “‘Am I Going Crazy?!’ - A Critical Race Analysis of Doctoral Education” examined how students of color navigated and negotiated oppressive and dehumanizing conditions in their daily experiences of their doctoral education. “Through [a] critical ethnographic exploration of black and Latina/o students’ experiences in doctoral education, [we] aim to illustrate the seemingly pervasive racialization of doctoral education” (Gildersleeve et al., 2011, p. 94). The study consisted of 22 students - all participants
were current doctoral students; 16 were still taking courses, and six had completed coursework. Of the total, three identified as Latina, five as Latino, seven as black females, and eight as black males. The students varied in discipline, 17 were in education, while five were in other fields such as statistics, agriculture, anthropology, and psychology. Participants came from three major public research universities, one from an urban environment on the West Coast, one from a small city in the Midwest and the last one from a small city in the Northeast. With two of the universities being predominantly white institutions and the urban university having over 50% minority student enrollment. The study consisted of ethnographic interviews, some done in person and others on the phone. The study was guided by the question “How do black and Latina/o students experience the culture of doctoral education?” (p. 94). The authors argue that doctoral education is a complex system with many influencing components that deserve critical inquiry, students then being just one of those components. Nevertheless, for the authors the voices of these students was of great interest and believed had a lot to say about the doctoral education experience, as such the authors “posit that a racialized social narrative exists that reveals the harmful institutional and systemic factors contributing to the possible derailment of Latina/o and Black doctoral students” (p. 94). And so the authors find that the culture of doctoral education can be harmful, marginalizing and even dehumanizing in particular for Latina/o and black students.

They find that there is a prescribed, already established, manner in which students must behave and that there should be a specific end product as an academic as part of the culture of doctoral education (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Nevertheless, Latina/o and black students may not fit these particular molds due to their experiences in the academy. Austin’s (2002) four-year, longitudinal, qualitative study on socialization and doctoral education with 79 graduate students
across two doctoral-granting institutions, found that “students must make sense of the academy and its values, its expectations of them as graduate students, [the academy’s] conceptions and definitions of success, and the models of professional and personal life that it offers to those aspiring to join the academic ranks” (p. 103). By reaching this point, going through the process and making sense of it all, scholars have determined the importance of students assimilating these values and norms into their own to be successful in academic careers (Austin, 2002; Weidman & Stein, 2003). However, some of those findings have not gone unchallenged.

While, the majority of first year, or first time, doctoral students may experience some need to adjust to these new processes of learning and producing knowledge, questioning whether they made the right decision to go into a doctoral program, is the funding appropriate or match their academic skills, did they make the right decision in the program they chose, can they do the work, do they have the right support from faculty, department, and/or the institution in all forms – academic and professional preparation, research topic, funding, and so on are common across all students, for Latina/o and black students there is an additional layer that they must endure (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Gonzalez, 2006; Gildersleeve, et al., 2011). Some critical scholars found that Latina/o and black students’ experiences in doctoral education are complicated by race, racialization, and racist characteristics in the social practice of higher education (Solórzano, 1998; Gonzalez, 2004; Lewis et al., 2004; Castellanos, et al., 2006; Gonzalez, 2007; 2006; Gildersleeve, et al., 2011; Garcia Martinez, 2016). For example, Lewis et al (2004) study found that in addition to the challenges faced as a first year doctoral students, African American students dealt with perceived individual and institutional racism. Similarly, other scholars added that along with the perception of individual and institutional racism, Latina/o and black students also find themselves having feelings of racialized and cultural
isolation and tokenism, that most of the time are expressed by experiences such as being expected to represent one’s racial and ethnic group, being the only person of color in class, lack of mentoring, and lack of diverse epistemological perspectives in the curriculum (Castellanos, et al., 2006; Gonzalez, 2007; 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gonzalez, 2004; Lewis et al., 2004; Gay, 2004). A different but additional layer experienced by Latina/o students is that of low expectations from faculty based on racial and ethnic discrimination as well as linguistic bias, and discouragement from using more culturally appropriate epistemologies, theories, and frameworks such as Chicana feminism (Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solórzano, 2005; Bañuelos, 2006; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Huber, Delgado Bernal, 2006; Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solórzano, 2006; Gonzalez, 2007).

Therefore, the study by Gildersleeve, et al. (2011) using a Critical Race Studies theoretical framework challenges dominant ideologies and in that way changes academic study beyond frameworks of individual responsibility and move to a discussion around the unexamined institutional and systemic factors that leave oppressive power dynamics intact (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Patton, 2006). Using this theoretical framework can open the opportunity to understand and give power to the voice of the oppressed and marginalized group – Latina/o and black doctoral students. Therefore, shifting power to students of color can also provide a counter narrative to the doctoral education experience. That is exactly what the study finds. The researchers argue that by using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework as an analytical tool the students’ narratives provide a deeper understanding for students of color attrition but also how they manage to survive through the academy.

The “Am I going crazy?” narrative is the outcome of the students shared experience. Examples to understand what this means goes to students’ responses on spaces they seek for
support and understanding such as student racial/ethnic based organizations like the Black Graduate Student Organization, that a student in the study highlights to point that this type of organization is student led rather than department or institutional efforts. Similarly, in my personal experience, at my current university Latina/o graduate students did the same thing by starting an organization that would serve and address their needs not being met by the departments they belonged to as well as the university.

While forming or seeking support from racial/ethnic based student organization, it does not mean that these students do not know the value and importance of a relationship with a faculty and/or mentor, the study finds that students narrative highlight how their race (the students) play a huge role in the interaction they have with the faculty, mentors and even other students. An example of this was how a black student went about a research project and constantly feeling that the faculty was not completely supportive or understood the students’ process, even questioned the students process and ability. This went hand in hand with other black and Latina/o students experiences of “racial aggressions - racial aggressions as representing both racial micro- and macroaggressions … [defined as] “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278). [Thus], black and Latina/o doctoral students experience macroaggressions, or overt, direct attacks geared toward their racial identities, that affect the ways in which they experience their graduate education” (p. 103). Within the racial aggressions, students found their scholarly efforts held back when it related to research with communities, “[i]f black and Latina/o doctoral students are constantly quieting their reactions to powerful and racialized occurrences then students may compromise their own well-being in the name of education, which appears contradictory to education’s
broader purpose” (p. 103).

Gildersleeve et al. (2011) adds that students of color must also overcome a sense of hostility in their programs. They suggest that hostility is communicated to the students through the questioning of their research interests, commitment to rigor, valued and undervalued worldviews, and previous personal and professional experiences and ways of knowing. When Black and Latina/o students find themselves questioning whether they belonged in their doctoral program and if they are capable of doing the work associated with the program requisites such as writing, research, class work, presentations, etc., while this may not be necessarily something only students of color experience at the doctoral level, students who question their ability and worth in education run the risk of developing perceptions of themselves that can be destructive and invalidating (Rendón, 1994; Vasquez, 2007). In some instances, Gildersleeve et al. (2011) suggested that this hostility was not just towards research etiquette but also towards student behavior in the academy. As such, students of color, and the majority assumption of black women as being aggressive and/or loud women of color must hold themselves back when they express disagreement in the classroom and/or with a professor in order to not be perceived as just another “angry black woman”, similarly Latina women must do the same so that they do not break the passive image that has been held by many. This adds to being censored or having to project an image so that they can get a point across with out having the stereotypes/image of their race/racial group have a negative impact on their responses and/or behavior.

Finally, Gildersleeve et al. (2011) similarly to Gay (2004), find that doctoral students of color must create spaces outside of their academic units that serve as an escape from their academic environment, form peer support networks both inside and outside academic spaces, and overall form peer support networks that allowed them to affirm one another and to form a
community in which they could openly share their experiences. Having to take these extreme actions, Gildersleeve et al. (2011) argue “sheds light on the idea that while doctoral education is structured as an individualist endeavor, many students of color are actually interdependent on one another and engage socially with their learning in doctoral education” (p. 106). It also reinforces student of color marginality in the academy as argued by Gay (2004).

Susan K. Gardner (2010) examines the role of discipline content and culture influence on the socialization of students. Her study explored the socialization experiences of 60 doctoral students in 6 disciplines at one institution. She defines socialization as the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization. She argues that for graduate students socialization is imperative to a successful graduate school experience. She also argues that the socialization experience for graduate students is unique by discipline. For example, the socialization experience in the sciences, one based in laboratory work conducted in groups, is quite different from the independent scholarship conducted in the humanities (Gardner, 2007). Nevertheless, institutional context must also be considered as part of the socialization process (Gardner, 2010).

Gardner’s (2010) study finds that while all students discussed similar socialization experiences, the degree of the experience varied by departments with higher or lower completion rates (p. 69). She discussed four main themes found – support, self-direction, ambiguity, and transition. She found that their peers provided support, meaning that students reported that they were taken under the wing of older graduate students and were provided an “extended family” type environment in their department. Gardner (2010) argues that the support from other students being mentioned far more frequently than support from advisors or faculty members is generally
not discussed in the existing literature. However, departments such as engineering and mathematics, did not share the same as most students relied on support from their faculty rather than their peers. These departments also had a low rate of completion.

Self-direction was expressed as freedom to what you want to do, in terms of research topic, learning how to conduct research independently, referring to the “ambiguity the process involved and that they felt the need to be “self-taught” and feelings of being “left alone” to figure it out on their own” (p. 71), as well as “having a plan” to complete their program. However, some of the students expressed that too much self-direction led to ambiguity. Lovitts (2001) suggests that graduate school regulations, guidelines, and the structure involved to complete the PhD is often an alien and unknown process for graduate students, nevertheless Gardner (2010) finds that the ambiguity is more often related to institutional issues rather than those coming from the department. A communications participant from her study explained, “I think they could be even more structured and clear about what paperwork needs to be done, when and who needs to receive the paperwork, and who needs to sign it” (Gardner, 2010, p. 72). Yet, students in early stages of the doctoral program were unsure of the process within their departments, understanding exactly what was expected of them in relation to graduate school, and later on in the process ambiguity of the examination experience, as well about researching and writing a dissertation (Gardner, 2010). This was also connected to the last theme in her study; transition. Transition was concerned with the students learning to adjust to the new expectations as well as the ambiguity of graduate school. Transition was also a process in the various phases of the doctoral program, since students transitioned from completing their first year as graduate students, learning the ropes, and then learning how to use the skills gained to research and write their own work. As students take less coursework and are focused on their own work, “regardless
of discipline, often struggle with the expectations of the dissertation process, compounded for students who lack support and the skills essential for completion” (p.74).

Gardner (2010) study provides insight to how the discipline and the department context, or culture, can impact doctoral degree completion. However, this study is limited in that it does not provide insight on race and gender of participants and it focused primarily at one school. Therefore, her study called for more research on doctoral education and furthermore on the experience of students of color at the doctoral level.

**Latinas, Mexicanas, Higher Education and Beyond**

One of the earliest studies on Latinas in higher education, “Confronting Barriers to the Participation of Mexican American Women in Higher Education” looked at the barriers that prevented the participation of Mexican American women in higher education as well as strategies to overcome such barriers (Vasquez, 1982). Vasquez (1982) found that the women’s low income background and gender role restrictions at home accounted for some of the barriers to access post secondary education, while in college financial aid resources, inability to seek financial assistance from parents, and feelings of isolation for not having the right “fit” had an impact on their experiences. She found that institutional barriers such as test scores and admissions GPA requirements also played a role in preventing access. However, the study found that those that succeeded had higher levels of academic achievement due to their connection to their ethnic and cultural identity background, had a personal commitment to an academic or occupational goal, received some form of financially assistance but not loans, were involved in culturally relevant programs and organizations that helped with the “culture shock”. Finally, Vasquez (1982), debunked the notion that the admissions requirements such as GPA and test score correlated with college completion, since she argues that these are “not as predictive for
Chicanas and other ethnic minority groups as they are for minorities” (p. 161). Furthermore, highlighting the successful navigation of the U.S. school system by young Chicanas with families that valued education.

Patricia Gándara’s (1982) epic “Passing Through the Eye of the Needle” study of 17 low-income, high achieving Chicanas who graduated with M.D., J.D., or Ph.D. degrees, was one of the first studies to challenge the cultural deficit model. In this study, Gándara finds that Chicanas, like their White counterparts, are highly influenced by their mothers who encourage them to pursue higher education, this breaking away from the stereotype that Mexican American women were passive and wanted to be stay at home wives. Additionally, parents played an important role by cultivating a strong sense of work ethic, a spirit of independence, high levels of emotional support as their daughters pursued their education and allowed their daughter to have less familial responsibility (such as not pushing for them to have children or get married with out an education) (Gándara, 1982). Finally, in this study Chicana students were more likely to go to integrated schools, have the opportunity to engage and negotiate between their culture and White culture early on, and persistently maintain high academic records through out their entire schooling.

A later study, “Chicanas Holding Doctoral Degrees: Social Reproduction and Cultural Ecological Approaches,” by Achor and Morales (1990) of 100 Chicana Ph.D.’s found that Chicana women were more likely to employ resistant strategies to institutional barriers. Chicana women would challenge barriers by rejecting any underlying messages of unworthiness. At the same time, they completed all of that was required of them in order to achieve their academic goals, such as hard work and dedication. Similarly, Cuadraz (1996) study, “Experiences of multiple marginalities: a case study of Chicana scholarship women” of Chicana graduate
students at a flagship university suggests that “Bourdieu’s image of incorporation for those from working class who achieve scholastic cultural capital overemphasizes adaption to a legitimation by the culture” (pp. 211-212) was not really applicable to these group of women. Instead, the women opted for collective action to succeed in their scholarship path, thus working with other women to move forward in their studies.

Patricia Gándara’s (1995) book *Over the Ivy Walls*, based on her sample of 50 “high achievers, analyzed the home influences and the family stories as cultural capital that enabled their success. Similarly, Delgado Bernal (2001) article “Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home: The Mestiza Consciousness of Chicana Students” extends some of Gándara’s work. In this work, Delgado Bernal (2001) worked with the concept of *mestiza* consciousness, theoretical framework influenced by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands* that shifts power relations, identity formation and the complexities of culture and ideology to understand the social, political, and ideological forces that shape educational attainment. Within this concept, she finds that Chicana undergraduate students identity formation and the intersections of race, class and gender enabled them to successfully negotiate their experiences and the dominant culture in higher education. As such, her work begins to shift power between research, researcher and who is researched. Ultimately, further challenging cultural deficit models and putting forth the opportunity for new theoretical frameworks that could be used for research of Latina women, such as 1) Critical Race theory, used predominately at the K – 12th grade and making it’s way to higher education, 2) Critical ethnography that which researchers seek to capture the differences in school achievement among families, challenging essentialist notions of identity and culture (Elenes, 1997) and also validating the culture of the home. This shift has also been inclusive of research such as lived experiences like autobiographical essays.
While more recent studies do use some of these theoretical frameworks others continue to look at resiliency and socialization. For example, J.C. Gonzalez’s (2005) dissertation, “Doctoral education experiences of Latina students: A qualitative understanding of the relation of academic socialization to retention and success” examined the schooling experience of 13 doctoral students enrolled at public research institutions throughout the U.S. that had completed at least three years of their program including the challenges they faced and their academic socialization process. He found that their positive experience in the doctoral program was due to being exposed to a new region, positive peer influences, positive view on the curriculum, supportive department, professional support, development through their assistantship, financial opportunities and a welcoming and diverse campus environment. On the other hand, the challenges they faced included being far from home, a discriminatory environment, challenges navigating institutional politics, generalized perceptions about the institution, financial challenges, professional challenges, lack of other Latinas in their program, assistantship challenges, challenges from peers, and publishing challenges. This study highlighted that while some factors may work for success for some, they can also be a challenge for the student.

J. C. Gonzalez (2006) findings from “Academic Socialization Experiences of Latina Doctoral Students A Qualitative Understanding of Support Systems That Aid and Challenges That Hinder the Process”, examined the experiences of Latina doctoral students related to academic socialization suggested that Latinas shared many of the same challenges and support systems as that of other non-Latino/a doctoral students. Yet, the challenges they face such as poor academic preparation, racism, cultural assimilation, and other institutional level challenges are a continuum of pre-collegiate factors, that I have argued are results of a history of educational neglect. Even then, Latinas who succeeded in the face of adversity have done so
because of limited positive experiences in their K–12 schooling as well as positive experiences during their college years leading up to their doctoral studies, similar to Gándara’s (1982; 1995) findings. Furthermore, J.C. Gonzalez (2006) adds that these women had financial support in the form of fellowships and scholarships from the institution throughout their doctoral journey. Even the challenges of race and gendered bodies, Latinas added that diversity in their institution played a role in their success, as well as the inclusion in department-wide support system helped them during difficult times.

Furthermore, J. C. Gonzalez’ (2007) “Surviving the Doctorate and Thriving as Faculty: Latina Junior Faculty Reflecting on Their Doctoral Studies Experiences” study of 12 Latina faculty from different fields found that as doctoral students these women were able to form positive relationships with other doctoral students, particularly those of color and other Latinas which helped them through the process. A good number of the participants also shared that they would turn negative experiences into positive learning experiences. J.C. Gonzalez adds that the participants had a positive ethnic identity that correlates to high self-esteem, a sense of purpose and high academic achievement. Similarly, to past studies, these women expressed having a purpose for their family as well as for their community, with an emphasis on their strong sense of purpose.

K. P. Gonzalez and his colleagues (2001) also provide an examination of a small part of the puzzle to understanding the Latina experience in graduate education. In this autoethnography of six Latina/o doctoral students use themselves as research subjects and examined their own experiences. What they found was that they all shared feelings of vulnerability when they started their programs as well as how unfamiliar they were with the culture of the doctoral programs and the process of socialization. Furthermore, they discussed the lack of Latina/o representation in
their programs, feeling as outsiders, and a sense of fragility and vulnerability associated with their isolation at predominately white universities. A second study by Gonzalez and his colleagues (2002) where they again study themselves and recruit other advanced doctoral Latinas at national education conferences revealed that their doctoral experiences were challenged by their academic institutions due to being Latina/o and conscious of the oppressive academic culture. In addition to the conflicts found and experienced in the first study, in this one they found the academy to be conservative, restrictive, and racist. From their perspective, they viewed the academy as conservative because doctoral students were expected by the larger academic community to study only "acceptable" and "appropriate" research topics, and topics on ethnic issues did not generally fit this criterion. It was restrictive because they were not supposed to be studying ethnic issues, as the study of these issues had already been claimed by other academics not of color. Acts of racism were reflected in their experiences because as they pursued research on Latinas/os it caused others to question their commitment to the subjectivity of the research and their research became highly suspect, even though their white peers studied white issues and white people without having their research topics scrutinized (Gonzalez et al, 2002).

In Guerra’s (2006) “Being Latina: All But Dissertation (ABD)”, she draws from her own experiences leading up to her academic success. She states that the recruitment programs for Latinas informed her and encouraged her to continue her graduate education. She also adds that her involvement with different campus organizations for students of color and the support she received was beneficial. Having the support from her family and support while she worked through her dissertation was also invaluable, which Gonzalez (2005) and other scholars suggest is key in the Latina educational journey. Guerra’s narrative reflects some of the possible changes that have occurred for Latina women in higher education. Early scholar, Laura Rendón (1992) in
“From the Barrio to the Academy” Revelations of a Mexican American ‘Scholarship Girl’” wrote; “to become academic success stories we must endure humiliation, reject old values and traditions, mistrust our experience, and disconnect with our past. Ironically, the academy preaches freedom of thought and expression but demands submission and loyalty” (p. 54). She adds, “Scholarship ‘boys and girls’ are left only with what Rodriguez (1982) calls “hunger of memory,” a nostalgic longing for the past-the laughter of relatives, the beautiful intimacy of the Spanish language, the feeling of closeness with one’s own parents” (Rendon, 1992, p. 54). Yet, she still has hope for other students of color by adding “we will change the academy, even as the academy changes us. And more and more of us will experience academic success – with few, if any, regrets” (Rendon, 1992, p. 63), and Guerra’s narrative is reflection of such change, yet the doctoral journey is still complex for most Latina women.

Overall, the literature on Latinas and the doctoral education, while still limited, suggests that these women face an array of challenges as outcomes of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, citizenship and/or their intersection. Latinas socioeconomic status matters greatly, just like other Latino students, as this leads to attending underserved, underprivileged, high teacher turn over, low qualified and certified teachers, non-rigorous curriculum, lack of college preparatory classes, and/or schools that academically track students. As Latinas, they are victims of historical de facto segregation practices that have led to similar consequences as being from low income backgrounds. Their gender attributes to being considered passive, future stay at home wives, and baby makers, tracking them out of college preparatory courses and even to vocational or simply basic level education. These have heavy consequences at the undergraduate and graduate level, as these women are still faced with challenged based on these factors. However, the literature shows that those that have been able
to succeed are those that had strong parental support and encouragement, especially from their mothers, strong commitment to education, had an optimistic outlook, drive to succeed, have a positive cultural identity, have an overall positive K – 12 and college experiences, receive financial assistance, institutional and department-wide support, Latina/o mentors, and a strong sense of purpose to family, community and society just to name a few.

Unfortunately, the literature is still limited in Latinas and doctoral education. A good number of studies were conducted in the 1970s and 1990s, and so do not necessarily address the current changes within higher education as well as new theoretical frameworks that counter the cultural deficit model. Majority of the studies are of Latinas, the umbrella term and do not desegregate and thus unsure of where all their participants are coming from. Furthermore, most of the studies were conducted or include majority of the participants from a particular region of the United States – the Southwest. Additionally, all are qualitative studies and researchers have conducted a one-time semi-structured interview limited to one to two hours in length. Finally, a majority of these studies, with the exception of the autonarratives/ethnographies, collected data from participants outside of their own home institutions, in some cases surveys were sent out or met at national conferences and few of the studies discussed whether the institution was considered a predominately white institution and what impact that had on their participants.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The experience and voice for many Latina/o students and those of Mexican descent especially have been constantly silenced, overlooked, and marginalized. Historically, communities of color, specifically Mexican American, have been deemed genetically inferior with a lack of cultural or familial value that emphasize education or a lack of motivation or ability to succeed in schools. While these negative beliefs about Latina/o students’ educational attainment have been dominant in society, many scholars, educators, and community members have rejected using deficit thinking models to understand Latina/os educational journey and in particular their achievements and successes. To follow on these scholars and on this tradition, I too use critical method(s) and theories to challenge, critique and understand power dynamics in my study of Latinas of Mexican descent scholars in the making.

I begin this chapter by defining the methodology of qualitative inquiry and move from life history method to that of testimonio to position understanding of such inquiry. Following this section, I share the process of how I chose to focus on this project and what fueled my choice to research first generation Latina women of Mexican descent pursuing a doctorate degree. I also discuss the research design, data collection, and analysis protocol for data.

Qualitative inquiry can be at best as having little or no general definition (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). This “does not clearly signal a particular meaning or denotes a specific set of characteristics” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 213). Denzin and Lincoln’s suggest, “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations,
photographs, recordings, and memos to the self...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

More than simply a way to gather data, qualitative inquiry is a way of approaching and interacting with the world. Gonzalez (2006) argues that a qualitative approach is best suited to understand the specificity of the social processes that can take place with such a diverse group of Latinas that have somewhat different experiences. Their race/ethnicity, social class and gender challenge the educational experiences of Latinas. Furthermore, limited research on Latinas as subgroups - Mexican, Mexican American/ Chicanas, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc., and regional spaces – California, Texas, etc., adds to the urgency of research for this particular group. To gain an in-depth understanding of the daily experiences of these women, in particular Latinas of Mexican descent, through out their educational journeys a qualitative method is appropriate.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) highlight eight constructs that make up this qualitative research:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the meanings people attach to things in their lives.
2. Qualitative research as inductive.
3. In qualitative methodology the researcher looks at settings and people holistically; people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole.
4. Qualitative researchers are concerned with how people think and act in their everyday lives.
5. For the qualitative researcher, all perspectives are worthy of study.
6. Qualitative researchers emphasize the meaningfulness of their research.
7. For the qualitative researcher, there is something to be learned in all settings and groups.
8. Qualitative research is a craft (p. 11).

The methods and ways in which questions are constructed illustrate what the researcher deems valuable as knowledge, reality, and how they interpret the world.

While the study did not include participants who had already completed their doctoral
degree, it did aim to include women who were on their last year of the doctoral program. As such, qualitative inquiry made sense for this study because it allowed for the exploration of life history and *testimonio* as methods to assist and understand the ways *Mexicana* scholars developed strategies to navigate higher education, in particular doctoral education, in the Midwest. With the study focusing on:

1. What strategies do first generation Latinas of Mexican descent employ when navigating their doctoral studies at public Predominantly White institution (PWIs)?
   i. What role, if any, do family, culture, gender and class play in the formation of first generation Latina scholars?

2. What impact does K–16 experiences play in preparing them to navigate the graduate school experience?
3. How do daily and past experiences influence their completion of their doctoral degree?

**Life History Method**

A life history method provided insight into a very (un)familiar world of a continuously marginalized group—Latina women of Mexican descent in the doctoral journey in newer geographical space. Life history method gained a noticeable position in the Chicago tradition of sociological research in the early 1920s and has been widely adopted for educational inquiries since the 1980s (Casey, 1995). An example of such being scholars Stephen Ball and Ivor F. Goodson (1985) founding a series of studies on teachers’ professional lives and careers. Life history method has been defined as the story a person tells about the life he or she has lived. Adding, “a fairly complete narrating of one’s entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8). Goodson and Sikes (2001) add that “life historians believe that the stories people tell about their lives can give important insights and provide vital entry points into the ‘big’ questions” (p. 2). Arguing that a life history method is valuable because: 1) “It explicitly recognizes that lives are not hermetically compartmentalized
into, for example, the person we are at work (the professional self) and who we are at home (parent/child/partner selves), and that, consequently anything which happens to us in one area of our lives potentially impacts upon and has implications on other areas too. 2) It acknowledges that there is a crucial interactive relationship between individuals’ lives, their perception and experiences, and historical and social contexts and events. 3) It provides evidence to show how individual negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live” (p. 2).

Furthermore, a life history method offered opportunity to ask questions from the perspective of the character/participant. However, Goodson and Sikes (2001) warned that responses/findings/conclusions cannot be generalized or be determinants of cause and effect. In life history method individual narratives/stories are links in a chain and ‘the life historian: ‘can see his life history subjects as a link in a chain of social transformation” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 9). Adding that Dollard’s (1949) notion of the life history subject as a link in a chain provides the opportunity to link a historical past, the present and the future.

“There were links before him from which he acquired his present culture. Other links will follow him to which he will pass on the current of transitions. The life history attempts to describe a unit in that process: it is a study that one of the strands of a complicated collective life which has historical continuity (Dollard, 1949, p. 15, as cited in Goodson and Sikes, 2001 p. 9)”.

A dilemma with the linking of the past, present and future, is the tension created by the responsibilities and expectations handed to an individual and the individual’s own history and their ability to interpret and act. Even so, a life history method offers the opportunity to explore such tension in terms of the relationship between the culture, the social structure and the
individual life. As a life history researcher, one must keep in mind the situation both as described by others and by the participant, such a history will not only define both versions but allow to clearly see the pressure of the formal situation and the force of the inner private definition of the situation. It is the intent of life history method to not separate but instead demands holism (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). This is why life history method in educational studies has been helpful, “working with teachers and pupils who are, again, arguably marginal in terms of their social power, life history has been seen as useful and appropriate because … public and private cannot… be separated in teaching… the person comes through when teaching” (p. 10). The strength of a life history method is that it aims to provide the whole story as the participant and the larger structures interpret it.

While life history method gained some noticeability and validity, it has not been far from critique. “Under modernism, life history languished because it persistently failed the ‘objectivity tests’: numbers were not collected and statistical aggregation produced and since studies were not judged to be representative or exemplary, contributions to theory remained parsimonious (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 14)”. It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s, postmodernism and post-structuralism, moving from objectivity to subjectivity that life history method revived. It was a time to move away from “modernist master narratives which are viewed as social productions of the Enlightenment Project” (p. 14).

In this manner, life history method, has moved to capture individual life stories but to also understand societal influences. Goodson and Sikes (2001) mention Foucault’s work that focused on the sociological attention of the ways in which institutions like hospitals and prisons regulated and constituted individuals’ subjectivities, thus there are societal factors that impact the individual. As the researcher, it was my responsibility through life history methods to “attend to
the silences as well as what is said...attend to how the story is told as well as what is told or not told, and to attend to the tensions and contradictions rather than succumb to the temptations to gloss over there in our desire for ‘the’ story” (Munro, 1998, p. 13). As such, the caution of doing life history work is that the researcher must understand that a complete story is not necessarily what is being gathered but instead snapshots of the individuals’ life as it has happened and proceeds on.

Thus, Goodson and Sike (2001) argue that “rendering of lived experience into a ‘life story’ is one interpretive layer, but the move to ‘life history’ adds a second layer and gather interpretation... moving from life story to life history involves a move to account for historical context” (p. 170). Similarly, tenets of Critical Race Theory push the researcher to do the same and to check the power relation between participant and researcher, as in much of the work it insists that both parties have the same power and control over the interpretation.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that while it is suggested to have all data be collected before beginning the analysis process, “life historians tend[ed] to the view that analysis begins as soon as they start working with an informant” (p. 34). A big reason for this is that “interview - conversations are not tightly structured and researchers will take opportunities to check out ideas, themes and thoughts as they proceed” (p. 34). The analysis process is about making sense of and/or the interpretation of the information and evidence that the researcher has considered being data; this then means being able to place the evidence and information into a framework or model.

At the beginning of the project a life history method seemed appropriate to gain insight on the educational journey of Mexicanas towards the doctorate. However, as the interviews began to take place there was a need for a methodology that was reflective of the value of my
own experiences in the doctorate journey, that embodied my multiples selves as that of the participants – (wo)man, woman of color, (im)migrant, Spanish/English speakers, Spanglish, the first, gendered, mother, sister, aunt, lover, etc. As these multiple selves surfaced it was necessary to engage with a methodology that examined and considered intersectionalities and went beyond the obvious, as such testimonios came alive.

**Towards Testimonio**

Life history as method with many strengths for this study, as a self-identified Chicana researcher I found that there was a need to consider the intersectionality of the participants’ experiences in this journey as raced-gendered students. As such, testimonio as method, carrying some traditions of oral history, became a more logical way to gain deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants of this study. Testimonio is a qualitative method developed in Latin America that incorporates the political, social, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Although, the participants in this study may not see themselves as political or as activists, their mere presence in the academy is political. Testimonio like life and oral history method attempts to gain insight and information of the persons’ development and how they make sense of their lives. Similarly, this insight is usually gained through interviews, transcription, and editing by the researcher or journalist (Beverly, 2000). However, unlike a life history method, testimonio explicitly carries a desire for social movement and change (Benmayor, 1998; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) while simultaneously engaging in the race-gendered experience of the participants. An intention of testimonio that is similar to Critical Race Theory in education is the commitment to social change (Solorzano, 1998). Additionally, testimonio is not only a vehicle of social change, but testimonio also tells stories of life, documenting silenced realities, and helping reveal complex
and “ politicized understandings of identity and community” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p.3). Testimonios has allowed for the participants to be at the center of the research in an effort to capture what is for the participant rather than what seems to be for the researcher. In that same manner testimonio provides a personal account that allows the researcher deeper personal access to the topic being observed. This access is of particular importance because it “repositions power out of the colonized framework and allows Latino/a scholars to construct knowledge through narratives that originate from personal experiences, which challenge social inequalities” (Huber & Cueva 2012).

Testimonio as method comes from a tradition of being used to convey the experience of people that have experienced persecution by governments and/or other socio-political forces in Latin(a) American countries (Behar, 1993; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Arguably, this can be the case of Latina/o students, especially Chicana/os who have been in some ways persecuted by an educational system that terrorizes and tries to erase their existence through various mechanisms from Americanization to zero tolerance policies. In recent years there has been an emergence, in particular, of research on Chicanas and Latinas experiences in the United States (Perez, 1999; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). Within this research, testimonio -

1) Challenges silence and reclaims space for people and issues not discussed in various settings
2) Explores the process of change and empowerment
3) Offers an opportunity for a collective understanding of similar experiences and subordination

and

4) Presents experiences in a way that is accessible to a larger audience beyond the academy (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Therefore, testimonio served as a critical tool used to further understand the experiences of
Latinas in their graduate school journey as it provided another way of seeing, a unique lens. Assisting in understanding the life histories of the participants within a larger context of change, empowerment, collectivity, community and accessibility. Testimonio in educational research is a process to understand the oppression that exists within educational institutions and showcases the sort of biases that otherwise go unnoticed; therefore, highlighting and calling attention to the efforts that students of color commit to for the sake of challenging and transforming cultural and intellectual spaces (Huber & Cueva, 2012).

In this study, testimonio, served as a way for me as the researcher to not just gather and document a list of facts but instead to listen, reflect on, and learn from the experiences and stories of the mujeres, along with them. In this manner, I too would share some of my own life experiences with them. As such making a conscious decision to not become detached or an impartial researcher so that the mujeres be aware of my deep interest and care for their stories, and that was reflected in the testimonios (Chapter 4). Furthermore, testimonio offers the opportunity to use alternative theories to explain and analyze the experiences of the mujeres. In particular, as this study involves some of the most marginalized and deemed voiceless groups – Latinas of Mexican descent.

Before getting to the theoretical lens/conceptual framework, I begin with setting up the study – research setting, data collection – participant requirements, recruitment process, participant selection, interview(s) process, and journaling, and finally a demographics of the mujeres’ followed by the mujeres educational demographics.

**Research Setting**

The qualitative portion of this study took place in the Midwest of the United States – the Heartland. The mujeres in this study are doctoral students at University of the Midwest (UM).
The University of the Midwest is the leading university of the state of Illinois. In 2013 – 2014, The University of the Midwest was home to 42,883 students; 31,901 undergraduates and 10,982 graduate and professional students, 55% men, 45% women, 5.5% African-American, 8.2% Latino/a, 15.0% Asian-American, and 0.06% Native American, making this a predominately White Institution (university data, 2015). While previous studies on Latina/o graduate student populations have tended to concentrate on the Southwest region of the United States, in general, and California in particular, my research highlights the growing presence of Latina/o student in institutions of higher education in the Midwest. Latina/os have been present in the Midwest yet research on the educational experiences beyond K – 12 has been limited.

Data Collection

Participant requirements

Participants for this study were selected based on the following criteria:

1) Self identified as a Latina woman, specifically of Mexican descent
2) First generation (high school preferably)
3) Low income status (family income as growing up)
4) From a Midwest state (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and/or Wisconsin),
5) Enrolled in a doctoral program at a public Predominately White Institution in the Midwest.

The participants of this study had to self-identify as Latina or Chicana but more importantly as being of Mexican descent. They needed to have been raised in a Midwest state, but not necessarily have had to be born in that state but had experienced most of their schooling in the Midwest.

They had to be the first in their family to be enrolled in a doctoral program and attending the University of the Midwest. The program or discipline of study was open-ended; thus the participants could be enrolled in any program as long as they were pursuing a Ph.D. In 2013,
Latinas earned the majority in the disciplines of Social Sciences (8.5%) and Humanities (7.6%) (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). The professional aspirations of the participants were not necessarily something of interest for the study, though with a Ph.D. they will be prepared for an academic career at a research university.

The focus of the study was to explore the ways in which the participants’ navigated doctoral journey. Therefore, participants would need have been enrolled at least for one semester as a graduate student but not have completed the Ph.D. by the time the last interview took place. Because the interest is on the day-to-day experiences in the Ph.D. journey having a participant that has been in their program for less than a year was important since the student would provide a fresh perspective of the process. The other participants must not have graduated by the time the last interview was conducted. It was important to have the student still enrolled as their focus would still be on finishing up the degree rather than working on the next step – a job.

Recruitment process

Participants for the study were solicited utilizing purposeful sampling strategies. This strategy mixes two sampling strategies characteristic of qualitative research: criterion sampling (makes sure that students have experienced the phenomenon) and maximum variation sampling (involves the intentional selection of students whose experiences, when analyzed in a collective, provides the fullest description of the experienced phenomenon). Recruitment to participate in the study began by reaching out to university and student led programs and organizations that aim to serve students of color in graduate school. I sent an email to director and presidents/leaders of organizations requesting that they send out to their members and attached a formal letter asking for participants (Appendix A).

I selected a total of 5 participants to be interviewed. Each participant was provided with a
Consent Form (Appendix B). Each participant was invited to participate in three 1 – 1.5 hour-long open-ended interviews (Appendix C). Each interview focused on a specific time period of their educational journey. The first interview consisted of questions related to their views on school, family views on education, and their K – 12 grade experiences. The second interview looked at their college experiences and finally the third interview consisted of questions related to their doctoral experiences. In all three interviews questions regarding family, community and their culture took place. A Chicana Feminist Epistemology framework was crucial in the formulation of the open-ended questions. This framework required that I think about the role that race, class, gender, citizenship, immigration, patriarchy and other identities may marginalize or Other the participants’ experiences in their educational journey.

The first interview took place at the University of the Midwest and it was a face-to-face in-person interview with the exception of one participant. The rest of the interviews took place online via Skype or Google Hangout. All participants had the opportunity to choose the time and location of the interview. Location for each participant mattered, some chose or were only able to do the interview at their campus office or Teaching Assistant office due to the slow connectivity of their home wireless internet or lack of internet at home. Other participants chose to do the interview from the comfort of their bed.

Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed. During the first meeting I took diligent notes of the participants features, this mattered greatly because some of the participants gained access to conversations that others did not and that impacted their experiences in their doctorate program. Observation notes and other documents, as provided by participants were used as well. Observations were reserved mainly to note places and spaces that participants used to facilitate their educational journey, an example of this was if the participant shared that hey
use a specific office on campus rather than an office for student use offered by their department, being of interest to observe since this space provided insight of why this space is more useful or safer for the participant to use. Other observations noted were the location chosen to have the interview take place and/or body language as response to certain questions and/or to note the silences in the narratives.

Introductions

First Interview: I met with three of the five participants for the first time at a local on campus café. The café we met at is a common space used predominately by graduate students and faculty, and less by undergraduates. The majority of the participants learned of the study via an email they received interestingly enough, three of the five learned about it from an email I sent to the list-serve of a graduate organization that I co-founded in 2011. Emma learned about it from word of mouth via a peer of mine who was working in a summer pre-doctoral program at the university. While I understand that following the method of testimonio, the first interview/meeting is crucial to establish rapport, a sense of trust and some form of relationship (Behar, 1993; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Thus meeting face-to-face is crucial, for two of the participants the initial meeting was via technology – Skype or Google Hangout. In the first interview I explained the purpose and scope of the study, why it mattered to me personally as well as what would be expected of and the role of the participant – opportunity to review, encouraged to ask questions and engage by checking their transcripts for clarity and be included in the analysis of their experiences. For the three participants I met in person I used this meeting to obtain written consent to audio record each interview I also distributed a hard copy of the questions that I would address. For the other two participants, once they reached out to me and stated they were interested I emailed them the consent form that was then signed and emailed.
back signed. Prior to the first interview I emailed them a PDF of the question that I would address in the interview.

The first interview had multiple purposes, one was to meet the participants and gain trust so that they would be open throughout the interview process. Another purpose was to learn of their early schooling experiences. The first interview was purposeful in understanding their early schooling experiences, which in some cases was before they even started formal schooling. The questions in this section touched upon:

- Family migration (if any)
- Family educational background, particular parents
- Role of formal schooling versus non-formal
- Memories of K–12 schooling experiences (critical events)
- Role of teachers, community members, peers

The first interview served as a retrospective approach that helped in establishing a roadmap of their schooling experiences (Gándara, 1995). The early schooling experiences were key in being able in understanding the ways Latinas develop strategies for navigating higher education - doctoral education, in particular what impact do K – 16 experiences play in preparing them to navigate the graduate school experience and finally what role, if any, do family, culture, gender and class play in the formation of first generation Latina scholars. At the end of the interview, I notified them that we would schedule the second interview once I had the first interview transcribed. It was also agreed that the second interview would be conducted via Skype or Google Hangout. They were also aware that I would send a journal prompt in the weeks to follow.

Second Interview: The second phase of documenting participants *testimonios* was through a second set of semi-structured questions that focused on the college experiences. It sought to understand the process of college choice making, and not in the sense of what college
to choose based factors for the best college but instead this interview sought to understand how the participants came to realize that college was an option and/or what was college in general. The questions for this interview were aimed at answering the role K – 16 experiences play in preparing them to navigate graduate school in particular doctoral education and continue to look at the factors laying their educational journey map. Topics addressed in this interview were:

- Influences on college information
- Influences (parents, teachers, counselors, mentors) in preparing for college
- Family role on choosing a college
- Challenges faced in college
- Strategies to succeed in college
- College experience

At the end of the second interview, I checked in with them regarding their journal entries. At that time, I had not read them because not all had submitted them. I also checked in regarding their first interview transcriptions. None of the participants had any changes or edits to make. Similar to the first interview, the third and final interview was not scheduled until after the second interviews had been transcribed. For the second set of interviews, one participant, Sor Juana, was interviewed in-person and that was due to the fact that we coincided in being in attendance at the same conference. The interview took place in my hotel room. The second interviews took place about 3 – 4 months after the first interview.

Third interview: The last set of interviews was conducted between four to six months after the second interview. For one of the participants, Emma, who had started her graduate program in the fall, the interviewing process took almost an entire year. As such, the last interview was conducted a month after the 2014 – 2015 year ended, so about June of 2015. For the last interview the semi-structured questions were specifically related to their current experiences as doctoral students. The third interview touched upon the following themes:

- Learning about graduate school and/the PhD
At the end of the last interview, I informed them that I would send them one last journal prompt within a week. I also informed them that I would be in contact with them via email to distribute the last interview transcription and to contact me with any questions, concerns or if they would like to add anything else to their testimonios. Finally, I reminded them that their input is welcomed and would be included in the analyzing process of their transcripts before the completion of the study.

Email Journaling

Another approach to data collection was the use of email journaling. Though not critical for collecting data, email journaling became another opportunity for the participants to develop their testimonio. As per the participants’ request I sent them prompts to think about and try to answer, however I usually sent a “prompt” within a week of the last interview for the purpose of having the participant’s follow-up on the interview to clarify and reflect upon their responses. This method allowed me to obtain day-to-day examples of their personal and educational experiences and how they made sense of them. This allowed for them to be more open about their own feelings and thoughts of the doctorate process. It brought attention to memory or moments that they might have forgotten but quickly became evident those moments were crucial in their schooling/educational journey. With the exemption of one participant, each participant completed three journal entries. Prompts for each journal entry:

• Journal Entry 1: What year is this in your program? How has it been so far? If you are in an advance year, how has it been different from your first year? What has been
beneficial/difficult this year? Both in terms academic challenges, faculty, department, etc. and personal? Have you faced any personal challenges due to you being a graduate student? Reflecting on this past semester/year, what would you have done differently? Wished someone had advised you to do differently? Outline challenges and successes as well as future goals.

• Journal Entry 2: As the semester is coming to an end, please think about what this semester/new academic year has meant in your journey towards the PhD. What stage are you in - coursework? Exams? Thesis defense? Proposal writing? What has this all meant so far? How are you feeling towards reaching your goal of that PhD?

• Journal Entry final: In your journey, what has been the hardest part of the program/process? Coursework? Dealing with classmates/peers? Faculty? Funding? Etc. Would you consider these barriers or struggles are faced by others that might not necessarily be like you? (Class, race, gender, sexuality, first gen, etc.) What do you think helped you succeed/overcome/make it this far? Are there are any examples of support that you received from faculty? Dissertation advisor? Peers? Friends? Colleagues? Family? Partner? Other? U Ultimately, do you see your success as personal one or one that included the need of others?

Demographics of the mujeres

In the study, two of the five women identified as Mexican/Mexicana, one as Mexican American and the other two self identified as Chicana, an identity that one, Sor Juana, had adopted when she was in college. As I gained trust and rapport with the participants, the term mujer or mujeres, became more commonly used in particular to referring to them collectively in their experiences. No one shared a dislike or discomfort with the term. Mujer, the Spanish word for woman, in my mind captured the shared identity as women of Mexican descent. Table 1 outlines the mujeres’ demographics with regards to their identity, age, birthplace, sibling order, marital/partner status, and home state.
Of the five *mujeres*, Gloria was the eldest, nearing 35 years old by the time we finished the last interview. Most of the *mujeres* were in their mid to late 20s. Emma was the youngest of all the *mujeres* and she was also in her first year as graduate/doctoral student. Of the five *mujeres*, four were born in the United States. Sor Juana was born in Mexico, but by the time she turned 18 she had become a naturalized citizen. Two of the participants came from the state of Wisconsin, Sor Juana and Gloria, while the rest came from Illinois. Two of the *mujeres*, Sor Juana and Cherrie were the youngest in their families, meaning they were the babies. Gloria was the eldest child in her family. Emma and Maria Felix were the second eldest. A majority of the *mujeres* came from mid to big size families, with Sor Juana having a large family, total of 6 siblings. Gloria, was the one with the smallest size family, she was the eldest but her younger brother was from her mother’s second marriage. At the time of the interviews, three of the five *mujeres* were single and did not share if they were dating or seeing any one person specifically, the other two *mujeres* were either living with their partner or married (Gloria).

Table 2 presents the *mujeres’* educational demographics including their mother’s
education, father’s education, whether they attended private or public high school their undergraduate field of study, community college attendance, master’s degree attainment and doctoral degree program.

Table 2: Mujeres’ educational demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Public/Private Schooling</th>
<th>Undergraduate Field of Study</th>
<th>Master’s Degree</th>
<th>Doctoral Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sor Juana</td>
<td>4th grade Mexico</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>History</td>
<td></td>
<td>History, Latina/o Studies minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Sociology, Spanish minor</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Felix</td>
<td>College Mexico</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Community Health Sciences (BA Sc)</td>
<td>MPH/MBA</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>7th/8th grade Mexico</td>
<td>HS Mexico</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Human and Community Development and Adolescent Development (BS)</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherrie</td>
<td>6th grade Mexico</td>
<td>2nd grade Mexico</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Technical Systems Management (BS)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all of the mujeres the mother had higher levels of education than the fathers, with Maria Felix’s mother having a college degree from Mexico. Unfortunately, due to language barriers she was not able to use the degree for social mobility in the U.S. Yet, her father had no schooling just like Sor Juana’s father. Also, Gloria’s mother earned her high school diploma while her step father earned the GED after coming back from the military. For Gloria, her biological father’s educational attainment was unknown. Emma shared that her father had some schooling but it was mostly ESL classes at the community college. The lack of high educational attainment for the parents is not uncommon for Latina/o students.
All of the *mujeres* had attended public schools at one point. Maria Felix started her schooling at a “private” religious school of some sort, however it also seemed to be public. She finished at a magnet school. Gloria went to a private Catholic school in the early years of her schooling because her mother worked in the school. However, that experience was very short lived because it was too expensive to go to the school, furthermore once her younger brother was born, priorities changed. Gloria’s public school experience, however, was in an affluent white neighborhood, her family moved once they realized that her younger brother was not learning and needed to get him to a better school to catch up. Sor Juana was also in an okay public school, however as she got into higher levels the school got whiter, and so did her classes. Like Maria Felix, Emma and Cherríe, while they attended public schools they were in academic and honors courses, that were geared towards college. They were tracked into academic, honors and AP classes. Both Emma and Cherríe took the exam and were admitted to Chicago’s college preparatory schools, however neither of them were allowed to go because the schools “was far, outside of the neighborhood”.

All of the *mujeres* went straight to a four-year university, relatively far from home. Emma, Maria Felix and Cherríe were all admitted to the leading university of the state, University of the Midwest. Sor Juana was also admitted to the leading university of her home state, University of Wisconsin. While Gloria was admitted to a smaller school, Wisconsin State. Majority of the *mujeres* finished their degree in 5 years. Two of the five earned a Bachelor of Arts, two a Bachelor of Sciences and one a Bachelor of Arts in Science. Of the five participants two took time off before applying to and being accepted to graduate school. However, Gloria just like Maria Felix, earned a master’s degree before pursuing the doctorate. As such, Sor Juana, is the only one that went straight from undergraduate into the doctorate. Of the five *mujeres*, two
pursued a doctorate in Education, one in History, one in Psychology, and one in Community Health but was forced to transfer into Kinesiology. At the time of the interviews Gloria was in the last stage of the doctorate and was going to defend the dissertation summer of 2015. Maria Felix was in her 3rd year when we started and was about to start her 4th year during the last interview. Sor Juana was in her second semester of her 1st year as a doctoral student and finishing her 2nd year by the last interview. Cherrie was finishing her 2nd year when we started the interviews and about to start her 4th year when we finished the interviews. Emma was the last participant of the study. She had just started the doctoral program. She decided not continue on to pursue the doctorate and was wrapping up the final classes to earn a master’s degree by the last interview.

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework(s)**

Chapter two of this study makes an argument that Latina/o students have a history of educational neglect due in part to deficit thinking models used to explain and assert that Latina/o communities do not care about education and as such this is a cultural issue. Also referred to as cultural deficit thinking, focused on the deficiencies and dysfunction of a culture as the cause of the group’s inferior position in society. Leading to scholars and research presuming Latina/os cultural values have been detrimental to their social mobility. The adaptation of this theory has been in large part to Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu & Passaron, 1977) cultural reproduction theory that examines the role of culture in the educational system. Through this model/theory, it is proposed that schools are set up to reward the cultural knowledge and skills of the privileged groups in society, meaning that;

The knowledges of the upper and middle classes are considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society. If one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed
valuable, one could then access the knowledges of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).

As such schools have used this lens/knowledges and deemed them as the normative knowledge and skills students should have, and use these to measure academic achievement and as the basis for continued learning of the students. And so arguing that in order for the student to be successful they must already have or will need to acquire the knowledge and skills of those groups (middle and upper class). Using this lens/theory, cultural reproduction theory/cultural capital, in this way to examine and understand the educational trajectories of Latina/o students’ points to the Latina/o culture as being responsible for the low academic attainment of the student. “As a result, schools most often work from this assumption in structuring ways to help ‘disadvantaged’ students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70) a form of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). While many scholars may agree that schools promote and reward the knowledge and skill of the middle and upper classes, they counter the notion of cultural deficiency or disadvantages among Latina/os. Instead, there is an argument that these students come to school with a valuable and rich set of cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills. As such the use of testimonio is adequate to present the mujeres and the data, however Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth challenges and critiques the notion that these mujeres come into the classroom or doctoral programs with cultural deficiencies or as blank slates. Grounded and extending on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), I use the Community Cultural Wealth model (Yosso, 2005) to present the findings from the mujeres testimonios (Chapter 5).
In addition, I use a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) to expose experiences that are probably not visible in a traditional patriarchal position or a liberal feminist standpoint (p. 560). Because CFE is concerned with knowledge about Chicanas, such as who generates an understanding of their experiences and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized, it is a critical lens for this study. Within CFE, both the participants and the researcher, must collectively and actively embark on a path of decolonization (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Veléz, 2012). This process of decolonization “is not to recover the silenced voices by using hegemonic categories of analysis, but to change the methodological tools and categories to reclaim those neglected voices” (Elenes, 2011, p. 60). Because of such individual, cultural and historical diversity of Latinas, CFE draws from the concepts, unique to CFE, of mestiza (mestizaje), borderlands, and Xicanisma to be able to expose how Chicana students experience school from multiple dimensions, including their skin color, gender, class, English-language proficiency. And so, relocating Chicanas as central figures in research and asking Chicana feminist research questions unique to Chicanas shifting and addressing the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship thus giving voice to Chicanas lived experiences and bringing change to their lives. As a researcher drawing on CFE to construct the questions for the semi-structured interview protocol that informed the findings of this study.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) argues that Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be used to transform, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourse (p. 70). In this way CRT centers the Outsiders (Hill Collins, 1986), mestiza (Anzaldúa, 1987) and transgressive (hooks, 1994) knowledges (as cited in Yosso, 2005). As such CCW draws from CRT in education. CRT emerges in the mid-1970s from Critical Legal
Studies with the early work of legal scholar Derrick Bell (1992) who was concerned about the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S. and arguing that traditional approaches of filing briefs, organizing protests and marches, and appealing to the moral values of the people had little to almost no gains than in previous times. In the field of law, CRT explored the ways that so-called race-neutral laws and policies maintained racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination, stressing the importance of examining laws and lawmaking within the proper historical and cultural context to deconstruct their racialized content (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Also challenging dominant liberal ideas such as colorblindness and meritocracy and pointing out how these ideas operate to disadvantage people of color and further advantage Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, Angela Harris argues that by CRT centralizing race within U.S. law and policy challenges notions that eradicating racism will rid society of ignorance and thus all will get along (In Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). As such, CRT developed primarily, but not exclusively, by legal scholars of color addresses social injustice and racial oppression in U.S. society by studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

CRT in education derives from the original ideals of CRT and enriches the understanding of students of color experiences and relationship to institutions of learning (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Seasoned scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that a recurring theme that characterized the civil rights movement has been occurring in the schooling legal battle such as the need or deserving of “equal opportunity” or better yet equity by people of color. Arguing students of color should have access to the same opportunities in schools such as the same curriculum, instruction, funding, facilities, etc. as White students, granting some form of equal ground (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Consequently, CRT in education challenges the dominant
discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinates certain racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). CRT scholars argue that educational structures, processes, and discourses function in contradictory ways with the potential to oppress and marginalize and the potential to emancipate and empower (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Daniel Solórzano (1998), a CRT in education scholar, outlines five defining elements (also referred to as tenets) of CRT in relationship to educational research;

a) *The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism*: CRT scholars acknowledge that there is no difference between class and race as the root of oppression, yet they do realize that class on its own cannot be the only reason for oppression (Barnes, 1990).

b) *The challenge to dominant ideology*: in education can challenge the traditional ideals that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity.

c) *The commitment to social justice*: scholars are committed to social justice and offer a liberating and/or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991).

d) *The centrality of experiential knowledge (storytelling/counter-storytelling)*: scholars recognize that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education.

And

e) *The interdisciplinary perspective*: scholars challenge ahistoricism and the single disciplinary focus of most analyses and maintain on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Harris, 1994).

Villenas, Deyhle, and Parker (1999) add that “a CRT analysis of local schooling practices can reveal the racism undergirding typical schooling practices related to tracking or ability grouping, disciplinary procedures, testing, and curriculum and instruction” (p. 33). Yosso (2005) adds that the five tenets provide a helpful guiding lens that informs research in Communities of Color, by looking through a CRT lens we can critique deficit theorizing and data may be limited by its own
omission of the voices of People of Color (p. 75). Arguing that one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking (p. 75), which the literature review in this study aimed to both highlight and challenge by presenting narratives of successful navigation of the school pipeline. In this manner CRT tenets have been instrumental in the formation of CCW by providing the tools to highlight the raced and gendered experiences of People of Color, for this study that of Latinas, in schools and other institutions of higher education.

Furthermore, CRT’s tenet of centralizing students of color narratives/stories that ultimate counters the majoritarian narrative, is possibly one of the most powerful contributions of CRT in education, but also for the construction of CCW. By centering their knowledges Students of Color and Communities of Color then are armed with wealth and capital. In particular challenging deficit thinking that assumes the position that students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). By considering Students of Color and Communities of Color counternarratives/stories, CRT scholars also challenge the racialized assumptions of these groups in the school setting that “aims to supposedly passive students with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). In this end then elements or tenets of CRT offer an approach to identify, analyze and challenge distorted notions of People of Color (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) also adds that the challenge of deficit thinking is not just about not having the values or skills prior to starting school for all people, but instead for particular groups of people where race then is often code for “cultural difference”. But if culture influences how
society is organized, how school curriculum is developed and how pedagogy and policy are implemented, and culture has been equated with race and ethnicity by some researchers then a cultural deficit approach in schools takes place that impact students of color negatively. As such, a CRT approach can challenge cultural deficit thinking, but instead nurture and empower People of Color, and as such for Yosso (2005) points towards a description of cultural wealth.

The critique with Bourdieu’s theory (Bourdieu & Passero, 1977) according to Yosso (2005) is that it is too often used to explain why Students of Color are not as academically successful as White students. Through Bourdieu, “cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society” (p. 75). As such, things like education and language (cultural capital), social networks, connections (social capital), or money and/or other material goods (economic capital) can acquired in two ways; 1) through family, and/or 2) through formal schooling (Yosso, 2005). And so, if schools already function as fillers of knowledge and skills for Students of Color, then this system will function as the only vehicle for Students of Color to gain capital, because “dominant groups within society are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital for social mobility” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Then this exposes that White, middle, class structure is the standard, and so all other “forms and expression of ‘culture’ are judged in comparison to this ‘norm.’ In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (p. 76). As such, with CRT centering the focus to People of Color, it challenges the norm/dominant-majoritarian narrative. In addition, Yosso challenges that capital should be more than just income or earnings, because it focuses only on a single form of capital –
money/income. On the other hand, wealth, defined as the total extent of an individual’s accumulated assets and resources (Yosso, 2005). “Centering the research lens on the experiences of People of Color in critical historical contexts reveals accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color” (p. 77).

Further, adding that while CRT has played a key role in the theorizing of Community Cultural Wealth, LatCrit has also been influential as it addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists (Valdes, 1996). LatCrit can function as an exploration of how CRT could be expanded beyond the Black/White paradigm, by incorporating a fuller, more contextualized analysis of the cultural, political and economic dimensions of White supremacy, particularly its impact on Latinas/os in their individual and collective struggles for social justice and self-understanding (Iglesias, 1997). LatCrit emphasizes Latinas’/Latinos’ multidimensional identities and addresses the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, language and other forms of oppression going beyond the Black/White binary and adding important dimensions to critical race analysis. Furthermore, LatCrit has a tradition of offering a strong gender analysis so that it “can address the concerns of Latinas in light of both our internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized us” (Hernández- Truyol, 1997, p. 885). Thus, LatCrit fosters a liberatory discourse centered on the experiences of Latina/os, in their own voices and based on their experiential knowledge (Elenes & Delgado, 2010).

Like CRT, experiential knowledge and lived experiences are of the utmost importance in LatCrit (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). The emphasis on experiential knowledge allows for storytelling (and counterstorytelling) as a valid and preferred methodology (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). LatCrit is founded upon the concepts that counterstories of Latina/os are counter-hegemonic (Elenes &
Delgado Bernal, 2010), that they unmask and expose inequalities, and that they serve to challenge the academy’s traditional view of our (Latina/o) experience and presence as foreign (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Montoya, 2003; Villalpando, 2004).

Therefore, Community Cultural Wealth, then is grounded and extends from CRT and LatCrit, because it ‘sees’ that Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital, aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Just like CRT tenets, these capitals are “not mutually exclusive or static, but rather dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (p. 77).

**Data Analysis**

The process of coding the data began early on, as in the life history method approach suggest that it is recommended to have all data be collected before beginning the analysis process, “life historians tend to the view that analysis begins as soon as they start working with an informant” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 34). A big reason for this is that “interview - conversations are not tightly structured and researchers will take opportunities to check out ideas, themes and thoughts as they proceed” (p. 34). The analysis process is about making sense of and/or the interpretation of the information and evidence that the researcher has considered being data; this then means being able to place the evidence and information into a framework or model. This moved me to use a testimonio my method, gathering of data, with intention. As such using a Chicana feminist epistemological framework to develop and inform the semi-structured questionnaire for the interviews. To ensure that race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and the intersection of such be addressed at some point of the interviews. Furthermore, in an CFE manner, the mujeres were included at various stages of the qualitative data analysis. First, I
transcribed each interview verbatim to ensure that the *mujeres*’ words were reflected in the study. Each *mujer* had the opportunity to review transcripts and was encouraged to add or take out any information they did not feel comfortable with. As a way to gain validation each *mujer* had the opportunity to review each transcription as well as review some of the broad themes found in the analysis process. According to Delgado Bernal (1998), the engagement of the *mujeres* in the review of the analysis opens the opportunity for “Chicana[s]…to be speaking subjects who take part in producing and validating knowledge” (p. 575). Providing an opportunity for the *mujeres* to gain ownership of what was being written about them. By engaging in part of the analysis process it became an empowering part of the research and furthermore an acknowledgement of the shared power in knowledge and production of knowledge for the *mujeres* and myself. The *mujeres*’ involvement in the review of the data analysis also served as a type of member check to ensure that there wasn’t any misinterpretation of voice. This kind of analysis produced overarching themes, or as I call them large themes of the educational journey of the *mujeres* and is reflected in much part in the *mujeres testimonios* (Chapter 4).

While a CFE approach was used to produce the questions for the interviews, a CRT and LatCrit lens were also informing the emerging themes. As I carried out the coding of data, thematic analysis of repetitive concepts identified within transcribed narratives was coded and grouped systematically (Owen, 1984). Owen (1984) suggests three points of reference in the identification of narrative themes: (a) Recurrence of ideas within the narrative data (ideas that have similar meaning but different wording); (b) Repetition (the existence of the same ideas using the same wording); and (c) Forcefulness (verbal or non-verbal cues that reinforce a concept). These then led to being intentional in the way I would present the findings. In that way,
it was intentional to use the Community Cultural Wealth model that helped bring forth important themes found in the data.

Again, for consistency and clarification, throughout the process each mujer received an electronic copy of their transcripts with an optional invitation to review and revise if they wished. Since the collection of the data took over a year and a half, each participant received the transcript at different times and so the analysis process occurred throughout, hence why each transcript was coded individually. While there were few points of clarification made by the mujeres from the transcriptions, some of them requested for department censorship or modifications be made during the interview. As such, my role as a researcher was to be respectful of their wishes in particular when they felt that the material was important but could present additional obstacles in their journey. Finally, in most cases I worked closely with the mujeres to ensure their experiences were accurately captured in the dissertation.

According to Maxwell (1996), the use of multiple data collection strategies, in this study – interviews email journaling, and the mujeres involvement in the analysis – assists in reducing the risks of error of any assumption. It also helps provide a more complete account than if using only one approach.

**Role of Researcher and Human Subjects Ethics**

Within a Chicana feminist epistemology framework, I as the researcher am encouraged to draw on my own experiences to successfully apply my cultural knowledge to the research project to more appropriately capture the social constructions that marginalized Chicana (Mexicana) students in the school setting (Delgado Bernal, 1998). As such bringing my own personal experiential knowledge of being a Latina of Mexican descent, in a doctoral program at a PWI in the Midwest, woman leader, women of color, with a history of attending school with majority
Latino population and majority white administration and teacher – can shape a “collective experience and community memory carrying with this the knowledge of conquest, school and social segregation, labor market stratification, assimilation and resistance: sensitivity to interpreting data that is both technical and nontechnical within existing literature; professional experience that allows [me] to move into an educational environment and gain insight into the lives of Chicana/o students more quickly than someone who has never worked with these students; and an analytical process that allows [me] to include the participants” (Malagon & Alvarez, 2010, p.156). Therefore, having a similar or shared experience, can enhance building a better and more trusting relationship with the participants and allow for participants to be more comfortable and share their stories without hesitation or feeling of judgment.

Within a CFE framework, I understand that I am the researcher and the interviewer yet by centering the mujeres experiences within the research we collectively collaborate to create knowledge, tell our story and analyze how our lives are depicted in the study. By not paying attention to the process of how information is being gathered, it is possible to compromise authenticity of the final product. I am guided by the interview protocol questions and the collaboration of the participants in what will be written for the study along with the multiple data collection strategies that will enhance subjectivity and reflexivity. I have complied with university protocol to maintain research ethics. By providing participants with an interview agreement letter that outlines what the interviewee and the interviewer mutually agree on as well as the checking in with participants for accuracy of transcription enhances research ethics.

**Summary**

In this section I provided reasoning for using a life history method and moving towards Testimonio as method. I provided a rationale for the intentional use of Community Cultural
Wealth, with elements of Critical Race Theory, LatCrit and the role of Chicana Feminist Epistemology in the constructing of interview protocol to gain a better understanding and response to the questions posed in this study. I also provided the steps taken to conduct the research from site for the research, to a demographics of the participants and their educational demographics, followed by the data collection and data analysis process with examples of how I went about to get participants in the study, to key points for each meeting and interviews. I finished by providing a statement of the role of researcher and how a CFE framework encourages the researcher put herself in the research.
Chapter 4:
Introduction of *Las Mujeres*

This study is multilayered in multiple ways and for multiple reasons. I opted to model this study on two methods that I found to be appropriate for the population, Latina women of Mexican descent, that are constantly placed on the margins and rarely get their voices heard, regardless of the capacity – as mothers, sisters, lovers, students, women/mujeres, or simply as beings. Therefore, this study used a life history method, understood as, “life historians, examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences and perceptions of the social contexts they inhibit” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.1). Posing questions, that “deal with the essence of identity, of our place in the world… On the other hand, there may be no answers in a definite sense...our answers are dependent…in other words, upon our ontological and epistemological positions and assumptions” (p.2). As such, “life historians believe that the stories people tell about their lives can give important insights and provide vital entry points into the ‘big’ questions… and the implications that responses to these questions have for inquiry into any aspect of social life” (p.2).

The other method – Testimonio as method “tell[s] stories of how a traditional, phallocentric, Latino family structure serves as one more wall to these women [study participants] must scale. At the same time, the stories show how knowledge of and from their everyday lives is the basis for theorizing and constructing an evolving political praxis to address the material conditions in they live” (Telling to Live, 2001, n.p). These testimonios offer the “language of Latina intellectuals as an alternative site of knowledge, stressing the multiplicity of U.S. Latina experience [whose origins locate themselves at the borderland of a reconfigured
“papel. nm. 1. paper; 2. piece of sheet of paper; 3. document (s), identification paper (s); 4. paper money; 5. receipt; 6. bag; 7. part, role.

-ito. suf. for n or adj. 1. diminutive; 2. emotive; 3. superlative.

guardado. adj. 1. guarded, hidden away; 2. watched over, taken care of, kept safe or secret, protected, including by a deity or saint; 3. maintained, preserved; 4. Retained, conserved, stored. Harper Collins Spanish-English Dictionary (as cited in Telling to Live, 2001, p. 1)

“Papelitos guardados has hybrid meaning for us: protected documents, guarded roles, stored papers, conserved roles, safe papers, secret roles, hidden papers, safe roles, preserved documents, protected roles…. Papelitos guardados, writings tucked away, hidden from inquiring eyes. Papelitos guardados evokes the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times. We keep them in our memory, write them down, and store them in safe places waiting for the appropriate moment when we can return to them for review and analysis, or speak out and share them with others. Sharing and begin a process of empowerment. Stepping out of the roles expected of Latina women in the academy and in our communities, we bring to life our papeles and render our testimonies through autobiographical narratives, short stories, poems and dialogues” (p.1).

As such, in honoring Testimonio, I share with you the papelitos guardados of five very successful, amazing and brilliant, Latinas of Mexican descent scholars in the making that “have begun [their] own quiet war. Simple. Sure. [They are] the one’s who leave the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate” (Cisneros, 1984, p.89).

How did we get here: Each mujer in this study participated in three 60 – 90 minutes semi-structured interviews. The first interview touched upon early schooling experiences, education and the high school experience. The second dealt with how they came to college, the college
experience, and why pursue graduate school. The third interview dealt with their current experiences as doctoral students. Merged in each interview is the role that family, culture, gender and class has played in their transition through each stage of their schooling. It was not always explicitly asked, however through our conversations it came naturally. In some ways, the interviews were shorter and shorter, yet somehow with richer content, in particular as the last one as they were in the middle of the experience – in the belly of the beast.

In every interview and conversation with each *mujer* I found myself re-living my own experience, both past and present. I connected with all of them at different stages of their schooling experiences and it had a lot to do with the fact that I too am Mexican, a *mujer*, first generation and come from a working class/low-income background. To have felt that connection, gave validation to some of my own experiences that ultimately helped me understand the institutional purpose of a doctoral education. As a child, I never dreamt of going on to pursue a doctorate, I did not even think that I would be living in the U.S. for that matter. My earliest memory of school or a school related activity was being in Mexico sitting in the kitchen table with my *tía*, my mother’s youngest sibling, and being forced to read and write or there would be no dinner. According to my *tías* stories I was a *burra* (donkey – literal translation, but really meant hardheaded, not smart). This writing and reading activity was endured for a while until I finally learned. I can honestly share that I do not recall that moment, the moment when it finally clicked, but clearly I believe her, that it happened. Fortunately, that torture paid off. When I moved to the U.S., my reading and writing was advanced so I was placed in the 3rd grade instead of the 2nd grade, I graduated at 17 and 3 months old from high school, something that I was very proud of. As a result, I give much, if not all, the credit to my *tía*. She gave me the greatest gift ever, a love for reading, writing and learning. My mother gave me the gift of valuing hard work,
of not letting my gender be a reason why I cannot do something, and most importantly she gave me the gift of anger and courage. What these women gave me, no book or school would ever teach me. They are the reason why I keep pushing forward, and this is something that I share with the participants of this study. They have learned about pushing through from family, culture, their gender and socioeconomic status.

I begin by giving you a picture of the education state for Latinos nationally, the top ranking universities that these students attend and what universities grant the highest number of doctoral degrees to Latina/os. That is followed by the current state of educational attainment in the states of Illinois and Wisconsin, where the mujeres of this study are coming from. Followed, by a breakdown of Latina/o students, undergraduate and graduate, at the University of the Midwest, where the participants are pursuing the doctoral degree. Finally, I introduce each of the mujeres that took part in the study.

**Latina/os Education, Illinois and Wisconsin.** Nationally, Latina/os make up 17% of the U.S. population that is over 56 million people. They are currently 22% of the K – 12 populations. The median age of Latina/os is 27 years of age. Only 20% of Latina/o adults (25 and older) has earned an associate degree or higher compared to 36% of all adults, that means that 2 out of 10 Latina/os have some level of higher education while of all adults 3.6 of every 10 have earned a degree. In 2012, Latina/os earned 7% of all master’s degrees conferred, in total they only represent 3% of Latina/o adults that have a master’s degree. In that same year, 5% of doctoral degrees conferred were earned by Latina/os, that is less than 1% of the entire Latina/o population. As of 2013, a total of 141,000 Latina/as had earned a doctoral degree as the higher degree earned, that same year only 1,200 of Latinas had earned a doctoral degree (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015).
The top institutions enrolling Latina/o students continue to include community colleges, both located in the Southwest – El Paso Community College (EPCC) and East Los Angeles College (ELAC) and EPCC leads in awarding Latina/os with Associates Degrees, while Florida International University in Florida leads in awarding 4 – year college degrees. None of the colleges or universities were located in the Midwest with high levels of degree awarded to Latina/o students, the majority were located in the Southwest (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015; Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015).

In the last five years, from 2009 – 2013, the National Science Foundation list of the Top 20 doctorate-grating institutions ranked based on the number of underrepresented minorities (U.S. citizens and permanent resident status) doctorate recipients ranked the University of California, Berkeley as number one with a total of 275 total Latina/o doctorate recipients within those five years. Followed by University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras (251), University of California, Los Angeles (233), University of Texas at Austin (188), and Texas A&M University at College Station (184). Surprisingly three Midwest universities made it on to the top 20 list – University of Michigan (156), University of the Midwest* (131), and University of Wisconsin* (123) (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015; Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015).

In 2013, the state of Illinois made the top 10 list of number of all doctorate recipients, with a total of 2,540 (4.8%) degrees with University of the Midwest awarding 29% of all doctoral degrees. Followed by the state of Ohio with 1,839 (3.4%) and The Ohio State University awarding 38% of all doctoral degrees. The state of Michigan granted 1,837 (3.4%) doctoral degrees with the University of Michigan awarding 46% of the total. The state of Indiana awarded 1,429 (2.7%) with Purdue University awarding 48% of the total. The state of Minnesota awarded
1,224 (2.3%) with University of Minnesota Twin Cities awarding 62% of all doctoral degrees and the state of Wisconsin awarded 1,021 (1.9%) with University of Wisconsin awarding 72% of all doctoral degrees in the state (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015; (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). Thus, it is fair to say that institutions in the Midwest are taking lead in producing PhD’s, however the percentage by race and ethnicity show the number of Latina/o doctoral recipients are scarce. For example, within the last five years, UC Berkeley awarded only 275 doctoral degrees to Latina/os but in 2013 the institution awarded a total of 911 degrees, that is three times the number of the total awarded in 5 years.

**Wisconsin.** In the state of Wisconsin, Latina/os make up 6% of the population but it is predicted to increase and currently they make up 9% of the K through 12th grade population. The median age for Wisconsin is three years younger than the national median of 24 years of age. About 16% of Latina/o adults have earned an associate degree or higher, that is about 1.6 out of 10, that is about half of all adults in Wisconsin (3.5 out of 10 or 35%). Not surprising, Milwaukee Area Technical College has enrolled the highest number of Latina/o students at 10% and of their graduating 2011-2012 class 8% were Latina/o students. The second highest enrolling institution is University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, enrolling about 6% of all Latina/o students, and the 2011-2012 class had 4% Latina/o student graduates, that is of 4,170 students graduating 183 were Latina/o students. Interestingly, Wisconsin State*, a smaller 4-year public institution had a graduating class of 691 with 50 (7%) being Latina/o. According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates (2015), the University of Wisconsin* is one of the top 20 institutions that granted doctoral degrees to Latina/o students over the past five years (2009 – 2013). Overall the state has granted almost 2% of all PhD’s in 2013 and University of Wisconsin, Madison awarded 72% of
all the degrees (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015; (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015).

**Illinois.** In the state of Illinois, Latina/os make up 16% of the states population, it is also the state with the 5th largest Latina/o population in the United States. Latina/os make up 22% of the K through 12th grade population. The median age for Latina/os is 26 years of age a lot younger than 41 years for whites. About 17% of Latina/os 25 years or older have completed some form of higher education, that is they have earned at least an associates degree or Bachelor’s degree. Top institutions enrolling Latina/o students are mostly public 2-year colleges, City Colleges of Chicago – Richard J. Daley College (66%), Wilbur Wright College (51%) and Harry S. Truman College (37%), Triton College (35%) and College of DuPage (22%) (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). Top institutions awarding associates degrees are again 2-year community colleges with the exception of one private not-for-profit. The top 2-year community college is Morton College (68%) and it is the second oldest community college in the state of Illinois. Followed by City Colleges of Chicago – Wilbur Wright college (41%), Triton College (27%), Robert Morris University Illinois, a 4-year private not-for-profit university (26%) and Moraine Valley Community College (14%). Two of the top 5 bachelor’s degree awardee institutions are private, one not-for-profit – DePaul University (12%) and one for-profit – DeVry University (13%). Northeastern Illinois University (25%) grants the most degrees, followed by University of Illinois at Chicago (18%) and University of the Midwest* (7%) awarding less than the private universities.

At the doctoral level, the state of Illinois made the top 10 list of number of all doctorate recipients, with a total of 2,540 (4.8%) degrees and the University of the Midwest awarding 29% of all doctoral degrees (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). Yet, from
2009 – 2013, the University of the Midwest had only awarded an overall of 131 doctoral degrees to Latina/o students. That would be about 26 degrees per year.

**The University: University of the Midwest.** At the beginning of the study in 2013, the University of the Midwest, had a combined undergraduate, graduate and professional enrollment of 43,398. The graduate level enrolment alone was of 10,080 with an enrollment of 4,589 being women and a total of 403 self-identifying as Latina/o. Almost two-thirds of the student population were out of state (7,112). Out of the participants in the study 2 were in the same department and the rest were in different departments. In the College of Education, specifically in the department there were a total of 22 Latina/os. In the College of Liberal Arts there were a total of 1,121 Latina/os, in the Department of History there were nine Latina/os and there was a total of nine Latina/os in the Department of Psychology. The Department of Kinesiology had zero Latina/o students, the Department of Community Health had 3 Latina/o students. At the end of the study one of the participants that began in the Community Health program transferred to Kinesiology (data pulled from university public data, 2015).

In the fall of 2014, the total enrollment was of 46,603, with 10,037 being just graduate students. The number of women dropped to 4,529, but still about 1,000 less than men. The total of self identified Latina/o students grew to 431. The same goes for out of state enrollment 7,196. The university data does not indicate gender by race/ethnicity, thus it is difficult to determine if there are more Latina women enrolled in the various graduate programs, nevertheless there is a higher male student enrollment in graduate education. By College and Department, there were a total of 21 Latina/o students enrolled in the department of education. One of the participants started the MA/PhD program in summer of 2014, with the participation in a Summer Pre-Doctoral program. In the Department of History, the number grew to 11 Latina/o students. The
By fall of 2015, the Department of Education had a total of 16 Latina/o students enrolled, one of the participants of the study defended and filed her dissertation at the end of the summer of 2015. The other participant chose to not continue on the MA/PhD track and just wrap up the work to earn a master’s degree. Interestingly, of the total 1,195 students enrolled in the college of education, 247 are from out of state. The PhD in Curriculum and Instruction and the Educational Leadership/Policy programs have the highest out of state students enrolled in their programs. These two programs are also home to the highest number of enrolled Latina/o PhD students. The Department of Psychology grew again with a total of nine Latina/o students. The department of History kept growing with a total of 13 Latina/o students enrolled. Finally, the Department of Kinesiology doubled to a total of two Latina/o students enrolled.

**Las Mujeres: Sor Juana, Gloria, Emma, Cherríe and Mari Felix**

**Sor Juana.**

Sor Juana was the first mujer I met with for the study. We met a local coffee shop on campus. She looked young. She was about my height, 5’3”, petite, fair skinned, straight black medium length hair, and if I didn’t ask, would have assumed she was half Asian. Sor Juana, was the second youngest participant in the study. She was also the only one that went straight into the PhD after college. She was born in Guanajuato, Mexico (the only one of the participants not born in the U.S.). She is the youngest of seven, four boys and 2 other girls. Her father has no formal education and her mother has a 4th education from Mexico. Both of her parents come from large families and they were the eldest siblings, as such they had to help support their families. Of all
of her family members she is only one that went through her entire schooling in an English only setting. *Papelitos guardados:* The only ESL (English as a Second Language) classes or aides were in middle school, she started in elementary school and so was thrown in an English only environment. As someone who was in a pull out program, where the ESL instructional assistant would take me out of my English only class to teach me English, I can assure you that neither program served a good purpose. However, both, Sor Juana and myself, had to learn English because it was a matter of survival. Yet, Sor Juana found this to be a bit easier for her since she learned English quickly, though she has continued to work outside of the classroom to preserve her Spanish. Keeping the language, for both of us, has been somewhat easier because we both, have been translating documents and been translators in public settings. Sor Juana was also the one that went the farthest in educational attainment,

The oldest in my family, one of my sisters. I don't know how far along she got in school in Mexico. She pretty much was a second mom. Always helping raise all the children after her. For my brothers, I think my two oldest had an opportunity to go school here once they started working. Coming over here with my dad. But neither one of them really had the desire to go to school. They would just be working. Then the two youngest of the guys. One of them graduated from high school when we were living in Green Bay. The other one dropped out right a few months before he graduated from high school. Then my second oldest sister, the one that's closest in age, she graduated from high school. Now she is going back to get associates degree like at a technical college in Green Bay. The three youngest, we were the only ones who graduated from high school. I was the only one that actually went farther.
As such, a college student or college graduate for that matter as role models were limited. Sor Juana’s cousin, a bit older than her, was was the first one to leave home, short lived, but still left home. Sor Juana wanted to be just like her, to leave and explore. It wasn’t like her parents were opposed to Sor Juana getting a college education, but they did not think that she needed to leave to get that education. Sor Juana recalls how disappointed her mother was when her brother dropped out of high school, especially since he was at the finish line. In part, that is a reason why she focused on her academics. Her parents were [and continue to be] supportive of her education, they would take her and pick her up for all the club and organization events that she was part of, including tennis. It was not just her parents, but her older siblings would also take turns taking her places and picking her up. For Sor Juana, school was a place where she could excel. School served the purpose of keeping her occupied and out of the way. Her academic excellence allowed her to be able to have freedom that her older sister did not get. Adding, “they gave me a lot more freedom compared to my other siblings. Well, compared to my sister. I always thought that was because I proved to them that I'm getting my work done and I'm still doing really well in school. That's why they are trusting me and letting me do all this.” However, this freedom was limited limited to academics/schooling only, she was never allowed to do sleepovers or other social activities of that sort. As well, as going away to college.

While in high school, her involvement grew. She was in college preparatory classes and she found herself moving away from the classmates she had in her early schooling. It was not that they were not around anymore, but instead she was being tracked into college going classes. This was necessary, since she was working towards the next step - college. College became a possibility because of her cousin who went off to college, as well as being in college prep courses. She had a counselor that would guide her in classes to take and would often ask “what
college are you applying to?” Her senior year in high school, she had her very first Latino teacher, a Latino male who was also pursuing a master’s degree. "The only non-white teacher I had was my AP Stats, he's Latino.... I had AP stats with him my senior year. He was one of the ones who would be talking about his college experience. He did something at [University of Wisconsin]. So when I knew that's where I was going, he was one of the few people that I connected on a college experience from being brown." She then realized that more schooling was possible. But first, she had to be allowed to go off to college.

"Yeah it took a little bit of convincing. I literally had to break down in tears just to go on a campus visit with my friend and her mom…I had to break down in tears to get my dad to let me go on an overnight trip to visit the campus.” It was more difficult than she thought, especially since her cousin had moved back and was finishing her degree at the nearby university. Sor Juana added, “I didn’t want to stay at home and then I’m like, I did not bust my butt off to just stay. It's a good school, but I wanted to go. One, I wanted to get away because regardless of the freedom that I got compared to my other siblings, it was just not at all compared to my friends." She convinced them by hitting their ego, at least her father’s by sharing, “'it's the best school in the state,' I think that hit their pride and they were like, OK, we'll let you go then." The decision was difficult but in the long run they knew that going away to college would pay off. Sor Juana adds, "they realized that if I stayed I wouldn’t be in grad school or wouldn’t have figured out what I wanted to do with my life." Like most parents, once they accept that college is a good investment they assume that a college degree means making good money because they will be in a good paying career, a teacher, doctor, lawyer, etc. Yet for Sor Juana that was just one of the benefits, she wished her parents could see and understand the personal and self-growth benefits.
Support in college was very limited, academically. Nevertheless, her parents were always present in one way or another. As a family, they helped her move in, and also led the caravan to the university. A friend of Sor Juana’s from the neighborhood would be her roommate the first year in college. Her family helped her get set up, had lunch with her and headed back home to Green Bay. This was not the last time they would visit, her father along with another sibling would come and visit often just for lunch or to get food at the grocery store with her. Her father could not ever go alone to visit her, since he did not know how to read, he needed someone to guide him.

Her first year as a college student proved to be not what she had expected. She was not part of any outreach or retention program. Because she was in predominately white classes she felt she did not need any additional support. It was in the dorms, where she was one of two Latinos and one of a total of five people of color on her floor that made her realize that she was in foreign territory, as well as getting on academic probation. Unfortunately, she found herself unprepared and easily disengaged from her first major prerequisites - business. “I tricked myself into thinking that I had a handle on it. That I knew what I was doing. I really didn’t. I was the top student in high school. Then I realized it’s not as easy as it used to be. Then I was doing pre-business. Then I ended up hating all the classes. I stopped caring second semester. I got an F in Calc.” She did not have a support system in place. Being on academic probation and having little guidance also had a financial cost, her sophomore year, she had to take out the largest amount of loans of all four years because her GPA dropped dramatically. Most of the scholarships for her first year were one-time only scholarships, then the low grades led to not being able to apply for new ones. She also had a difficult time asking for help and was trying to navigate this new space all own her own, trying to find herself, especially because she “was smart”. Papelitos
guardados: Until this day, her parents have no idea of the many mistakes she made her first year, being on academic probation, almost failing out, and the loans that she had to take to stay afloat her second year. Changing majors was the last thing they really knew or understood.

Getting to know other students of color, particularly Latinos helped. She learned that there were programs for first generation students that helped become familiar with the university and of the resources available to them. Though she missed out on them, she also learned of the Multicultural Reception (MCOR), that she attended later on. She missed out on a lot of these resources because she never felt like she needed the help, she was “in a very, very white part, all of it. The dorms that I was staying in was just very removed from the hub of activity.” It was not until one of her Latino friends found a group of Latinos when he got involved with soccer and that led to meeting other students involved with Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A), led her to realize there were other organizations such as Latino based greek organizations. This also led to being involved and connected to other Latinos on the campus. This involvement, also led to developing a support system and getting some form of guidance. This is also led to taking classes outside of the pre-business prerequisites and to the first ever Chicano studies class. “I’m like, okay, I’m going to change my focus. I’m going to take classes that actually interest me, not classes that I need to take, at least not for a business. Then the sophomore year I took, my first semester back I took a history class, a policy class and Chicana/Chicano Studies, Latino Studies intro seminar”. Meeting students from M.E.Ch.A opened the door to very different experiences and opportunities that were not afforded to her with her predominately white friends, those in her dorm particularly. “It wasn’t until I got into M.E.Ch.A that I realized that there was a CLS program. They were like, ‘You should go and take the classes there.’ They would tell me about some professors in the political science department
or the history department that there’s a lot of us who were sociology, policy, history, Latin American and Caribbean studies, one or two engineers, school of education. We all did the same things. They would tell me, “This is a good professor. You’ll like her. You’ll like him. Take this class.” Then towards the end I always had at least one or two MEChistAs in my classes. Classes, outside of the Chicano/Latino courses, were very white. Taking a history of American capitalism course, from the business department, was the most horrific experience. In the lecture class it was noticeable, how white the class was, however in the discussion section she was the only woman, person of color and the only Mexican. She felt bad for the TA of the course. She later on worked with this TA in the library archives. She learned of his frustrations in teaching the class.

She became a History major because she was fortunate enough to take her first history course be taught by a Chicana professor, Dr. CGC, who helped during one of the many reshaping and restructurings of the Chicano/Latino Studies Department. She also taught History of the American Labor class that led to Sor Juana’s interest in both History but more specifically on the history of Latina/os in Green Bay. She was “really excited because it was the first time [she] had a woman as a professor… She was a Chicana”. She was excited of the idea that she too could become a historian, because it was the first time she had a woman professor. In her junior year she took another history course with another Latina faculty member, Professor FM. That made two Latina faculty members in the History department. Both of these faculty played a huge role on her academics. She felt connected to these women.

Through M.E.Ch.A she learned about the McNair scholars program at her campus. She then had both professor CGC and FM as her faculty advisors. Needless to say, they provided her with a great deal of support and guidance especially in the graduate school application process. She gives them full credit for the getting accepted into graduate school. They were not just her
professors and mentors, but they both became her motivation. She aspired to be like them. She graduated as a double major—History and Political Science with a Chican@/Latin@ Studies Certificate and a Gender and Woman Study Certificate.

Graduation was a very emotional time for Sor Juana. She was extremely proud to be graduating but more importantly to have her family there to share that moment. While graduating college was a huge milestone, it also led to questions of what she could do with a history degree from her parents and other members of her family. Sor Juana found it rewarding because she could pursue graduate school and do research on an area of interest that was very close to her, and so highlighting the history of Latinos, Mexicanos, from her community. That to her meant a lot more than making a lot of money. However, to her family that did not seem like an economically stable future.

Our last interview was towards the middle of the fall semester. However, this particular semester was not like the others. Over the summer at the university a student outrage erupted with the dismissal of a faculty for their political views. A faculty, of color, had their contract revoked by the university leading to a number of protests by the students, letters of support for the faculty by various departments on the campus, and eventually renown scholars opted to boycott and not participate in invited talks at the university. In the midst of all of this was Sor Juana. She shared that she was not even aware of the date or month with so much going on on-campus due to this issue. As a doctoral student aspiring to become a faculty, a faculty of color at that, this occurrence was a matter of concern for her.

It made things a little, a little scary because you think like you have this. You’re in the academy, you think you’re protected to some extent with like the work you wanna do. Especially if it’s work that not everybody agrees with or like something that makes the
majority uncomfortable. You think you can go into the classroom and like really push people to think in new ways and get them to see different perspectives and like I think that’s like that’s what like I wanna do. I wanna go into the classroom and make sure that people learn something new that they are kind of pushed out of their comfort zone but are still able to engage in conversation. And it’s scary to see that, that’s not a guarantee, that you still have to like play by the game and kind of tip toe around the lines because of like crazy administration and then just like seeing how this whole discourse of civility kind of exploded across a country with different universities. And this is not just it doesn’t happen just like on a single case.

Feeling unsafe even after earning the degree, becoming a well known scholar, and tenured is real and something that she would not have thought about happening, however it was, it was happening at her campus to a faculty of color. Knowing that nothing is guaranteed, even with a contract being signed, is frightening, especially for female faculty of color who already experience double standards because of their gender. There is no safety she adds, “and so it just makes it, it makes it a little scarier and a little harder, because I guess… to some extent you think you’re protected being an academic and like you have the freedom to you know, do your work and challenge people and like that’s what you’re supposed to be doing, like getting people to see different things but you’re still gonna get that pushback.” Thankfully, her department was leading the way on support for this faculty, voted no confidence on the leadership of the university, and as such supported the graduate students involved in this movement as well. They encouraged their involvement and organizing. To her, this had an impact since she has been used to fighting for the “little” people or for better wording those that are constantly marginalized and unjustly judged.
Nevertheless, the involvement outside of classroom matters because it can take a toll on students. Sharing that finding a balance between academics and activism is much needed, yet for people of color in academia that balance is never really there. There is a constant need to be both and can’t give either one or dedicate less time to one or the other, especially when it is part of your academics and scholarship. She was now a second year in her program. She was still taking classes. Though she had not missed much academically, the organizing work had not slowed her progress in the doctoral journey but it was overwhelming.

Having to create a balance while needed is very limited, she was managing but that did not mean that this was the doctoral experience she was looking for or signed up for. She pointed out that a lot of the labor, in terms of organizing or recruiting or other non-academic activity, was being done by students on color. “Student work and people that serve on different committees in the department, it’s always the students of color. That are doing all this extra labor and all this extra work.” Adding, “I think this is like part of what the whole, we have to look forward to in academia like even as professors we’re still gonna have to do the extra labor, the extra mentoring and still get our stuff done without having to, oh but I don’t have, I need more time. I don’t know, it’s sucky to think about it that way but, just seeing like the professors in the department. Like professors of color and how they do the extra mentoring, they take on students of color that aren’t necessarily doing work that they’re doing but yet they’re mentoring them. And they don’t get, it’s not part of their, like tenure process but yet they’re still doing it”.

As a graduate student she has gotten to see what this additional work entails, since she has been involved heavily on the organizing and rallies of the faculty of color dispute, but also with her department recruiting and being part of diversity committees and so on. Her department has gained some diversity in the graduate student body however they have not been able to
increase the number of African American students. As well as retention. Funding wise, she shared that in her class there were only four students that were awarded a graduate fellowship, she was one of them. The other person of color was a woman that was half Japanese. Yet, the majority of students in her department racially/ethnically are still white but there is more of a gender balance. The racial/ethnic breakdown in the department has to do with who is willing to do the work, the increase of students of color has been due to the work current students of color have put in, including her. This work is just one part of the labor (work load) that is placed on students of color. It is not just about recruiting, but also about the research that is being conducted – scholarship. From the summer scandal, it became clear where the lines were drawn in terms of who (students and faculty) supported in regards to questions or matters on race/ethnicity and gender, specially in the work students of color were conducting within their graduate research.

Socially, these drawn lines, had an impact. Papelitos guardados: Some graduate students from outside of her department commented on how diverse her department was and how they seem to work together well and so on, however Sor Juana shared that most students of color stick together all the time because they need each other, they support each other. Even outside of the department, most students of color go to one particular bar while the other students opt to go to another bar. This has led toward working for the last 2 years to build a strong support system on and off campus. “I have a good community and a good support system but also I think it’s because I’ve never seen, I’ve never had this opportunity to be with like even if it’s just not even a dozen people of color but like knowing that we’re all here that we’re all somehow, had similar stories or similar struggles or similar you know academic trajectories or we actually understand like what it means to be here and like what it took for us to be here”.

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For Sor Juana that support has come more at this level than before, she shared that the diversity in her department is the most she has seen, “I mean in comparison to my undergrad department it’s definitely one of the more diverse.” She also added that the department has been workings towards diversifying the department, “last year, they were looking to hire a colonial Latin Americanism and they had a very narrow search, like we want a woman of color, who does this?” So their searches are becoming more specific and intentional. Their goal – more women of color. She stays hopeful that the department will reach its goal of hiring more women and other faculty of color, especially as current faculty will be up for tenure soon. She has hope for her department. However, just like in undergraduate she continues to be guided and mentored by one of the few Latino tenured faculty in the department and she finds that comforting.

Her current status in the doctoral program is as a second year. By the end of the academic year, she will have finished all required courses for her field of study, that is three different field of study. That is a major field and two minor fields. The major field requires 5-6 courses and the minor fields require two courses per field, a total of four courses. She will also be adding a Latin@ Studies minor. The next step, or something she will be doing while completing the course work is file for her PhD portfolio. That is a formality to let the department know that she has completed all coursework – include some sample papers, a short essay on her progress and that signals she can move forward to the prelim. She will take three prelims one for each of her fields. Prelims are intense, for each prelim she has a minimum of two examiners per prelim, that can be up to 6 examiners. She must complete each prelim in one day. To prepare for each prelim, she has a list of books that she must include in her exams, crucial to the field. For example, for “the notoriously long Latin American list which is like over 200 books and that’s because the Latin America field is not broken up into colonial and modern, so I have that whole range of
history to cover in one field.” The student can work with the examiner and petition to cut some books out. “You have to go physically pick up your exam, then you go take your prelim wherever you want and you have until 4:30 pm to write three essays out of like 5 or 6 questions that are given to you on the exam. So, you write for about 7 hours straight and then you email in your exam.” A stressful part of the doctoral journey. For that reason, the prelims are spread out in two semesters. She will take one in the fall and the other two in early spring. In between the last semester of coursework and before beginning prelims, that summer students are also expected to conduct pre-dissertation research, that is “visiting different archives that [students] think [they’ll] be working with during [their] research year.” The next step is that very shortly after taking the last prelim, the student is “expected to defend [the] dissertation proposal.” All of these while still fulfilling other duties that can be teaching or conducting research or other duties that are part of the students’ assistantships. In her department, however, she is able to take classes that will support her next steps. In the fall that she will be studying for her prelim, she will also be taking a dissertation proposal class/workshop that counts towards her coursework. Furthermore, she fulfills credit hours by registering for independent study or reading courses, thus she is considered full status but time to study for prelims is embedded in the program. She will also be a TA in the fall and spring semester, something that she will be adjusting to. Sor Juana’s detail of the doctoral journey has been the clearest and with most support, from her peers, faculty and the overall department. It is structured and straightforward. Sor Juana is also ahead in the process because of the funding she has received. “Technically, because I have been able to be on this fellowship and been funded for two whole years, so I’ve been able to take courses in the summer, getting requirements out of the way.” She came in with a bachelor’s degree, and now she is ahead of the bachelor track, but right on the track with someone who
came in with their masters. “I wouldn’t have had these extra courses during this summer [and] wouldn’t be taking prelims without the funding. Probably I wouldn’t be taking them all until the spring semester”.

Over the summer, she hopes to be able to ground her research, but more importantly that this research is on what she originally wanted to work on, “looking at labor and how labor has played a big role in Mexican immigration into the Midwest,” most specifically her question wants to explore how Mexican immigrants and other Latina/os end up in Green Bay in the late 20th century when there were places such as Chicago and Milwaukee so close by that already had established communities. Writing in the narratives and experiences of these communities that have too often been erased and are then perceived as foreigners.

**Gloria.**

Gloria was the second participant I met with. We met at a café near the college of education building, very suiting. I had met Gloria before, when I started my program I had seen her around. She seemed quiet and reserved. We had limited interaction. At the time we met, Gloria had come back into town, she had left the university to conduct fieldwork, but also to get away. She did not look the same way she did when I first met her a few years back. She was thin, had short black hair, and seemed happy/confident. Yet, at the same time she was still quiet and reserved. Though she still held a strong presence.

Gloria was born in Wisconsin. By the time she graduated high school she had attended four different schools. She started her schooling in the early 1980s. She started her schooling in public school, kindergarten, and then was sent to catholic school for three years, it “was a big deal, because I was on a waiting list to go to a school ... The school was in a church two blocks from my house and there was a waiting list, couldn't get in. Then they sent ... it wasn't super far,
but there was no transportation so my parents had to drive me. I think they found, not annoying, but it was out of their way. Then it got too expensive… It was $500 a semester. That's how much it cost.” Going to Catholic school was pushed by her grandfather, he was “a staunch Catholic.” For Gloria, however, it didn’t really matter if she went to public, catholic or any other form of school as long as she went to school. Though she did find a difference at the schools, “When I went to a public school it was a completely different environment. The Catholic school I was, I think, the only brown person, literally only brown person. I don't even think there were any black people there, ever.”

At the public school “it was all kids of color. It was the Mexicans and the blacks, that's it. There were always the 4 white kids in every class because it was a neighborhood school. I wasn't the token, but then I became somewhat of a token because the level of schooling was very different.” When she transferred to public school, she was forced to fight for herself.

When I transferred to 4th grade the kids made fun of me. The first months I was there were really tough because they called me a goody goody because I had really, really nice penmanship and I knew things. That's how I was trained in Catholic school. You respond, you sit. I very much played the role of the gendered young girl. You try to know the answers, you want to be right, you want to please your parents. I was a young perfectionist in the making and it wasn't like that in a public school. It was cool to know, but you didn't always want to be the person that knew. I had to endure some of that until finally I couldn't just brush it off anymore and I had to get into a fight with this kid. After that incident no other kid ever messed with her, particularly the boys. That was exactly what she wanted, to be left alone so that she could learn.

Being picked on by other kids for being smart was not the only problem she faced. As a
child she was “considered a tomboy”. Her parents were like, “Well she'll grow out of it.” Her
dad thought that was a way for her to protect herself against boys because they were the primary
people that she should be afraid of. “I was never really afraid of anything. I was really afraid of
my parents because they would take away my autonomy, which was why I liked school because
school equal autonomy.” She had limits and school opened opportunities that challenged the
gender roles.

[School] was the only place, as a girl, I could go besides the library and not have
somebody constantly monitoring me. Sure there was monitoring, as a child, but it felt
more free. It felt like ‘Okay, I can answer a question. I can ask a question. I'm talking to
people,’ whatever we're talking about, things like that. It felt I could be [her]self and not
always be on edge. I felt very confined in my house, in my apartment. It was always you
got to do this and this. You got to do this, this and this. It was cool. You were on a
schedule.

For Gloria, school offered the opportunity to make her own choices, to be independent, to rely on
herself and her intellect. Being a good student and that doing well in school was important to her
parents. “They were always like, “If whatever you're doing outside of learning, school, gets in
the way of that ... if you don't get straight A's we’re going to take something away.”” By doing
well in school she was able to do other things like sports and music, not necessarily school sports
but at least play at school. “Every day I played basketball, every day, or I’d go to the library.
That was what I did.” However, some activities were limited. She could play basketball in her
neighborhood and she had to be the best in order to actually be able to play with the boys.

She enjoyed playing because she was really good at it. There was a point in her life that
even the school basketball coach reached out to her parents to have her be on the school team, they did not allow her to play in the team. To them, participating in a school sport meant that she would be out and about being wild, getting busy with boys. She was allowed to be part of band, school music program. School involvement was also limited to fitting it into her responsibilities. As the eldest of two, she was responsible for her sibling, especially, since both her parents worked 8 to 5 jobs and every hour mattered, her step father was a mechanic and her mother always held a secretary job at an office.

Gloria’s teachers understood and were supportive. It was okay for her to bring her brother along. This also kept him from getting involved or at least bullied by gangs. Prior to Gloria’s mom remarrying, they lived in sort of the housing projects, and her mother worked in a Catholic nursing home and that is where Gloria first went to school and learned to and appreciate reading, “The nuns would read… It wasn’t always easy, but once I got the fundamental parts that really helped. The fundamentals of reading.” Her early schooling experiences were positive. It was something she liked. She did not get much help at home, but she was encouraged in some ways. She was always told to get good grades, that it was the way to succeed. She had to well, had to get A’s, that meant that she was doing well. Doing well, meant that she had the opportunity to do other things, like being in music, even if she had to figure out a way to make it work with taking care of her brother and getting there.

Her K through 8th grade was a positive experience, she enjoyed learning and was in a diverse school setting. In high school she changed schools because her parents found out that her brother was not reading at grade level, he was in 4th grade and did not know how to read. They felt that it was the schools fault and so they moved to another area where they could send her brother to a better school. That also meant that she would have to transfer schools. She attended
a high school that was predominately white. Her brother “went to a private school that cost quite a bit of money and then I went to a suburban school. Then I went from all black and Latino to all white, again, in high school.” She stood out. It was just another opportunity to point out that she was different,

I remember the first day of class. I took gym class, of course, before 5th period…We were changing and this girl came over, and again I don't know any … I know zero people, zero okay. She's like, "Hey, can I ask you something?" I was like, "Sure, my name's Gloria, by the way." She's like, "Are you black?" I was like, "What?" She's like, "Well, some of the girls want to know if you're black or if you're Puerto Rican or what you are because we've never seen anyone your color." I was like, "No, I'm actually Mexican." They were like, "Really?" I was like, "Yeah." Then, of course, I was like, "Some people do think I'm Puerto Rican because I'm tall and there's a stereotype that all Mexican women are short." I was like, "No, I'm Mexican." I don't know my dad's Mexican and my mom is Polish. They're like, "Oh okay, we just wanted to know." That was it. I was just like … “Okay, welcome to the neighborhood.”

She expressed that this was common at family gathering, the Othered. At her grandfathers’ funeral, people “were like, “Who is that girl? Why is she here? Who is that?” It was “Big brown girl over there, who are you?” I never looked like anyone. My brother is my mother’s and my step father's son. We have the same mother, but we have different fathers. I look like my father. He looks like his father.” As such, Othering or not fitting didn’t just happen at school but it also happened in her home. This made her want to be out of that particular space. As soon as she had an understanding of what it meant to be an adult, in her childhood eyes, she worked towards that. That meant reading the newspaper, drinking coffee, and paying her bills, she could be an adult.
To be an adult meant that she could be free, take care of herself. While her home life was not horrible, it was enough to want to leave.

In addition to being a girl, she was poor, her family was working class. She had to save up for anything that she wanted outside of the things provided, one pair of school shoes, one pair of gym shoes, and three pairs of jeans for the year. She saved the money she earned at the McDonalds so to buy a car for herself. She began to work at 15, legally, but she been doing babysitting jobs prior. Though she had a car she did not drive to school, because she had to pay for parking at school, so she would take the bus instead. Having or not having money played a big role in going to college.

Going to college was not pushed on her necessarily, she did have support from some aunts and cousins, and her parents again would tell her she could go but she had to figure out how to pay for it. “Education and support. You need to go to school. School is always number one. You should be good at school. You have potential, you are smart. You need to do well, that’s your job, that’s number one, will come before anything.” She was smart but did not do well in the college exams, ACT/SAT. She also was not able to retake the exams or do both because she could not afford to pay for the tests. She was aware that there were colleges. She learned about college through the school college fair and guidance counselors. Her mother had a high school diploma, her step father dropped out before going to war in Vietnam and when he returned he got his GED, her biological father she does not know and so is not sure if he even had any schooling. Aunts and uncles, her parents’ siblings, encouraged her to think about college, but no one really explained the process of the application.

So, she based going to college on affordability “…they said ‘We don’t have no money. We’re not going to pay for it or you’re going to pay for it?’ But I was going to find a way. I
would do it, figure it out. If not, I would join the army.” She felt she had options, she could also join the army. Gloria is the only participant whose parents were born in the U.S, raised in the U.S., with a formal K – 12th education, and a veteran parent.

Going to college was based on affordability as well as on admission. She recalls that by 8th grade she knew that marriage was not part of her path and so, "So I was like, "Okay, what do I have to do to go to college?" One thing she understood and thought about college was that she had to have money. As such, she began saving money very early on. Even when she knew that there were scholarships, she could not wrap the idea of asking for money when she could make money by working.

When it came to apply to college it was not the math class that led to her doubting herself, but instead it was her guidance counselor that hesitantly agreed to write a letter of recommendation. By then, she had made a decision to apply to only one college and if she was not accepted then she would join the military. At the end of the day, her goal was to leave her hometown, it did not matter if it was via college or military. She was not just limited because of test scores and an un-confident counselor, but also by financial aid. Her parents gave her a very hard time with the FAFSA and so she wasn’t able to apply for financial aid. She solely relied on scholarships and savings. She was admitted to Wisconsin State, she shared, I got into Wisconsin State, which is a small state school in Wisconsin. It’s close to the border of Illinois, great place for me, small. Very much, I never had a TA. I didn’t even know what a TA was until I came here, to work here. I was like, “What does that mean? …My largest class was maybe 60 people. That was my intro math class that I passed for this. That was a struggle. That stuff, but I loved it.

Her father and brother helped her move and move into her dorm.
The transition to college life was not that difficult for Gloria. The university was racially and ethnically diverse and a majority of students came from working class backgrounds. Staff and faculty were also diverse, the university bordered another state and so there were students from out of state as well. The white students that attended the university were mostly from rural areas or from poor communities and so they too were of low income status. She enjoyed her freedom, hanging out and so on, she would make sure that she was in class every morning or whenever she had class, especially since she was paying for college out of pocket. The summer after her freshmen year she began working at the university, she held positions as a research assistant for the library and worked at the Women’s Center, she eventually became a resident advisor and got her housing covered, she took less loans out this way. Working at the library opened a new world and opportunities, sharing,

learning a lot about the library system because at that time, between 1997 and 2001, the library system shifted from paper to online. They got rid of the card catalogs so it helped me learn how to use online databases by working at the library because people would always ask you questions. I had to learn how to use the online databases just as much as people still did the card catalog stuff.

She really enjoyed having the opportunity to both work and have a space to do her own homework. As a residential advisor, aside from having free housing, she was able to stay almost year round and thus she did not have to go back home as often. Visits from her family were not as frequent. Her stepfather and brother would come to visit but very rarely. College was really something special for Gloria. She was reading and learning, two things that made her happy. The few times that she tried to share about new insights of what she had learned, she felt that they pushed her away, showed no interest, and she did not want to play that game.
Before going to college and even in college Gloria was not really reached out to to be part of programs for first generation or underrepresented group. It seemed that this program did not exist at her campus or was not aggressively being recruited. Most likely this was due to the fact that her name did not match what she looked like. There were many incidents where “People never thought on paper that I was Latina but they would see me and be like, "Why don't you come to so-and-so's group? Why don't you do this?" and “it was almost like I had this double-life.” Even to this day, people ask her partner, who is fair-skinned and also has this ambiguous look if she is the Polish one and if Gloria is the Mexican.

Overall because she attended a diverse college she did not have extreme detrimental experiences, she shared,

I had problems, I messed up, but I grew so much. I made so many mistakes that I grew so much. I met some amazing people that I still run into, that I still talk to. I felt really good about that. It was a really good place for me, to cultivate my leadership skills, my confidence. If I could do it again I would go back and do it again.

Pursuing graduate school was connected to her experiences when choosing major/discipline as an undergraduate. She started college as an English major because she wanted to be a teacher, and soon realized there was little pay in that area. She tried Psychology. Taking a course and soon realizing it might not be the right fit, “I took one class and I was like, ‘This is some bullshit.’ I was like, "This is all about some old white, straight dudes that are trying to tell me about psychoanalysis." I was like, "I don't believe in that, I can't do that." She took a sociology course and found that this was something that she could do. She also minored in Spanish. Gloria loved college, she loved learning, she had been ready for this since she was 12 years old. She was ready for the freedom; she was ready to be on her own.
Gloria was the only participant that was in the final stages of the doctorate. She shared that she was slowly disconnecting from social media and was even thinking about giving up her phone. She had slowly connected with people using old forms such as snail mail and mailing cards. It was a different way of connecting for her. Ultimately though, her disconnect to a technology driven world was so that she could work on her dissertation. She would defend her dissertation at the beginning of the summer after what she exclaimed, “You know it’s been 8 years. 8 years is a really long time!” Before pursuing the doctorate, Gloria had earned her master’s degree at a small campus in Illinois.

The last interview began with the end and moved towards the beginning of her journey, in some ways. She began by sharing that the reasons why she decided to pursue the doctorate was very different than why she is now finishing it. When she started thinking about it, she was single and had no plans of how this decision would impact her family or a partner, it was a selfish decision. She had learned early on, from band and music classes and even working at McDonald’s that she naturally navigated towards teaching, she was good at it. However, in college she realized that it was teaching adults that was something that she was most interested in. Therefore, she made the decision to pursue the doctorate, an uneasy task. Finishing the doctorate was for whole different reason. Though she saw herself as a teacher, now she actually could see herself as a writer and a thinker, a producer of new knowledge. She saw the research she was conducting as valuable, she had crafted a beautiful project of very necessary work that needed to be done,

I’m finishing because I think the work matters. I think the way that I’ve done my project matters. And the way that I’ll talk about the work continue to talk about the work in the
public matters...Really seeing myself as a writer and a thinker that took a really long
time.
She did not quite know why she was pursuing a PhD in the first place, but she wanted to be
challenged, but for her it also meant a possibly pay upgrade.

She shared that what led to her dissertation study, a project that changed dramatically
from beginning to end. She had reached year five in the program, exams were done, coursework
was done, and now she wanted to move closer to her partner, she had been in a long distance
relationship a while now. She decided that she would “do a discursive project” that way she
wouldn’t need to get IRB, adding “books and ideas can be my subjects and I would be able to
finish and I’d be fine.” By this time in the process of the doctorate, she was exhausted, simply
exhausted. By the end of her fifth year, she was a teaching assistant in a very large lecture class,
taking 14 credits, and had worked on her exams, “gained 100 pounds, was just so mentally
fatigued and physically fatigued.” Conducting a discursive project would alleviate a lot of that
stress because there would be less hurdles. Then she came across some readings while trying to
finalize the topic of her project and began to notice a pattern of very depressing findings about
“LGBT dying or committing suicide or just sort of this queer death.” She wanted to learn more,
skimming through the bibliography she came across a school that was near where she had grown
up, a school that welcomed LGTBQ youth. Therefore, her project focused on those students.
That meant taking all the steps she wanted to avoid. She began the process of connecting with
the school, IRB at the university and from the school, and eventually after almost a year she was
able to begin her research. Yet, she found out that what she had in mind was not at all the case.
She had to re-evaluate her original plan and concluded that she needed to shift the focus of her
project, so instead it became “to try and understand the functionality of the school. It wasn’t so
much about the kids as it was about how the school operated in their life.” She was in the school for almost five months. Her project led to many emotions in particular of anger because her study would not necessarily change the lives of the youth she was spending her time with or their situation. She felt very conflicted in the process because she didn’t want to come into this space and take information and not give back. Collecting the data drained her emotionally, she stopped writing. For almost six months she did not write. Adding that she was away, felt lost and “couldn’t really talk to anybody about it… I felt I had to change advisors because my advisor was just, she was just absent, for lack of a better word. She was not around and not in a physical sense cause I was in the west suburbs of Chicago [collecting data] and she was here in Champaign, but, the entire time I did my research like she never called me, she never emailed me, I was just out there.”

Reaching that moment to write her dissertation and having very limited guidance was overwhelming, like walking blindly. She had no idea of what she was doing. She was already doing things unorderly. She had collected data before defending her prelim, the proposal of her study, this was due to time. After she got the green light from the school principal she had to act quickly in getting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that met only a few times a year and so in order to get approved to move forward she skipped, momentarily, the prelim. Passing the prelim meant moving on to candidacy, another check off the list and a step closer to the doctorate. It was not until she was encouraged by a friend to submit a proposal for a conference on campus that she gained some confidence in her work, but more importantly she gained support from a faculty. By this time in the process, she “just [wanted to] feel like I’m not drowning. I think getting a PhD, that’s what it feels like, like you’re drowning. Or you’re treading water. And you never know what’s gonna happen.” At this time, Gloria was a
conference away from dropping out of the PhD. She wanted feedback and some guidance on her research and on the process itself.

The guidance and support came from the most unexpected faculty, who ended up chairing her dissertation research project. In a matter of minutes her whole life changed. This faculty validated her work, letting her know that her work mattered and needed to be done, but also provided Gloria with real and structured guidance. The new advisor would be going on a trip to the East Coast but that they would skype and get squared away with next steps, a plan to finish the dissertation in a timely manner. Within a month or so, they skyped, they developed a plan, Gloria got a date to defend her prelim, by the fall semester she was a Ph.D. candidate. Unfortunately for Gloria, she had no peers attend her prelim defense. That particular act transformed the process for her once again. She focused her energy on finishing her dissertation her way on her own terms, “and so I think it was interesting because in that moment I made that decision that I was gonna do this for me.” She then formed a strong committee, with all women of color. Due to her work, most committee members were from outside her department. At one point, after attending a different conference that focused on Chicana women, Gloria met a Chicana faculty whose work was speaking to her own, she wasn’t prepared to have her on her committee but it felt right and this new work, new lens, belonged in the conversation. Gloria is writing diligently to get to that final defense.

The journey to the PhD for Gloria has not been an easy one. She applied three times before getting admitted. She did not get heavily recruited. She was an employee of the university when she applied. She had taken a class and then she applied. It was not until the third time, when she requested letters of recommendation from a well-known faculty in the department as well as a high position Latina administrator that she was finally admitted into the program.
Gloria strongly believes that these letters had a huge impact on her admission. Since she was not recruited and this was her third time, she was not offered full funding, or a fellowship. Gloria admits that University of the Midwest “was not the place for [her], intellectually.” But, she did not feel confident to apply to other doctoral programs and even when she thought about transferring, she still did not feel confident. As a student, she was told that she should not apply for certain fellowships because they were too competitive.

At the time of the last interview, she was teaching three sections of a 100 level course, that had 95 students enrolled, and was working with another faculty as a research assistant. Again, this faculty was not a faculty of color yet she gave Gloria an opportunity. She got to transcribe and code. For Gloria, this allowed her to use her current skills but also develop new skills such as a different style of coding data or how surveys can work in later research. Adding that they didn’t talk a lot but she knew she cared about her work and that she wanted her to graduate. In order for that to happen, a graduate student needed to have financially stability, her supervisor understood that.

The only other place(s) on campus where she felt like a visible person was in the Latina/o Studies Department. The department has made her feel welcomed and that she belonged there, as well given her funding for a couple of years as a teaching assistant and for conference travel. She has taken courses in the department and gets to interact with predominately Latina/o faculty that she feels connect with her work and connect with her as a person. While, she is also a minor in Gender and Women’s Studies, she gives credit to Latina/o Studies for being at University of the Midwest, to the individual professors in the Gender and Women Studies department “but the department of Latina/o Studies, by far, is like leaps and bounds ahead of like
any department that I’ve ever like worked with. Or seen. And without them, I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t be here right now. Talking to you.”

Gloria’s struggle was throughout the Ph.D. process. Papelitos Guardados: She failed her first exam but did not learn of this until she was about to take the second exam. This delayed her process but she did not think about quitting at this point, it just made her question whether she was in the right place. It was the lack of information that made this situation frustrating.

Unlike her prelim, she does not plan on inviting anyone to her doctoral defense. This last part is for her and no one else. She understands,

It’s not supposed to be easy, it’s not supposed to be easy. I’m not asking for easy. Not at all. But there has never been, ever, a moment of I can breathe. It’s gonna be ok. I’m gonna get through this. They have my back. Like never. I’ve never felt like that. I’ve never felt a moment of, wow, this is, this is, this is something else, like I’m a part of something bigger. I’ve never felt like that.

She made it clear that she is not asking for any step to be easy, she knows that this is an intellectual space. However, she would appreciate it if she had been given the support, guidance and mentorship other students, in particular African American students had received. Papelitos Guardados: As a “queer, butch woman” adds,

there’s nobody else in the department that looks like me, that acts like me, that’s trying to get at what I’m trying to get at in the way I’m trying to get at it. I’m not a high femme. Like I’m not out there doing shit that these other girls are, like that’s just not me. I’m not putting my race ahead of my sexuality, or my gender in front of my race. Like, they’re all together at the same time I’m sorry that makes people uncomfortable I’m sorry that’s hard for you, but that’s me. You know? Like I’m gonna talk about things that I’m gonna
talk about, in the way that I need to talk about them. Cause I’m 35 years old. And I’m just, I’m too old to beat around the bush. Like I’m not just gonna do that anymore, Like I just can’t. So I’ve had to learn how to do it without them. I just, I couldn’t be sad about it anymore. Because that was stopping me from progressing. So I take what I need to take and I’m gonna move forward. And I’m probably not gonna give any donations to the department.

She does not believe that she owes anyone anything. She can no longer apologize for not being what the department wants and praises, someone that is not her. As she has shared, she is not the cool kid that walks down the hallway and everyone knows who she is and what her work is about, and she is okay with that. However, she wanted to make clear and to be known that,

I have these scars now, because of your department. I’m not the same person that I was. Because, you, you basically like abandoned me. You left me. You don’t care about people like me, that look like me that are doing research, that’s really complicated and messy and doesn’t, can’t put it on a poster and it doesn’t make you feel good and umm; that it makes them uncomfortable. I would tell them that I am more introverted and leery of people because of this department. (Pause) And that, doesn’t feel good. And I would want them to know, that like I think they think and I think they do, they think they make really good impacts on people’s lives, but I think that there’ve been some lives that have been changed in really difficult ways. Because of the lack of attention and care. Umm not even support, its care. I would be like, you don’t care about people like me. You don’t care about me. Most probably, I bet Dr. Z doesn’t even know my fuckin name. And that’s not OK.
Finally, in Gloria’s words, “the reason again, the reasons why I started are not the reasons why I’m finishing. There’s no romance involved in this at all. It’s not romantic anymore. It’s probably not even sexy anymore. It just. A project. That matters!”

Cherrie.

Cherrie was the fourth participant for my study. A friend of mine forwarded her the call for participants’ email and she reached out to me. All interviews were conducted online via Skype. The first time we met, I was in my home kitchen, Cherrie was in her campus office. It caught my attention how fair skinned she was; I did have to ask what part of Mexico her parents where from. Her parents were from Jalisco. Most Mexicans from Jalisco and Michoacán tend to have large groups of people that are fair skinned, light almost blonde hair, and colored eyes, it has a lot to do with the Spanish colonization. She shared that her nicknames were “La Gringa” (white girl) or “La Guera” (the light skinned one). Cherrie is light/fair skinned, and has long, light dirty blonde color hair. We had a good connection at the first interview and that seemed to make the interview go very smoothly. Cherrie and all her siblings were born in the U.S., Chicago to be exact. Before she was born, both her parents would come and work seasonally. Both of her parents were seasonal workers before she was born. Cherrie is the youngest of three. Her siblings, both older, went to school in Mexico, and she was the only one to go to school in the U.S. Yet, being raised in the Pilsen area meant she went to school in predominately Latino and Spanish speaking schools. She “learned how to read and write in Spanish before [she] learned English.” Cherrie’s older sister is six years older than her and her bother is nine years older than her, they were never in the same school together.
Cherríe was in predominately Spanish speaking classes until the third grade, most of her teachers were Latino, this changed when her family moved neighborhoods. In her new school the majority of the teachers were White, though the student body was still racially diverse. The 4th grade presented her with major challenges, “I was supposed to be in bilingual, like I was supposed to switch into like half English, half Spanish, but I went to a really bad school, so they just didn’t have enough bilingual teacher anymore, they ended up just putting me in a class that was all English.” This meant she had to learn quickly, “but went from being a straight A student in 3rd grade to getting like Cs and Ds in 4th grade because I didn’t know what the hell was going on and was expected to like do everything in English.” Her parents were not really aware of what was happening. While, they were very supportive of their children going to school and getting an education, it was never pushed on them. Her parents believed that children should be doing their best and if they had any problems the teachers would make them aware of it. Cherríe never made a fuss about being in English only classes, so her parents were not aware also they were not that involved because they felt that school would do its hob to educate their children, Cherríe added that her siblings went to a really good school and so her parents thought all the schools were the same. But, because they moved Cherríe did not get to go to the same elementary school as her siblings, and so she missed out on a great opportunity in her early schooling.

When they first moved to the U.S., her father was still doing some migrant work but then moved to work in a factory as well as other odd jobs here and there. Her mother became a day care provider. Though, her parents had been in the U.S. for almost three decades, her mother does not speak English well if at all and her father acts as though he doesn’t speak English either, however because he works outside the home and the neighborhood Cherrie believes he
speaks more than he shares. Her mother works and stays within the neighborhood, that is predominately Latino and Spanish speaking, doesn’t have a need to learn English.

Due to the jobs that her parents had, it was difficult for them to be involved in her schooling. As a day care provider, her mother was busy taking care of other people’s children and did not have the luxury to attend many functions for her daughter. Although sometimes she would bring some the children with her to Cherrie’s activities like school fields trips. Furthermore, while her mother was not able attend all school functions or meetings, Cherrie credits her mother as the first person to spark an interest, curiosity and love for math,

when we were little my mom used to babysit there was a boy who was my same age, my cousin. When we were little, to entertain us, she would play math games, math races between us. That was like five, six years old. We would compete, like who could do addition and subtraction faster, and multiplication. My mom would create like these huge one-hundred problem sets that she would just sit us down with and be like ‘Here!’… We both had like a great competitive nature with each other, with my cousin, so we would just go crazy to try and become better at math to beat the other person. Since then, I just love math.

Her love for math was also nurtured in high school, that was one of the few subjects that she got some support in.

Cherrie’s transition to high school highlighted the gendered opportunities, or lack there of, and also where she gained an awareness on the poor quality education she was receiving. At home, she was charged with doing girl things, like doing things for her brother and father. Her older sister was “very like a feminist who would get really pissed off when they asked her to do these things.” Therefore, Cherrie did things such as clean and even do her brothers bed, he was
nine years older than her. This sexist behavior as she called it, impacted other areas of her life like school. “Going to high school I got into a better high school, into college prep, that I could take like a train and a bus to get there. My parents were like “No way! There’s no way that you’re going.” Pretty much, they didn’t straight out say “because you’re a girl; but it was implied…there was a high school that I could walk to, that was next to my house. It was like one of the shittiest high schools in town, but they did not allow me to go to a better high school because it was too far away.” Cherríe was not allowed to go because it was too far and it would require her to take a train to get there. Her parents did not understand the difference of school quality they just knew it was too far and too much hassle to get there. Cherrie’s parents believed that “school is school. The student makes the school; the school does not make the students.” As such, her parents wanted all of them to get an education and were supportive them having a better life and resources, especially since they themselves were not allowed to go to school, but they didn’t understand why they would need to go to a specific school or college.

Cherríe became aware of the poor quality of her school from friends that attended college prep high schools. As such, she made the best at her school by taking honors and AP classes. “I had friends who had gone to better, to other schools…They would always talk to us about like ‘Oh, I can't believe you go to that school. It's so awful. They don't teach you anything.’ That’s what made me aware, but I didn't think it was as terrible as when I got to college and saw my level of knowledge compared to other people's and like "Holy crap. My school didn't teach me much of anything." But, I knew that there was a difference, and I wanted to just, if I could get into a better school, I wanted to go there. I guess it was just because there were kids around me who went to better schools. Even though her neighborhood friends would share that they “read different books or had smaller classes... [and that] it was crazy that they had like thirty-
something kids in a classroom. Cherrie didn’t just think about school curriculum and class sizes, but instead the violence, “there was a lot of violence in the school compared to other places. A lot of fights, and gangs, and all that…there was always police officers, pretty much outside the school… lot of fights, and gangs and all that… there was always police officers, pretty much outside of our schools.”

For Cherrie, school violence and police officer presence became common but that was not the case for her older siblings. They went to Orozco Academy. At some point her parents did notice the violence, however, they saw that her older siblings made it and so it wasn’t the school but the student that made the difference. Even though there was concern with safety, it was still safer than having their daughter take a train to another part of the city, an unknown part of the city to them. Her mother at one point told her that it was difficult for her to imagine her standing in the cold snow in the dark, since it would be very early that she would have to take the train, that it was dangerous for a girl. Cherrie made the best of her situation. She took the exam in middle school, and even though she could retake it, she opted not to. She made the best of it. For her parents, taking a bus or train to go to a school further away, on the other side of town, was more dangerous than the violence in Cherrie’s school. Police officers were present and could protect her, who would protect her on her way to the other school.

Cherrie settled with what was available. She was not getting the best education but she was getting an education that was better than that of the general student body at her school. She was smart, “I guess my state scores told me that I was smart. That was the reason that people would contact me to take these classes. Like they contacted me asked me if I was interested, and I would be doing things like that.” Unfortunately, although she took honors and AP courses, these classes were equivalent to elementary college level classes in comparison to the college
prep high schools. “See in my school, is sad, like everything was just so easy. They just, it’s like they dumbed everything down, and made everything…it was hard not to…in high school, I had to try to not get an A.” Even in the college prep classes, it was easy. Until she went off to college, “it was a rude awakening when I got to college. Very, very rude”. Adding, “I took AP calculus, AP chemistry, AP Spanish…we took everything like AP History, and AP English, all those things, but they didn’t teach you enough for you to be able to pass an AP test.” She wasn’t even able to pass the AP exams and so entered college as if she had been on a regular academic track never taken AP. As such, Cherríe was getting the best education possible at the school in her neighborhood. She added that, “If you were in the IB program, you had the descent teachers…We were the lucky ones to have the good teachers who actually cared a little bit more.” Most of the students in her school did not take the test to go into the college prep high school and at the high school a majority of them did not opt or test into the honors program, and so “the honors program was a lot of the Asian kids. The Latino kids didn’t really apply for it.”

By being in the honors program, she was afforded having teachers that would create opportunities to learn about colleges, aside from counselors, and having teachers that nurtured her academic interest, in particular her math interest. Though the honors track had their own counselor assigned to them, “there was like one specific counselor that was in charge of college stuff. I got to visit a lot of colleges when I was going to apply for college, and they were different ways to learn about them...they would take us to like college open houses, or like college fairs and things like that.” She had the opportunity to visit University of the Midwest as well as, “Notre Dame, those were the two that I remember going to, it was just like a bus and we came for a full day, and we had different things here at the university.”
Thus, being part of the honors program opened the opportunity to visit college campuses and learn more about the process. Her parents’ involvement in college preparation and high school was very limited to almost non-existent. Their involvement was limited to attending graduation ceremonies and picking up grade reports from the school. Though Cherrie did well in school, Papelitos guardados: she shared that at one point in middle schools she was doing poorly. She did not turn in homework or do assignments but did really good on exams and that helped out on the final grades. The encouragement for both to apply for the college prep high schools and even to college came based on her testing scores. This also led to having strong support and encouragement to apply to colleges and be admitted to colleges.

She was also motivated to pursue higher education by an unexpected tragedy, I think when it came to college was the one brother that my dad had in Chicago. Him and his wife both passed away in a car accident when I was thirteen, and their children were older. Their daughter was twenty-two, and their son was eighteen, but dropped out of high school. They didn't do anything with their lives, and when their parents passed away, their lives were just shattered. They never learned how to work, they never learned how to do anything, because their parents gave them everything, and it was just like a whole thing to watch. Then they just kept spiraling down, like they never recovered from it. I remember thinking to myself "I don't ever want to be in that position. If my parents were to not be here, I want to be able to take care of myself." I was only like thirteen years old, but I can remember thinking that like "I don't want to end up like that," or just not be able to take care of myself, especially at that age.

She also attended a school where a large percentage of young women ended up as teen moms, “I think I was like one of the few people who made it to the age of 20 without children, of my
girlfriend group.” She added that the first person she ever knew was having a baby, she was thirteen years and in 8th grade and a school mate was having a baby. She thought that it was crazy and just didn’t not like kids enough to want one. Additionally, what helped her was being involved in extracurricular activities. She was also part of the swim team, band, math and physics club. She was the proud president of the Math club at that. She really had love for it. Her grades and involvement led her to apply and be admitted to University of the Midwest. She applied as a chemical engineer. She learned that she could pursue this as a degree because in her senior year other Latina/o students from the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) came and spoke to her class. Furthermore, being in the IB program meant being on the science track that offered chemistry, took three years of chemistry, liked it and also loved math. Then through SHPE, learned about engineering and chemical engineer. She recalled that “sounds really cool and something I would really want to do.”

Being accepted to University the Midwest was not the biggest challenge for Cherrie, but instead getting support from her parents about going off to college. Cherrie’s sister had also been accepted to University of the Midwest, her sister opted to go to a college in Chicago that gave her more scholarships, yet it was not as good of a college. Cherrie shared that her sister was already out of college for like two years, and realized that she had gone to a crappy college. “It was really difficult for her to get a really good job, because when they saw where she went to college, employers didn't really take her seriously.” Her sister encouraged her to go to University of the Midwest, adding “your education in college is extremely important. It matters to employers and it matters for your future career.” Having her sister have that particular experience helped Cherrie in being able to go off to college. Her sister became her advocate and helped their parents understand that the university they attended mattered.
Unlike high school, Cherrie fought to go off to college. While her parents were happy and supportive that she was going to college they were not too excited to the fact that she opted to go to University of the Midwest. They had the same view of college as they did of high school, it isn’t the school that matters but the student and what he/she makes out of their experience. They didn’t understand that the name of the university mattered and its prestige in the state of Illinois.

They made a fuss and would not help her financially, even to apply to for FAFSA, even so her older sister, who was the family’s accountant/tax person helped with information for FAFSA as well helped pay for her books. In preparation for college and knowing that she would not get any financial support from her parents she worked a lot. Cherrie had a full ride for her freshmen year and did not have to take out any loans. She was now set financially, but she found herself at a loss in her classes, “obviously had no idea what I was doing. I just thought I was continuing high school for another four years or something.” Papelitos guardados: “I realized that I had no idea how to study so I had to ask people who got good grades… I studied with friends who were doing better than I was and I started going to tutoring for a couple of classes and I think that's what really helped. And just having people to work with, friends there know what they were doing and help you out with it.” Furthermore, she became heavily involved with SHPE. This involvement led to being guided and advised, because she found that her assigned mentor through a first generation program on campus, was not providing positive advice nor successful strategies to be successful in classes. Cherrie made her way to the tutoring center and learned of other services, however, a bigger problem for her was that she had no interest in engineering.

At the beginning of her 4th year, she switched to technical systems management (TSM), a mixture of agricultural engineering and business. This major would allow her to be competitive
for the graduate program she was interested in, Industrial-Organizational (IO) Psychology. She spent two years fulfilling most of the psychology and business requirements for the degree. She graduated in five years. Making the decision to switch over was not an easy one, in part because of the stigma that came attached to leaving the major, “I guess I made the decision and then I went and talked with one of the deans in the college of engineering that I was close to. Just because I was not sure if I should switch or shouldn't switch, then usually to switch out of engineering is because you can't do it, and you failed you know. So, it's really hard to convince yourself to do it.”

Even after transferring to the new program, she stayed involved with SHPE specifically in the recruitment and retention of Latinos in engineering She still participated in the outreach and programming even once she changed majors. In particular, because she helped developed some of the programming like recruitment and retention programming. For example, she helped in having a summer program for students that came from low performing schools and were accepted to the university. It was sort of a boot camp. This was then followed by a mentorship program with upper class students. This involvement and responsibility is what made it difficult to switching majors.

When she changed majors she also changed colleges; engineering is housed under Liberal Arts while TSM it was housed in the college of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. In this shift, she found more support. Though there was a drastic racial/ethnic and gender difference. “Chemical engineering had one of the higher ratios of women…twenty percent [of women]. And there were actually few minority, like six, in class” However, in TSM, “there was one black guy or two but that was it. Everybody else was white. Because it’s mainly people who are farmers do it because agriculture.” She was now in a program that was predominately male, white and from
rural Illinois. Yet, having an accessible and welcoming advisor made the transition a smooth one.

Transferring majors also meant changing colleges. At the college level, she found that she was very different from her peers. She experienced culture shock because though she had grown up in the U.S., she grew up in a predominately Latino and Spanish speaking community. She recalled that many of her peers had college educated parents. They had opportunities to be academically assisted by their parents, “their parents would help them study for their exams, they were almost pushing them to get tutoring and looking up the resources for them and telling what to go do” and for Cherríe, it was just her having to deal with everything, no one was going to help her. These encounters and experiences she dealt with often, especially in the dorms with her roommate that came from out of state with parents that held a master’s and a Ph.D. degree. On her end, it took her parents over a semester to get over the fact that she had opted to go away to college and due to their limited schooling, they weren’t able to provide any academic support. On the contrary, Cherríe rarely shared if she was struggling or having any issue in college because that would be welcomed by comments that this would not have happened if she had gone to another college near home.

Being involved with SHPE helped her find her niche. She had the opportunity to hang out, study and work with other students that were like her, that experienced similar challenges. Aside from SHPE, what helped Cherríe was her involvement with La Casa. She learned about it when she came visit as a high school student and she recalls that they also reached out to her once she was accepted. La Casa provided a space where she felt welcomed and that she belonged. Through SHPE they would hold events, store supplies, and have study hours at La Casa. She would also attend events and workshops hosted by La Casa staff. It was a good place to hang out for her. It was also a place where she could get away from her own dorm. As an
engineer major her first year she lived in a themed dorm – Women in science and engineering (WISE), a predominately white dorm. The WISE dorm was mostly white, Asian American, and Asian with a handful of students of color. She always felt weird being around all white students especially in her dorm because at times they just did not understand her. Feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome made it that she spent very little time in the dorms. This limited taking advantage of any resources, though she did share that most of the programming and resources were mostly gear for the white WISE students. Especially with mentorship it was difficult to connect with someone that did not understand the whole person – race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, language, generation status, and the impact that has on preparation. There was no connection. She added that even other events and programming really did not touch upon the needs or challenges faced by women of color. When she could, she moved out. Living off campus gave her the opportunity to save money but also to be in a community that had similar experiences and ways to cope due to their race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, generation statues, citizenship, language and more importantly where she came from – Chicago.

Nevertheless, something that she never expected to hear from other students was that she was White. When she changed to TSM, the majority of her peers were white males. She did not feel comfortable, she was out of her element, yet she shared that to others in her program she was apparently White. She took a class where she was to given the white racial title. Even though others might have given her this title that came with great privilege, her interactions with other white students didn’t quite change. She still felt like the other, but now with a sense of having another layer of responsibility. She recalled not being “hurt…just very confused. Because I’ve always been Latina like probably one of the biggest parts of my identity. Whenever we talk about Latinas we always talk about ourselves as like, People of Color. And like the struggle of
being Latina but never ... I don't know I just never thought of the color of my my skin meaning something different to people who don't know me.”

Having someone else point out her privilege, made her aware but also confused, since she recalled experiencing microaggressions in her dorm with her roommate and in other situations. She recognized that she had this privilege of being thought of as white, but she did not participate in that privilege. She did so by claiming her Mexican heritage and speak Spanish whenever possible. It was like she needed to prove she was Mexican because automatically others had taken that away from her. She also was not fully aware of this privilege because she shared that the other engineering majors she was close to happened to be light skinned Latinos as well. She had also experienced multiple times that other Latinos would see her as white and would only speak to her in Spanish, yet she did not really understand the privilege that came with being seen as White. Nevertheless, Cherríe shared that at one point she wondered if she was admitted to college and the engineering program because she was a Latina female rather than her academic merit, and it was moments like these that made her question it even more. She had to constantly tell herself that she was a great high school student, had the grades and the test scores, she did score well enough for the college prep high schools in the first place. Yet, she still had to convince herself that she was there because she had earned it, she deserved to be there.

It took Cherríe five years to finish her Bachelor’s degree. She also did not apply to graduate school while still enrolled as an undergraduate. In order to prepare for graduate school, she had to take four to six psychology classes, four business classes and a statistics course as a graduate school pre-requisite. Since fall grades would not be posted until after the deadlines for her program of interest, she was advised so take a year off. She was burnt out from so much schooling. In that year off she worked in the college of engineering as a program coordinator.
developing resource programs for incoming undergraduate students like summer camps. Staying on campus worked out in her favor when applying for graduate school. She stayed connected with her undergraduate advisor with whom she had conducted research under his guidance. He talked to her about graduate school, but she would like to credit both her friends and her current advisor for putting that interest in her head. Having conducted research with her graduate advisor and his graduate student, allowed for Cherrie to gain interest in the field of IO Psychology.

Though she came to University of the Midwest to pursue the doctorate, it was not an easy process or decision. Cherrie, applied to 12 graduate programs and was accepted to four. She shared, “the acceptance rate for IO are like 6% it’s like super low. Umm, so like my advisor was like, you have to apply everywhere and it’s really luck. If the person you’re interested in working with is taking students and you fit what they want.” Being accepted to four programs highlights how competitive she was. She even got accepted to her number one choice, Georgia Tech. However, after she visited she realized it was not what she expected. She also got accepted to a program where the university was not as highly regarded and that would impact her options for employment. She then had to make a choice between Purdue and University of the Midwest. She was going to accept Purdue’s offer, she had already been convinced to go there, and the person she was going to work with was a graduate of University of the Midwest, but when it came time to notify the person at University of the Midwest, “he convinced me it was a terrible idea” to go to Purdue.

She originally was not going to apply to University of the Midwest, because she did not feel as highly qualified, even though she had done well in all the courses as an undergrad and had conducted research under the supervision of her current advisor, still felt she would not get accepted, University of the Midwest is one of the top programs in the nation. Then, she had two
of the top programs fighting over her, “he (current advisor) was offering a lot of. So he offered me a fellowship for my first year. And he was offering me all these other random things…So I mean at the end UM was the better program and I was choosing Purdue just because I wanted to go somewhere new but it’s not as highly ranked as UM and the town is the same thing.” The funding was very similar, and that mattered. She was really going into the same environment; it was just a different state. The most important reason why she chose UM, was that at Purdue, she would have been the only one. She wasn’t sure she could handle that.

The IO Psychology program meant, studying people at work, how can we make individuals more productive and there’s two different sides - 1) how do you select people so how do you hire individuals who are going to be the best workers. And 2) the organizational side, that’s once people are in your organization, how do you keep them there, how do you make them productive and how do you keep them happy in the workplace.”

This field and study are not very common. It is not a field of study that many Latina/os would consider. Most students would either go into either Psychology, Engineering or Business. IO Psychology is a combination of all three. She realized that this was something that she was interested in. Because she was “really into recruitment and retention of Latino students and engineering… [and] created a ton of programs and did a ton of work with the deans and stuff like that up front.” This being just one reason, and realizing she disliked engineering was another. Therefore, finding out that she could study organizations and get a PhD on that was fitting. In this program of study, she gets to study outreach, recruitment and retention of minority students, or at least how the programs functions to do just that. In addition, to organizations in general function and how they can help those that belong to the organizations be more productive. Unlike other programs like education, IO is “more interested in the entire pipeline, we do study
how you make people interested in certain fields, or through education but then also after education like how you get these people into becoming like CEO’s and things like that in an organization.” She does research outside of school settings as well.

For this particular field of study there is no undergraduate major, the closest that would help meet the pre-requisites was technical systems management (TSM), because it combined Psychology and Business. However, if she wanted to work in the field as an IO Psychology, she would need to earn an M.A. or Ph.D. She adds that, in order to be an IO psychologist you have to get an MA or a PhD, you cannot do anything without that. I don’t even know why I chose PhD; I really think I only chose a PhD was because I wanted to be Doctor… I still applied to PhD programs because my advisor was like, you’re gonna get a PhD, like you shouldn’t get an MA, you can get paid more money.”

As a third year, she has found that some things are a bit harder than she thought. She came in to the program hoping to do work on students of color. She is interested in studying “vocational interest and how that applies to what women choose to go and how long they persist in their degree in school and afterwards where they go.” Vocational interest is new in IO psychology; nobody has really looked at a lot of vocational interest in IO psychology. Therefore, her work means that she would have to collect her own data and “then find out if the women actually graduate or what their GPA is when they graduate from engineering.” This is connected to trying to understand what attracts women to STEM degrees and to stay in that field. This work is one of two study interests she has. Her other interest of research focuses “on raters’ ratings of performance.” This looks at the yearly evaluations that happens at most jobs in order to determine raises and so forth. She tracks “how good or how bad these measures are” and argues that the “supervisor ratings are not very good so you shouldn’t ask your supervisors for
evaluations or like you should mix it with some evaluations with co-workers, and supervisors.” Therefore, finding the best way to measure performance in the work place.

Trying to pursue her research interest on women and engineering has been difficult because she does not have access to the information. She needs to access the GPA of the students (women), that is a huge part of her data collection. While the college of engineering is open to giving her that information, the office of institutional review board (IRB), informed her that the only ones to be able to provide that information is the registrars office, to be considered valid and accurate GPA information. Unfortunately, the registrars office has not been easy at providing the information. Though, a student could provide the GPA, it still needs to be cross checked with the registrars office, in order to gain validity for peer review journal publication. Therefore, she has been stuck and unable to move forward in her original research project. Publishing is very important in her field of study. Even when thinking about other projects or how to go about her original project she is unable to look at minority women because the numbers are too small, a qualitative approach would not lead to publishing in prestigious peer reviewed journals in her field either. Furthermore, qualitative methods and training in her field of study does not really exist, they are pretty much quantitative researchers.

She shared that her program, now a total of 12 graduate students, is predominately Asian. Of the nine Asian students only one is a national, Chinese-American, the other are White and then there is her, the only Mexican in the program. In regards to gender, it is the same as in most program more women than men, 9 women and 3 men. The faculty are predominately white men, 3, and one African American female professor. Cherrie works conducting research, in performance research, with the African American faculty who is currently working on tenure. Her main advisor is one of the three white male faculty. Being the only Latina in her program,
working with the only other person of color in her department, and having her main advisor be a white male is not an uncommon experience for students of color. However, it can be exhausting. She finds that in these types of relationships and working styles, Michelle will oversee the master’s thesis and Dan will oversee and be the final advisor for the dissertation. If they ever get a project going, since almost three projects have already failed yet the work with Michelle has been going really well.

At this stage she has moved forward. In her program she does not necessarily need to write up a thesis, but she did need to do short papers, that she will hopefully be able to publish. Publication is really important in her field, especially if she wants to pursue the faculty route. Early on her main advisor, made the suggestion that if she was going in that route, it was best to work with an assistant professor. It has paid off, Cherrie has one published article as a co-author, a review and resubmit in the works, and another one she is currently working on. Though, her main advisor is not publishing with her, he is guiding her in the right direction to be a competitive hire. She adds that her main advisor is a good mentor and advisor due to the fact that he lacked both guidance and mentorship when he was a graduate student himself. He is supportive to all his students across the board. He encourages to do work on issues that are important and matter to her, though all within the scope of quantitative work, he also encourages her to apply for fellowships. She is guaranteed funding for a total of six years, especially as a TA.

As a TA, for the very first time, she recalls that on the first week of teaching her class a white student was complaining about not being hired, that he had applied to multiple jobs and that they just would not hire him, she adds, “he’s like ‘no, all they do, the only thing that they hire is the Mexicans, and they only hire the Mexicans in this town.’” Unfortunately, she was
unable to provide neither comfort nor an answer to the students. She shared that 1) she did not know how to handle the situation because in her department and area of study race and gender are rare topics of discussion and research, it is only addressed when discussing hiring and not been biased but in the other direction, so not hiring people of color because they are people of color, and 2) this was a common event for her. Not that people shouted that they were not hired because they weren’t Mexican, but instead that through out her schooling, Kindergarten to graduate school, it was always assumed she was White. Even when she purposely pronounced her name in Spanish, it was assumed she was White. She was by default invited into very uncomfortable conversations that highlighted the views of predominately Whites about Latinos and other students of color. In most of these cases it was about how these students were not university material especially this university. Even when she informed them that she was Mexican/Latina, the response was not any better; they would simply move on and were more cautious with their language and what they shared or informed her she was not like the rest.

Furthermore, she adds that one of the issues with her program is not being able to study race and gender through qualitative methods. The number of students of color or minority groups within the organization that she researchers are so small that quantitatively there’s no impact or significant data to highlight the issue at hand. She knows that there’s “research that shows that White supervisors systematically give lower ratings to their black subordinates. Most of the research has been done among black and white, there’s not a lot of research on Latinos.” Yet, getting a sample group together is very difficult, “that is part of the workplace, those are issues they’re not fully studied, people don’t fully understand them yet. I think it’s just the fact the system for us when it comes to publishing, doesn’t help us study those groups. You know? It’s difficult for us to study minority groups and publish.” Though she has not fully given up. If she
continues in academia she shared, “that’s something I would probably do once I had tenure. You know, I would actually spend four to five years collecting one sample to publish it. Right now I don’t have the time to do that.”

She will be under 30 years of age when she finishes. She is still undecided whether or not she will be going into academia. She has the option of going into the Department of Psychology or Business. If she goes out of academia, she would be in the industry – consulting for large organizations or even with Human Resources. The demand for the work she does is very high, most importantly because there are few people in that field of study yet the need is there especially when industries are trying to transform their field to have the best of the best.

Her final thoughts and advice to other Latinas,

know if there’s something that you love to do and you wanna do, do it. I feel like we get a lot of pressure you know at least our families aren’t used to like Latinas going into higher education. Or they’re more like now, stay if you know if you get married and have children that’s ok, you don’t have to keep going to school or don’t go away like stay close to your parents cause that’s the way that it’s been done you know, in our generations women stay with their parents and things like that. And I don’t know I feel like now in our generation you should have more emphasis on what you want for yourself. If you want a career, and if what your parents have told you what you should be doing, is it what you want? And it’s ok, like go for what you wanna do. I don’t know I feel like there’s time for everything. You can you know, in the future, I used to tell myself that, like in the future I can do the whole family and things like that, for right now focus on my career and that’s what I want to do. And if you need support you can always look for it, people aren’t just gonna come and give you the support you need, I think a lot
of people are like people who feel like they’re not supported and they have a difficult
time, you know most a lot of people don’t know that you need that support or that you
feel lonely, or that you need help, but if you go out there and actually seek it, people are
willing to help you. But sometimes it’s up to you to do a little bit of the work and find
people who support you and let people know that you need help.

Emma.

Emma was the last participant of the study. For a while there it felt that I was not going to
be able to get the five participants for this study. She heard about the study via a friend of mine
that was staff of the summer pre-doctoral program, she was in the beginning stages of the
doctoral experience. She was an ideal candidate for the study, because she would offer a fresher,
deeper and richer narrative of her experience of being in graduate school. Since she started her
doctoral program in the summer of 2014, I never met her in person. Most of our interaction took
place via online. Emma was a bit reserved. Yet, she was comfortable to share her experiences
and reasons why she had made certain choices and why she was pursuing graduate school but it
seemed that a face-to-face interview would have allowed to get more insight. Emma, had long
dark brown wavy hair, light caramel skin tone, and wore glasses, she seemed petite and possibly
my height.

The first interview took place once the semester had started, early fall, so she had
finished the summer pre-doc program and had enough time to settle in as a graduate student. The
university was not new to her, she had earned her undergraduate degree at University of the
Midwest, a year earlier.

Emma did not identify as Mexican but instead Mexican American. Sharing,
I know growing up I considered myself Mexican American. But I was never like really, I mean I felt as much of both, but it started, the race question never came to mind until I started applying to college. That’s when I was a little confused as to … I remember going up to my um college counselor and asking her, I’m like, “Uh so which of the race do I choose from the box?” You know, in terms of like your color. And that’s why I was confused ‘cause I never saw anything like, it was like White, Black, Pacific Islander and I’m like, “I don’t identify with any of these.” So she was like, “Well, look at the color of your skin.” And I was like, “Okay.” Then she’s like, “What color is it.” I’m like, “White or white-ish, pink-ish. I don’t know.” And she’s like, “Well, which one is closer to your, you know, what you identify?” And I guess, “White.” So that’s when I, the whole like race thing kind of came into question. I’m like wait, “Am I really considered White?”

You know? Like …

Therefore, “I guess Mexican American ethnicity wise and then um White as in for race.” Her racial identity was defined in some ways by the check off boxes on the college application. Emma, was born in the U.S. Her family, though on her father’s side, his family lived in the U.S. for a long time. When her mom and father decided to move to the U.S., they moved to Chicago because her they had extended family there. Of all her siblings, the oldest was the only one born in Mexico, the rest were born in the U.S. Her parents are also Mexican nationals coming from Michoacán, Mexico. Her parents schooling consisted of reaching the 7th or 8th grade for her mom, who was the eldest and so had to drop out to take care of family responsibilities, and her father did graduate high school in Mexico, and took some community college courses in Chicago. Nevertheless, the main person involved her early schooling was her mother. She was a
strong advocate for Emma. Her mother was also the one that instilled the importance of
education, especially because she was not granted that opportunity herself.

Two major events lay out her schooling foundation. She attended Kindergarten for two
years because of her age and month of birth, “I ended up repeating kindergarten twice, or going
two years. It was because the Illinois State law requires that your age requirement has to be a
certain, like in September you have meet a certain age requirement.” Apparently her mom had
registered her early and so she had to repeat Kindergarten. However, that came with some
unintentional consequences that caused fear in her mother. Her mother worried that because they
spoke Spanish at home that Emma might actually not learn English properly. Related to the other
event, “I guess this is important to know. All English school speaking wise. Like it was just
English no uh bilingual programs.” Emma adds, “She didn’t want me to struggle with like
English language ‘cause we spoke predominantly Spanish at home, so she didn’t want me to
struggle in the school system so she put me in bilingual courses in second and third grade.” But
then, that also led to worries of not learning Spanish, “But then my mom felt concerned that I
couldn’t uh catch up with the language felt like I would struggle so she put me in my bilingual
courses my second and third grade.” She went to Catholic school for kindergarten, from
kindergarten, from first grade through second grade it was predominantly Black school, and then
third to eighth grade was predominantly Latino.

The bilingual programs were very short lived and after 4th grade she was in an all English
classroom. Nevertheless, Emma feels that it was not so bad, having had the opportunity to at
least have had some bilingual education served to help her feel more confident in her Spanish
speaking abilities. In the bilingual program she recalls that most of the teachers were
predominately Latino, just like the students. As she moved up in grades and became all English
classes the teachers changed to predominately White teachers, with the exception of the bilingual teachers and black teachers. Yet, the student body was predominately Latino (80%) and Black (10%) and other mixed minority groups (10%) including some Polish immigrants.

Her schooling experience was a little different than her siblings. She is the second oldest but the first born in the U.S. Her older brother was born in Mexico. Both of them were in grade school together at some point, he is four years older than her. Although, he would have liked to get a college degree it became almost impossible for him since he was undocumented. “He was born in Mexico. He came here when he was four years old. He was in high school he didn’t have a residency, undocumented, he decided to enroll in college and took some courses but he never really showed up to class or decided just not to go anymore. As such, he wasn’t able to offer Emma any guidance and so she went through the process as she was the first one to do so.

At the age of six her parents separated and they were raised by a single mother. Her mother moved to the Southside area of Chicago while her father stayed in Little Village area. He was in and out of their lives but was not a big part of their life until later when she was in high school. At the age of 16 her mother passed away and so then they moved back with their father. By this time, Emma was already very independent. “My mom would be working but she, even when she didn’t work, she wasn’t as involved in the actual school setting, but she was involved in trying to help us with the homework or encouraging us.” She would also encourage and praise Emma and her siblings for doing well in school. “She’s like, ‘I’m really happy that you guys are doing well. I don’t want you to be suffering like I am right now trying to work in a minimum wage job to support you for right now. I know you guys are furthering. You guys are gonna do very well.’” The only other family to provide some form of support was her grandmother since she was a primary care giver and one that she recalls having an impact on her schooling, “I
remember my grandmother teach me how to read in Spanish. I do remember that but after that it is was my mother.” Much of the support was limited to her mother and grandmother. Emma, credits a lot of her teachers and even friends in providing support and information about school in particular the higher levels like high school.

As she moved up in grade levels, she learned about the college preparatory high schools, “they have like those schools downtown they are very well known like the Jones Preparatory, North College Preparatory, like Young. So if you took those exams at eighth grade and you passed it you were qualified to attend any of these schools and that’s where you found like the predominantly like White kids. Otherwise like outside of that area, if you’re like in other Chicago schools it’s predominantly just minorities.” Emma applied and was accepted but was not allowed to go, “when my brother was younger he had to take a bus to and from school and she didn’t like the fact that her son had to wait in the cold on the snow for the bus to pick him up. So my mom didn’t want me to struggle, taking the train, waking up early and having to be on the whole commuting back and forth to school. She preferred me to go somewhere nearby, not for me to struggle trying to wake up early trying to be on the cold. She was looking out for me anyway and preventing me from actually bothering going to something further, doing something further or going somewhere further.” At her neighborhood school, she took honors courses since her freshmen year. Even though most of her grade school experience was about about memorizing so that she could pass the state exams she faired well in the state exam. That led to taking Honors Algebra as a freshmen and all Honors courses as a sophomore. By her senior year she took AP Calculus, AP Biology, and AP English. Emma went to a school with predominately Latino and Black students, and a handful of white and Asian American students, yet her Honors courses were with predominately Asian American students. Papelitos Guardados: However, all
the Honor classes, still left her short on college level work, “I wasn’t used to writing papers every week, having to do a lot of readings every week, I wasn’t academically prepared for that. So my freshman year I did struggle quite a bit. It was kind of scary, experiencing something new and no one really told you about.”

In addition to Honors and college preparatory courses she became involved in a lot of the things that the other honors course students like joining the National Society and other clubs and so she built a good college bound resume, with out really knowing that she was doing so. She added that she did well in school so that she did not end up doing physically laboring jobs like her mother or struggle to live life. College was not really in her radar, even though she was taking the classes necessary to be able to apply for college, “all I knew was about one community college kind of on the road from the house. But I never really gave it any thought until my teachers were like, ‘Hey, you’re taking all these AP Courses. Like you know you have the academic and you know you have the, the motivation to do something.’” She was also in Upward Bound and her advisor “was forcing us to submit at least five college applications in order to graduate… otherwise you wouldn’t be walking on the stage graduating.”

By the time she reached senior year and began to apply to colleges, her mother passed away. Her younger brother unfortunately dropped out of high school. The death of their mother took a toll on him and led him to not knowing what he wanted and school was just not a place that he felt he could find the answer. The opposite occurred with Emma where she became even more motivated even though her circumstances changed by now living with her father. But even then, she mostly relied on teachers and friends to guide her through most of the schooling process, to get to the next level once she learned of the option of going to college. On her mother’s side, Emma would be the first to go off to college, she was also one of the few that had
citizenship. Unlike her father’s side, whose family gained residency and citizenship because of their parents coming to the U.S. before him and being born in the U.S., her mother’s side did not have that privilege. A majority of her mother’s family were undocumented and worked and continue to work in low paying jobs. Similarly, both her mother and father worked in factories making minimum wage. Her mother was not able to move up the latter due to her lack of English language, she only had a 7th or 8th grade in Mexico, and no time to really further her education in the U.S. Her father did speak English, at least more than her mom, and he even enrolled in some community college courses.

When Emma and her siblings moved to live with their father in Little Village, her father opted not to have them change schools. This was key, because she kept the support from teachers that would eventually help her with the college application process. Not moving them to a new school was only one form of support, however. Unlike her mother, her father did not check in on them doing their homework or attend parent-teacher meetings, but he did make sure they were in school, a 20-minute drive every day and picking her up from after school activities or other events that she was part of.

Finally, Emma shared a critical moment from her high school experience that stood out,

Since I graduated in the top 10 um one of the top 10 students in my graduating class, they gave me special box seats for me and my family and they gave me extra tickets to invite more family. So I invited my friends, my younger brother and my sisters, my brother and sisters side. And I called my dad and I’m like, “Hey um …” We have this conflict thing going on too because he refused to pay for my prom or graduation because he said it was super expensive. So that’s where the conflict thing. I’m like, “Here I’m going to give you graduation, even though I paid with my money, here I’m going to give you graduation
ticket.” And then I don’t why...if he just made or what, he just made this whole story and like, “Oh I’m not going. Go give it to your grandma.” I was like, “Okay. My grandma is already invited. Okay. I’m okay, well here is your ticket if you decide not to go okay don’t go.” I don’t know why but he ended up going... I’m not trying to be dramatic but he ended up going. So he did show up, eventually.

She graduated as the part of the top 10 percent in her class. While her father made a big deal out of the wrong thing, he still made it to the graduation ceremony. This statement also highlighted the continued struggle of being a young woman but also being of a working class background. Being poor or of working class background is something that has meant that she needed to be creative and find ways to participate in high school “things” like prom or grad night, etc. Being poor and in a one parent household can be extremely limiting on those “extras”.

Emma applied to college because she had to not because she wanted to be the first to go to college and set an example. Being part of the honors course meant that she would have to apply to at least 5 colleges. She chose most of the schools at random, she did not really know the difference between one of the other. She did know, however, that University of the Midwest was not in Chicago and how good of a university it was and how well known it was. She opted to attend UM because, “once I got my package, I noticed that I didn't have to take out such a huge amount of money, I was like, “Okay, I can do it. I can take out a loan.” I just ended up taking out a student loan without my dad's help. It was throughout the whole 4 years. It was basically all on me.

She also added that it was her father who took her to visit UM for the first time. “Orientation, I know we had to come down here during the summer to check out the campus, take a tour. My dad was willing to come down here and drive me and show me around campus.”
This was also “pretty much the first time that I visited the campus. It was really weird because I just decided to come here even though I never decided to check out the place.” Her father’s involvement in college related activities ended there.

Going to UM was the first time that she would be in not just predominately white classes but also predominately white school and dorms. “I came from a predominately Latino community back in Chicago, so everyone in my high school was Latino. Coming here, I mean, I knew there was a huge Caucasian population, I just didn't know to what extent.” Experiencing “a huge culture shock, [this is] what it's like to see white people. Then, going to class ... the whole first week I was experiencing college so it was a whole crazy scenario. I know for sure my first semester was a huge struggle for me.”

Her first time experiencing culture shock was when she stepped onto campus, but the first microaggression was with her first roommate. She was placed in the Engineering dorms, were mostly if not all the students were engineering majors and upper classmates. Her roommate was a sophomore, white, and from rural Illinois, completely opposite of Emma. Emma was also not an engineering major she was a Psychology major. “She found out that I was Mexican so she would always bring up my ethnic background. She would be like ‘Oh’, on the white board write typical college dorm stuff. We wrote our names there and someone drew the Mexican flag and a taco on there. I was like, ‘Why would you do that?’ I was like, ‘Okay, whatever. It is what it is.’ I never really let it bug me too much but it's those little hints that you know that's what she saw me the most. She didn't see me as a person first. She saw me as my ethnic background.

Matters did not get better for Emma. While she graduated in the top 10 percent of her class, she was not prepared for college level work. “The academic aspect of it too was ... it wasn't, it was like the first semester but for the first couple 3 weeks how rigorous it was. They
expect an assignment be turned in every week. I wasn't used to the writing papers and submitting stuff every week. It kind of got really overwhelming to a certain extent. That first semester I almost considered dropping out or transferring to the school back home. I couldn't handle it and juggle it.” It took her some time to find her way. She also credits being stubborn than anything to staying. Furthermore, she had a graduate mentor from a TRiO funded program to provide guidance and support her first year, but she did not really use the service. Something that as a graduate mentor herself, graduate assistantship position at that time, she regrets and shares with her students. She regrets that she did not take advantage of the resources, she got the information but did not seek them out. She did not leave the university because she wasn’t about to quit, she was actually looking at the requirements to transfer to a college in Chicago when she reached this moment. She said to herself, “No. If I applied here and I made it and other people applied and didn't make it, then why am I calling it quits.” That helped her. She stayed. However, she also connected with friends who had gone to the same school as her and developed study groups, hang out outside of class and she did not feel as disconnected from the university. She also realized that she was able to do the material as long as she applied herself and did not see these new changes as challenges but instead an opportunity to grow.

Academically, she did not do well in her first semester at UM. As a Psychology major a final grade of C+ in a foundation psychology class was not a good start to the major, Fortunately, after this negative experience something good came along. She realized that it was difficult to get advice for her major since there were over 100 or so Psychology majors. Not doing well in the class discouraged her from pursuing a Psychology degree. However, one of her friends told her about another major that was more hands on and not so heavy on theory, a program that made more sense for her. She met with an advisor and felt a difference in the attention she received, it
was less chaotic and there was more time for her. She opted to change majors but she had to take some pre-requisites such as a math class. By the time she started her sophomore year she had declared a new major – Human and Community Development. Once she changed majors and found her niche on campus she did fairly well. She felt comfortable and confident.

Unfortunately, being in college did not protect from some other challenges she would face especially when she would go back to her neighborhood. She found herself caught up in some sort of Twilight Zone episode, she was being called out for the way she spoke – academic. Emma was different now. She was using words that were not common in her neighborhood, she stated “I was showing off my vocab to prove to them that I'm smarter or at a higher level than they are. That was not my intention but that's how they saw it.” She felt she was a victim of double standards.

She did not get that same response from family however. “My family was actually proud of me to see me actually go through the first year of college. My dad started seeing that I've never asked him for financial help. He actually started taking me more seriously.” Most of these experiences and comments happened with friends she grew up with that did not go off to college or that were in the local community college, but not really going full time. She felt ostracized.

In her later years of college, she joined the McNair program. She was not necessarily looking to join, however she learned that she would get paid to conduct research, something that she was already doing for free. “This is really bad but I only joined McNair or decided to do McNair because of the money. I actually, I wanted a summer job so I was like it pays well and you don't have to do much for the researchers, you keep doing work.” In addition to making money, she learned about graduate school, something she had not considered or really knew much about until then. Her research project for McNair was to better understand factors that
provide opportunities for second generation Latino youth to pursue higher education. Participating in McNair did let her realize that she had options after graduation. She excelled academically, “I pushed myself to the point where I graduated ... I was on the dean's list 5 semesters. Actually, I graduated with a 3.8 or a 3.7 or something.” Yet, Emma did not participate in all the graduation ceremonies. She opted to do study abroad her last semester. She questioned whether it was worth it, especially on a financial level. She adds that her father did not really care about going or not going to a graduation ceremony, he did the same at her high school graduation. What mattered to her at this point was the respect that she had gained from her father. Therefore, walking on stage to get a handshake and spend money on housing and travel for her family and on a cap and gown was not really worth it. She was out of the country through July.

Emma did not go straight into graduate school. Even when doing McNair, she was not sure if that was for her. She moved back to Chicago that summer. It took her almost two months to get her first job, the YMCA. Yet, that job was short lived. She then began to work for Head Start, “as a head start teacher and visiting the kids in Chicago. [she shared.] It was really awesome because I got to work with my very own community. I get to travel to different homes within the community and get to interact with other Latino moms and the little kids. I get to speak Spanish. Nevertheless, it was her experience working with Head Start that reassured her that graduate school was the right next step. “That actually really was the trigger as to why I wanted to go. It triggered me to actually find a grad school. I was like, "I kind of know why I want to go back to school." I was still kind of like obtaining that kind of thing. Once I got to work with that program it changed my life. I can see why it was important to go into education and with these families one on one.”
The last interview took place after the spring semester was over, Emma had officially finished her first year as a graduate student. Unfortunately, it was also the end of her doctoral journey, for now. She shared that she had opted out of the doctoral path and would just complete the education master’s. She was taking a summer course so that she could earn enough credits to finish the degree over the summer. She also shared that she was not really working with anyone in her department but instead with her undergraduate advisor as a research assistant. Her undergraduate advisor works with youth programs and that is what she wants to do, she shared, “I want to end up doing like a social justice kind of activist, kind of not for profit in the long run” and this professor did that kind of work. Her department advisor was assigned to her since she was a first year and that is how it worked in her department.

Emma’s decision to attend graduate school was based on the need she saw in her community and when she officially applied, she did so to predominately master’s programs. She was not sure if the doctorate was the best route for her. However, at UM and the department of education gave her the choice to apply to the Ph.D. as well.

When she applied and was admitted, she quickly realized that her interest was on wanting to do research on Latinos and finding a lack of Latino professors in her department. There is a lack of Latino faculty that conducts research on Latinos and education or something closely related, even in the Latina/o studies department, the faculty are limited on education research. Emma did not think it was their responsibility to have a faculty that focused on education, anyway. Nevertheless, other factors that took a toll on her were “the lack of and just the lack of the department like structure.” Adding that maybe she was not ready to commit to amount of years it would take to complete the doctorate.
Factors like “the lack of support… kind of thing, structure. Like there’s a structure inside but they don’t really tell you what you’re supposed to do. You kind of have to go seek it out. And even when you do seek it out they kind of send you back and forth like you have to go see this person and then go see this person. So it’s just the struggle of like them sending you everywhere…And then the fact that there’s preferential treatment like from what I heard in the program. Like some people get to know about all the benefits cause they’re closer to all the professors for one. Their advisors, sorry. So they get told of opportunities that we don’t, because we’re not as close. The fact that we don’t have similar interested professors, kind of you know. I guess there’s, there’s neglecting going on in the department.” This experience so early on in her graduate program led to her not wanting to be committed for longer time in the program.

When Emma reached out to her assigned advisor to share her concerns and also the possibility of leaving with just a master’s, her advisor was not as responsive as she had hoped for. Emma, reached out to her advisor multiple times and at no point was she ever asked why she was leaving. “I sent her an email about in March trying to get in contact with her so I could explain to her what I wanted to do. But she told me she was unavailable because she had a conference or something like that so I tried to get in contact with her, she sent me her number she was traveling and I called her but she didn’t answer and then I sent her another email explaining what I wanted to do and she told me that, that it was fine. That whatever I wanted to do was fine. Yeah, she was like; ‘oh, you don’t want to finish the PhD program? That’s cool. Oh you want to do credit your masters? Oh that’s cool. Oh you want to work over the summer with the professor, that’s cool.’ It was like; ok. It was all done through email, so she never really told me how to go about it.”
Emma pursued graduate education because it would lead to having the ability to better serve her community. The community that she had forgotten about due to being away in her undergraduate years. When she returned and began to work in the community she realized that much had not changed, especially when she was gaining deeper insight of the conditions of the families and neighborhood she once lived in. Nevertheless, earning her master’s degree would be a stepping stone to creating the change she sought. Finally, similar to her college graduation, she would be skipping the master’s graduation and ceremony. This time it was not about money but instead because she just did not find the purpose in doing so; “That’s one of the reasons I don’t bother to walk on stage either. Like I didn’t walk on stage this year, or the year that I graduated, so. To me it’s not you know. If you’re not providing me with what I need or what I want, then why do it?”

Emma finished all requirements for the masters in education in the summer of 2015. She graduated and moved back to Chicago. She is currently working for a not for profit agency in youth related services.

**Maria Felix.**

Maria Felix was the third participant I met with in person. We met at an on-campus café that is usually busy with undergraduates doing work and at times there are some events that take place in the café area. When I met her I knew that her narrative would not be the same as others. Maria Felix is thin, average height maybe 5’3” or 5’4”, medium-long dark straight hair, dark caramel skin color. She is not soft spoken nor super loud, she has a strong voice and presence. In Maria Felix’s case, I start with the last interview. Towards the end of the interview, she said to me,
I thank you for doing that, I think it was really an eye-opening experience to be in my PhD and to be talking about my education from the beginning with you it was something that allowed me to reconnect and even collect my thoughts around my own motivation, style, being a teacher talking about my education and being in the PhD program all at the same time while we had these this ongoing collaboration cause the way that I saw it was that for me it’s not over until you’re done. So, sharing that value with you, and I would love to continue but essentially having the dynamics happening at the same time gave a different feel to my PhD. Cause even when I was going through it I was thinking I’m gonna tell Mariana about this and I’m gonna expose it. And I know that she’s gonna write about it even if they don’t write about it I know she will.

For Maria Felix, while her doctoral journey began as a perfect one with funding, strong and innovative research, and a great mentor/advisor, things turned in the wrong direction as she approached her third year. Maria Felix shared, “I had to have some distance from it before I could even like talk about it. I’m doing now because months ago I was a mess. I was a mess, a fucking mess.” Maria Felix had a long term relationship with the professor she started the PhD with. She had developed this relationship as an undergraduate student, her professor at that time had just started at the university. She wanted to do research on Hispanic women in the Chicago area, where Maria Felix was originally from. As such, the relationship developed early on. There were some differences, in the sense that Maria Felix is a U.S. born Latina and her professor was born in South America, was fair skinned, and came from a well off family that could afford her the opportunity to study in the U.S. to pursue her doctorate. Those differences eventually played a role in the relationship breaking apart. I asked about her advisor, and she shared,
No, not anymore. I switched. It was a huge huge fiasco. It happened last semester and it was seriously a situation that I had to figure out what was in my best interest because it was just a very unhealthy relationship for me to be involved in and I was super vulnerable, I felt I was fixated on all of my flaws instead of being able to productively grow. So it was just in the end after nine years of having a working relationship with her, it had turned abusive so I had to step back. She was supportive, well I was the one who, you know addressed the, the mistreatment and then as a result she told me she could no longer advise me. And to find somebody else. It changed my whole research focus, I had to switch departments.

Maria Felix began her doctoral program in Community Health, she then switched to Kinesiology, both are still under the same College. That also meant that she had to change her dissertation project, “My research went from basically from nutrition with older adult woman culture and? To interventions to culture and pedagogy of basic activity. focused a lot on oral histories and the potential for health intervention analysis. With a community health assessment that’s been ongoing three years where I’ve done work, many different projects on assets and deficits of community, community health assessments, inventory, oral history and then I’ve done a whole plan of work.” Now her work changed to, “a critique on kinesiology practices as they’re funneled to communities of color or minority communities, my work is really connected to culture, theory and more so in this qualitative sampling.” While her past projects were very much quantitative in nature. As such, now she feels stuck because she cannot access some data.

She shared the drastic difference between her old and new advisor,

I see day and night with my new advisor and my old advisor. My old advisor, worked with me since I was a freshman and in her mind I was never more than that., an
undergrad, for her. And the way that she relates to undergrads is they’re free labor. They’re free work, they’re children. And so really, the fact that I started working with her the year that she started working was that there was a lot of micro aggressions a lot of psycho, social, emotional, things going on that she did not behave with other students the way that she behaved with me. Where she would be authoritative, dismissive, she was cold, she was cruel…She was taught in Japan, so she would always you know refer to situations that she experienced with her advisor how he was very, abusive, same way that she reacted with me was the same complaints that she had towards her advisor. So she was just teaching me in the same way that she knew. We had such a long history of years together where she saw me evolve and nothing I did was good enough and so I felt that she took advantage of me and my community in the sense that she wanted to work with Mexicans when she came to America. Cause it was close enough to her culture and interest. So, when she announced it in class she said I wanna work in the populations of 60623 and 60608 in Chicago, and I raised my hand and I said, I live there. I can be your gatekeeper whatever you need. So from then we started this working relationship. The projects, she wasn’t receiving funding so she pulled out of the projects. And this was when at the same time she changed her research focus and she no longer wanted to support me. But at the same time she had me in leadership running the lab, teaching her classes, TAing her classes and I wasn’t getting paid for that. I was doing it because if I said no, all hell would break loose. And then so what kind of started getting me to really stand up for myself, my colleagues would tell me how unfair she would treat me. My colleagues would have opportunities and I wouldn’t, having worked a fraction of the time that I worked. She always kept me like her free labor. And I would just do it because it
was for the work…. then she would say how much I frustrated her, how, how, like dumb I was, how like if it’s even like repeated. She would constantly berate me. She would have me like picking up bread for meetings. Like things that I would happily but, like when it came to writing and publishing, she would exclude me from the process. Research things that I had to work from inception to end, she would not allow me to write about them. I would write a paper and this is what happened towards the end. I wrote a paper. She read it she said it was crap to redo it. I redid it, I wrote like thirty pages, then she said that I didn’t write it, and that she wasn’t gonna do it and it was crap, and then she said that she wasn’t gonna list me as an author on the paper that I wrote. And she would invite people that had nothing to do with the project, who had never worked or touched the data or worked with the participants done any of the stuff, and she would put their name on the paper.

This was just a snapshot of the friction that occurred with her past advisor. The situation with her previous advisor affected not just her academics but her health. Maria Felix was the one to really move towards changing advisors, and informing her past advisor that she needed to be in a healthier environment,

I cannot be in a hostile environment where everything that I say is criticized and nitpicked and instead of me feeling like I’m growing.” Adding that she felt, “anxious. I wouldn’t sleep, cause I was working all day I lost all this weight. I was having all these other problems with my health. Like I was just, a mess. It was horrible! And then she kicked me out of her lab, acted like I was a criminal and told me to get out because she was concerned for her safety. Changed all the locks. Takes me off of all the jurors. Takes me off all the computers, and her husbands a department head, so what can I say or do?
Maria Felix, did reach out for support and advise, she shared that,

I did speak to a lot of professors that I had to work with, professionally and within the classroom and they all were there to lend an ear. Or lend an ear and offer me work but that’s all they could do and a lot of them had gone through what I had gone through or they knew, a lot of tenured faculty were that support for me. They were the ones to hear me out and to reaffirm this is not right. This is not how this situation should be with an advisor and it’s unhealthy. These are the steps I recommend for you to seek justice these steps I recommend for you to find someone else. This is what I can offer you to work with me. So this is what I received from like numerous professors. At least 15 or 20 and they all confirmed that I’m worth it and that I do good work. And they would all tell me like, look at the work you’ve done with me xyz project and I started realizing I’m valuable. I work with all these people they have all good things to say about me. My advisor thinks I’m an asshole and that’s all I could focus on. So having their input and feedback and you know bouncing ideas off of them and having them reassure me that it happens, reassure me that I’m doing good work and, and encourage me to not stop.

As she made the switch to the new advisor, she added,

my new advisor it was like at my own pace. I reach out to her, she’s happy to connect me to whoever, she’s not funding me, that’s for sure. She has no funding, she has no research with participants that I would work on but she’s my advisor on paper and she’s supportive and she understands my work and she collaborates with people that I collaborate with and I guess now that’s, that’s what I have…I’m already connected with other people that I’m publishing with…But at the same time, my advisor’s almost 70 she’s raising two African American boys that are under the age of nine, she’s a caregiver
for her mother, who’s very sick and she has like four or five PhD students she’s teaching two or three classes, she’s traveling at conferences writing papers. So I know that she’s busy.

One this is for sure, “to come to the PhD, maybe she’s the one who like first told me, hey, you should get a PhD because of her own selfish interest but you know what? They accepted me, I’m in the program and I’m staying in the program and I’ll be damned if this makes me stop… I’ll be damned if I let go of my PhD… And if it takes me a year, if it takes years if it takes me switching advisors then that’s what I’m doing. She’s not gonna take it from me…. It’s not gonna be the reason why I’m not a doctor.”

Maria Felix’s journey to the doctorate has not been an easy one, though she was always a smarts student. She did well in elementary school, sharing that she was talking at one years of age and reading very early on as well, at 4 or 5 years old. She adds, “in grammar school I only had one, B. Never anything less than a, B. I had straight, As.” Yet outside of the school that was not the case, she added, “because of the issues that were going on around me whether in my home or on the streets or with my group of friends, I was excelling very fast in my academics but not in my social situations, I couldn't manage my curiosity to live life and do it in a healthy way. So in grammar school I was already acting up.” Maria Felix is the second oldest, with a sister that is two years older, a brother that is one year younger and another sister that is eight years younger than her. Adding that she “loved being the smartest person in the room. Smarter than the adults… knowing more than [her] classmates… loved being teacher's pet…loved reading more than everybody just like being a bright person.” As a way to get attention, “because [her] mom was always working and [her] dad was not in the picture “and even when he was, he was an alcoholic, that led to many issues at home. Her mother has a college degree from Mexico and
her father has no schooling. However, shared that when they first moved to Chicago, all of her family “were recent immigrants all undocumented”, and so that is a big reason why her mother could not use her college degree from Mexico. Nevertheless, her younger sister was “in college in Hawaii right now…[her] brother went to school in Pennsylvania, and [her oldest] sister finished three years of college in Chicago.” Maria Felix is the only to have graduated college, earned a Master’s degree – Masters in Public Health and an MBA (still pending), and now en route to the PhD.

Maria Felix attended a magnet school while in high school, that would lead her to apply and eventually attend one of the best universities in the state and in the country. She shared that, “going to a magnet high school, I had to learn as I was going so I was always geared and oriented to a college since the start. I had a biology class and they made us write a 25, 35-page cell report, and that was college caliber work.” As such, she was being groomed for the best schools, adding, “we were elite, we were ahead of the curve, we were smart, we're special, we're fit to be competitive and our college applications and we're going to get there.” Applying to college was an easy task since she has a counselor that showed her the steps to apply and made sure all documents necessary were submitted. She adds, “I applied to 13 schools, I got into 12 out of the 13, they were Ivy League... I got into the Browns of the country, the Columbia, all the U of I systems, UIC, like Berkeley, University of California, like Stanford, all these schools that I didn't know anything about.” Making the choice of where to attend was not easy. Deciding then on the University of the Midwest, because she was familiar with the campus.

I start UM and the summer before I go to UMI have a mental breakdown because I'm still in this relationship, I have been to so many funerals from gang violence. I was probably doing too much things that were messing with my head, and I'm like, "Okay, you got into
all these schools. You have a future. People think that you're smart and you probably are. You're investing in yourself. There was a lot of pressure for me, how to go about it so I had this breakdown. I was having a panic disorder. I was having extreme anxiety and I was going through counseling, to psychotherapy to get my head on straight. I come to the orientation, mind you, I had already been here several times just to party or visit the campus, and so I've been here a few times and I'm like, "Okay, I'm familiar with it. All right, the housing." Then I realize I'm going to live with three black girls and I'm like, "That's a culture shock for me. I'm going to live with, first of all, not at home, second of all, with three girls from a different culture. What if they don't like me? All three of them have known each other since they were in kindergarten. I'm going to be the outsider." I'm all freaking out about that. I'm all freaking out about the little details of it. I started school and I didn't realize that I was declared in a major. I'm like, "When did I sign up for this?" All of the sudden I come here the first day for orientation and there's like a tornado or something crazy like that and I'm like, "Oh, great. There's all this bad weather out here. I go to see an academic advisor. They signed me up for like eight science classes back to back and I'm like, "Okay, whatever." Then I'm struggling the first semester like, "This is hard." I'm a chemistry major and I'm like, "What am I getting myself into?" They're like, "Oh, you wanted to pre-meds, so this is what you do," and I'm like, "Okay." I'm struggling. I'm calling home. I want to move home. I give up. I'm not going to do college anymore." I call her crying, praying to God, hoping God to help me, and then at the same time I keep coming back and forth to Chicago. I'm still with that lifestyle. My head's in two places, and then after a while it starts connecting. It starts making sense. I start learning about study skills, learning styles, supports, resources, resources for minority
students. I got a job the first semester and I carried that job for the next four years. It was like a roller coaster ride, but I went through it. I think what was helpful for me was that I had a great support system and my mom was there for me.

Some of the networks and jobs she held in college assisted her in the transition to graduate school. She came in as a Chemistry major/pre-med, she found that she needed more support and started a pre-med group for Latina/o students. Furthermore, she adds, “I was taking classes in chemistry, biology, community health and I'm like, ‘You know what, this feels a little bit more like what I want to do.’ I got the minor in chemistry and continued with community health. I graduated with community health.” The change of major was not because she couldn’t make the grade, but instead she was not happy in the major, adding, I was pulling the grades, but it was just like back-breaking labor, and in community health I was getting straight A's.” She also mentioned that this was a difficult decision even when thinking about the graduate school option, “I'm still to this day, it's like when I'm done with my PhD and I apply to medical school maybe I'm ready then, but it was always like such a blow to me, like I want to be a doctor, but it's not easy.” Even then, “I'll finish my PhD. I'll work in the field and see if I want to pursue the degree in medicine to be a practitioner who does research.”

Finally, back to where we started in our conversation. She adds, “To come to the PhD, maybe she’s [old advisor] the one who like first told me like, hey, you should get a PhD because of her own selfish interest but you know what? They accepted me, I’m in the program and I’m staying in the program and I’ll be dammed if this makes me stop.” As her doctoral experience became a turbulent one but eventually found her way out of a non-productive and toxic environment, she still aims to finish the doctorate. She finishes by sharing,
When you’re a PhD you can be doing all kinds of stuff. You can even have direct practice with patients and you’re working with physicians but it’s not so a, b, c, it’s like a, r, t, z, you know? And then you’re doing it all. But in a more dynamic way. So, it really would challenge me to think of a feasible approach to reach the population that I would generally have reached if I were a physician - older populations, older adult populations, populations that are suffering from health inequality and like I said maybe I’m not gonna be looking at their cell count to make sure their cancer is growing. But, if I really want to focus on research that’s focused on cancer innovation then I could find a lab and shift the focus and that’s my aim. It’s really what I want to invest in and what population do I want to serve.

And so after multiple stumbles and challenges, she will see the PhD through. At the end of the last interview, Maria Felix was preparing to submit her dissertation proposal by the summer and continue analyzing data with the goal to finish and defend by Spring of 2016. She also planned on retaking the finance class so she can officially have the MBA. Pursuing a medical degree is something she decided to put on hold until she had experience in the field with her doctorate degree.
Chapter 5:
Findings

This research study examines if and how life history and testimonio as methods can assist in understanding the ways Mexicanas develop strategies for navigating higher education, in particular the doctoral journey, in the Midwest. Specifically, this study considers:

1. What strategies do first generation Latinas of Mexican descent employ when navigating their doctoral studies at public Research I Predominantly White institutions (PWIs)?
   a. What role, if any, do family, culture, gender and class play in the formation of first generation Latinas of Mexican descent scholars?
2. What impact do K – 16 experiences play in preparing them to navigate the graduate school experience?
3. How do daily and past experiences influence their completion of their doctoral degree?

Historically education research has placed the burden on education attainment on students and parents. Making the argument that education was not valued or encouraged in Latina/o families. As such, recent research(ers) have begun to focus on successful students and elements that help them achieve. This research study, is part of that scholarly work that aims to draw attention to successful students, academically/educationally, the mujeres in this study have gone above and beyond dominant narrative expectations. These Latina women are en route to becoming part of the less than 1% of Latina/os with the highest degree attainable in the United States, and in the world for that matter – the doctorate. Instead of presenting the mujeres’ lived experiences through the frequently deficit lens (Valencia, 2002), I will be using Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model.

A Community Cultural Wealth model (Yosso, 2006), shifts the view from the deficit perspective to the assets that Communities of Color acquire. Community Cultural Wealth includes a variety of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts of socially marginalized
groups that often go unrecognized, acknowledged or celebrated (Yosso, 2006) by White stream schools (Urrieta, 2009). Therefore, “Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth through at least 6 forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. [Furthermore,] these forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another” (Yosso, 2005 p. 77).

In this chapter I focus on the strengths and the community cultural wealth revealed through out the mujeres testimonios. I am consciously and purposefully highlighting the conocimiento and strategies of survival and resistance of the mujeres. By doing so, I acknowledge, recognize and give value to their experiences and stories (Yosso, 2005). In the next section, I will give a brief introduction of each form of capital of the community cultural wealth model followed by relevant excerpts from the mujeres testimonios, with emphasis on the last interview that focuses on the doctoral experience. This does not mean that early schooling experiences and are not important, however, the last interview captures the essence of the 6 capitals of Community Cultural Wealth.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to hold on to hope and dreams despite inequality and often without the means to make those dreams come through (Yosso, 2005). Even when faced with multiple real and perceived barriers, one remains hopeful, resilient (Yosso, 2005; Gándara, 1995).

All of the mujeres in this study were holders of aspirational capital. They did not necessarily imagine that their early dreams and hopes would go so far, however, they did not stop dreaming even when they faced a multitude of challenges. For example, in their early schooling (K – 12), Cherríe and Emma, all were unable to attend the college prep school where
they would be academically prepared to meet the challenges of their undergraduate curriculum, nevertheless they all made the necessary changes in their classes at the regular school so that they would be college bound. Similarly, all of the *mujeres*, even with at some points limited support, went off to college away from home. Even Maria Felix, Sor Juana and Gloria, who where in the “good” schools and taking the quality college going classes, still faced challenges going away to college. All women had to “fight”/convince their parents that they should be able to go away to college, neither one of them gave in to staying home. At the doctoral level, Emma even though left the university with only a master’s degree, has not given up on pursuing a doctoral degree,

actually now that I tell him that I’m thinking of moving or I’m actually moving, he’s like oh, why don’t you take a year off and come back the next school year and come to ur department. Basically transfer over. So now he’s suggesting that I transfer departments… Right now I’m in the process of declaring the master’s degree… so after I declare, I’m gonna go ask whether or not I can still transfer… or take a year off and come back and say oh wanna keep going but in a different department… so I wanna take time off just go out there and be more practical, being more real life knowledge that I could potentially apply in the PhD, come back to the PhD

Emma’s experience was not as gratifying and so she sought options, including the possibility to transfer to another department and continue on to pursue the PhD. She opted to take time off, leave with her master’s degree and then apply the following year in the new program. As such, she continues to pursue that dream and is hopeful that she is making a better decision this time around.
In Maria Felix’ situation to continue to the end of the program was no longer an option for her. She had a great relationship with her department, research and main advisor, until recently. At the last interview, Maria Felix was forced to change advisors and program. She began as a PhD in Community Health and now she was in Kinesiology. She shared,

Literally, how bad I am at communicating how like much she’s like” you annoy me to a point where I feel like I’m gonna explode, I just can’t think” I told her if you feel like that it’s a serious problem. I’m gonna find another person to support me. If you can’t handle it, and she said, “It’s not that” and then towards the end I was already looking for a new advisor and then she just kicked me out.

I really needed to clear a mental, a mental space. Because all that was too boggling, too dramatic to have weighing down on my and I was just like obsessing and so since then I’ve been like eating right working out I broke up with the person that I was dating at that time that things weren’t moving forward and I decided to stay. I decided to see it through stay in [Midwest] because I could have easily ran away to Chicago

And just forgot about all of that and forgot about it but you know what for some reason or another God wanted me to experience and confront that so I had to be strong and as much as it was like shitty or whatever happened make peace with it and continue forward. And I’m still in the same building in the same school the same everything. And if it takes me a year, if it takes years if it takes me switching advisors then that’s what I’m doing. She’s not gonna take it from me. Or this not her but this one problem, or this one setback or this one obstacle. It’s not gonna be the reason why I’m not a doctor

Maria Felix had overcome multiple barriers, including having a mental breakdown while in high school and various forms of environmental toxins and violence early on in her schooling. Also,
she was not the most well behaved but she knew she was smart. Too smart for her own well being, reaching a point of realizing that no “A” would save her from the life she was leading at that time. Even then, she felt that all those early lessons, where to prepare her for this challenge – finding herself having to change programs in order to finish her degree. Though she is in the same building as her old advisor, she continues to move forward, because as she had shared early on, “you tell me not to do something, and I will do it.”

Gloria, was the only mujer in the last phase of the doctorate, she was a few writing edits away from getting the doctorate. However, similarly to Emma and Maria Felix, she found herself having to change advisors and questioned whether she would be continuing on and finishing. Until she changed advisors and her for the first time, “I don’t think you should quit because you’ve done so much work. Like it would be a waste for you to drop out. Like I don’t think you should do that.” She had reached the final stages when she found her self re-committing to the degree.

I’m finishing because I think the work matters. I think the way that I’ve done my project matters. And the way that I’ll talk about the work continue to talk about the work in the public umm matters. That’s what I’ve come to learn I think really in the past year and a half like really writing. Really seeing myself as a writer and a thinker that took a really long time. Like that took people to push me to say that's what you are. As a doctoral candidate. You’re a thinker, you're you have to consider yourself this. Umm and that's really taken a different mode for me. Umm I didn’t really think of myself as a writer or a thinker. I think I’ve always thought of myself as a teacher.

As such she kept pushing through. She defended the summer after our last interview. Gloria loved and enjoyed being in school because it afforded her freedom and opportunity to learn. She
never saw herself pursuing a PhD, but she did see herself as a college graduate, because that meant she would be an adult. To have reached college graduate status, opened the door for more dreams that she continues to accomplish even when she finds herself full of doubts, but also in spaces where barriers and obstacles look different – lack of advisors of color, lack of support in her research, lack of guidance, etc.

All of the *mujeres* and their families while unsure of how they were going to get through the educational pipeline, there was hope for some form of education. For Sor Juana it was clear when she saw her mothers disappointed when her older brother dropped out of high school only three months before the school year ended. In the case of Gloria, her parents would take away school related activities if she did not do well in school and would remind her that she had to get an education. Before the passing of her mother, Emma would be reminded that she needed to get an education so she would not need to depend on anyone else, especially a man, for her to be able to survive. And while her father did not always verbally express the importance of an education, he opted not to change her from schools so that she could stay in the honors program and would make that daily drive to and from their home in the opposite side of the school. These, *mujeres* faced challenges all through out their educational journey, starting from elementary school, as mentioned earlier, including being placed in English only classes when they only spoke Spanish or knew very little English. As they moved up the education pipeline, they had to make decisions to become prepared for college, even if they were not 100% sure how they would be able to go, yet they never quit trying. While, they have had their doubts through out their journey, they have found that their families have been instrumental in their motivation to continue and to aspire for more. Yes, they have been challenged by their gender and the
expectations that has meant, however, that has also been their driving force to move upward and forward in the education pipeline.

Familial Capital

Familial capital is defined as “cultural knowledge’s nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, and other extended family were mentioned as strong transmitters of educational aspirations and moral lesson, as well as direct providers of support in school and learning life lessons.

All of the *mujeres* in the study, shared in different ways, how their family stories and practices impacted the research and work that they continue to do in their doctoral program. For example, Cherrie shared that it was her mother that first nurtured her love of math,

I remember when we were little, my mom used to babysit there was a boy who was my same age, my cousin. When we were little, to entertain us, she would play math games, math races between us. That was like five, six years old. We would compete, like who could do addition and subtraction faster, and multiplication. My mom would just create like these huge one-hundred problem sets that she would just sit us down with and be like "Here, just compete with each other."

Cherrie’s mother had an elementary school level education in Mexico, thus taking a big chance with math activities for her daughter. Cherrie is a quantitative researcher that uses math all of the time. She began as a chemical engineer and moved towards a degree in technical systems management, “mixture of agriculture engineering and business”, where she still used math. A degree that would offer her the opportunity to be a strong candidate for the IO Psychology program.
In the case of Gloria, both her parents (mother and step-father) expressed the importance of school, however it was when her mother was a single parent that Gloria learned to love reading. Her mother worked in Catholic nursing home, where the nuns would read to her. Also, her grandfather, pushed “He would go to church all the time. He was very ‘She needs to go to a Catholic school’”. Even though because of cost and the distance of the school, she eventually moved to a public school, her parents were “always like, ‘If whatever you're doing outside of learning, school, gets in the way of that ... if you don't get straight A's we’re going to take something away’.” School was important to her parents. They even moved her to a better school, when they learned that her younger brother was not reading at 4th grade. Regardless having a school education, high school education, was really important to her parents. While, her parents were clear that they could not support her financially when she went off to college, her step father and brother drove her and moved her in to the dorms, and occasionally would go visit her and take her out to lunch. Her step father was very proud of her taking ownership of her education, and he shared that with her multiple times.

For Sor Juana, Maria Felix, and Emma, going to school and getting an education was critical for their families. For Emma, she shared that it was her “mom was much more of the, she used to stress education way more than my dad does. My dad finds it irrelevant to get an education. Or not as important kinda thing.” Her father, who took care of her and her siblings after her mother’s passing, found schooling irrelevant because both of his sons (one younger and one older than Emma) dropped out of college, however his actions were very contradictory. When Emma’s mother passed away, so that she would not have to start over, he would drive her and her older brother to their old school. Emma’s mother and father were divorced and so when her mother passed away, they had to go live with him. Her grandmother, however, was also
supportive of her schooling. If her father had to work early or late, she would care for them until their father could come and get them.

For Sor Juana, going to school and graduating high school was very important to her parents. Both of her parents came from large families and therefore were not given the opportunity to go to school. Her older male siblings also did not go to school and her oldest sister only went to school in Mexico for a short period of time. She shared that, “My mom was really, really upset when my brother dropped out of school a few months before graduating. It was because he got used to working and making money… The three youngest, we were the only ones who graduated from high school. I was the only one that actually went farther.” For Sor Juana, the support her family gave her extended all the way to graduate school. While she made it clear that they may not know about theories and books, they have always supported her financially, even if that was by them taking a trip to visit her in college to take her out to lunch, buy groceries or pay her rent. As a graduate student, they have done the same, especially provided financial support.

The support from Maria Felix’s family has been strong. Her mother has been by her side at every critical moment. Maria Felix had a turbulent history in school, letting the toxic environment of her neighborhood take over her life when she needed to be focusing on school. Adding, “in my social activities and my personality was like, man this girl is too intense. She's too much to handle, you know. And it's like, people really had to believe in me. And the reason that they kept believing in me, was not so much in myself, but because of my mom. Because they saw how much she tried and how much she cared and how much she was present.” Having a strong presence in school, made it so that the teachers and administrators gave support to Maria Felix, that they try to be there for her as well. For Maria Felix, seeing her mother do all this for
her and survive a domestic violence relationship, helped her shape up. She was a smart child and student, but it was watching her mother struggle and have faith in her (Maria Felix) that gave her motivation to keep going. Most recently, with the faculty advisor crisis, her families’ response was,

    My mom was there for me, picking me up off the ground when I couldn’t even get my head up. It was so traumatic, that moment...So, my brother said, she’s jealous, don’t worry about her. My dad said, she’s a bitch, you’ll find somebody better...

They didn’t even understand like, really the severity of it or what I was going through or the stress it was entailing on my health. Like, they just saw me and I didn’t look right. I didn’t look well, and I wasn’t happy and I wasn’t myself. And they want me to be me and love me, so they want me to be well. They don’t care if I get a PhD. My mom was there for me the whole step of the way. She was there. So, she knows, she knows what it is.

For Maria Felix, her family but in particular her mother, have played an important role in her educational aspirations. In the simplest terms, they have her back. Her health and her life were more important than any degree she earned, however they will support her to ensure she finished her degree. Her mother has always believed in her academic potential and as such has created a path for her, and opened many opportunities for that to happen. Neither of them have ever sat back and took it as it came sitting down, they always found a way to stand up and keep pushing forward.

    Family, has played a key role in the mujeres educational aspirations as well as ensuring that they reach those dreams. Not always in the ways that one would think, such as attending PTA meetings or being in the PTA, or even attending parent-teacher meetings, however by sharing the importance of school and an education, as well as the mujeres realization of the
limited educational opportunities to for their own parents, gave them the drive to pursue their educational dreams.

Familial-Social-Navigational Capital(s)

Yosso (2005) defines social capital as “networks of people and community resources, these peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions” (p.79). Navigational capital then refers to “skills of maneuvering through social institutions…[specially] the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). I placed familial, social and navigational capital together, while they are distinct forms of community cultural wealth, I find them to have been interweaved/connected. For the success of these mujeres would have not been possible, in many ways, without an extension of familial capital in the form of social and navigational capital. For many of the mujeres, these social and navigational networks and resources became an extension of familial capital.

For example, for Sor Juana having her female cousin go off to college offered the opportunity for her to think about college and the fact that she could go away to college, even if she was a girl. Cherrie’s older sister, was admitted to University of the Midwest, but did not go because she did not get enough financial aid and so she went to a college closer to home, she then realized that her degree did not hold the same weight as University of the Midwest, and so when Cherrie was admitted, and their parents forbid her to go, her sister insisted and encouraged her (Cherrie) to go. As the family accountant, she was even able to provide Cherrie with their parents’ information so that she could apply to financial aid. For Emma, having witnessed her siblings both drop out of college, provided her with the opportunity to prove her father wrong.
and that women could go to college and graduate. Furthermore, having the support of her grandmother was instrumental, because her grandmother was in some ways the voice of her mother and that pushed her to go on to college and then graduate school. By moving to the suburbs, Gloria, had the opportunity to have better schooling and access to counselors that encouraged her to apply to college. Furthermore, having been given a Harvard sweatshirt early on as a Christmas gift, instilled curiosity about college and that a place where learning existed beyond high school.

Family members, extended and close, helped them navigate some parts of high school and how to go to college, as well as inspire the to go to college. However, that was still limited because majority of the *mujeres* were the first in their families to be educated in the US school system and as such the first to navigate the US schooling system, that meant that they needed to extend their social networks to get information about college and later on for graduate education. They were all encouraged to go to college, but very few in their families were able to share the how to skills. Nevertheless, in high school most of the social networks extended to ensure that they be placed in college prep courses by taking Honors and AP courses, like Emma, and Cherrie needed to do since they were not at the college preparatory high school. Sor Juana was also in college preparatory courses, “I think even in middle school and high school I think a lot of my friend circle shifted and there was a lot more white. I don't know if it was because I always was in advanced classes. So I don't know if I just got tracked into. There weren't that many brown people in those type of classes.” Gloria was in a similar situation that by default was in college preparatory courses because she was as suburban high school.

By being in a college preparatory track and involved in other clubs, Sor Juana was “really involved in student council. Then I was also in the National Honor Society. There is a lot of talk
about college in those type of places. Teachers kept asking, “Where are you going to go? Where are you going to go?” Once you meet with the guidance counselor around junior year they start asking you the same question like what you’re thinking of doing after graduating. She was really nice. She was the only Latina student guidance counselor there.” Furthermore, “one of my student council advisers, one of the two teachers that ran student council. He was working on his master’s. I think he was starting to work on it around my junior/senior year. I think that’s when I realized, you’d want to do something higher than just the four-year education. That was the first time I think I realized that going to college is not, it’s only one step.” In high school, she was involved in academic clubs, nothing to do with cultural identity. This mattered, because once she went off to University of Wisconsin, she missed out on many opportunities for first generation college students, and so she relied heavily on her social networks to navigate a predominately white institution. It was through her racial/ethnic social networks, like Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A) that she learned of the McNair Scholars program. Through McNair she gained invaluable skills, like conducting research, she adds, “they[McNair] also helped a lot with the graduate applications, a lot. I don’t think I would have gone into grad school had it not been just for their support and their guidance through the whole, just even the application process.” Her McNair faculty mentor(s), she had two Latina historians as her mentor, something completely unheard of that provided unconditional support in the graduate school application process and more. She shared that they were encouraging, “You’re going to get through. You can do it. This is what you need to do. Don’t let these things hold you back,” things like that, and more importantly they supported her intellectual curiosity and growth. At the graduate level, being part of summer pre-doctoral program, provided her with the opportunity to learn of the various services and resources available to doctoral students, engage in her research
earlier than her peers and also establish relationships with faculty of color, in particular more Latina/o historians. These relationships have led to being able to navigate the academy as a woman of color, and to be able to situate her research work in a way that will lead to further support and funding to be able to complete her PhD.

Similarly, Emma, found support in McNair. While she became aware of McNair because she needed a job for the summer, she found it to be beneficial and gained interest in graduate school. She shared that graduate school and applying was both a result of friends who were already in graduate school and McNair, “doing her social work at University of the Midwest and a friend that’s doing education policy at Pittsburgh the University of Pennsylvania or something that’s over there. So he helped me understand how to apply he’s like apply for the PhD cause you’re guaranteed funding …Everything else I kind of remembered from McNair, kind of like pointers. And they had a book that they gave us so I used that book that they gave us as just the fact that I had those resources from McNair kind of helped me. And I would contact the McNair coordinator for the waivers, the fee waivers.” It was also the faculty mentor she had from McNair that wrote letters of recommendation and encouraged her to think about transferring into his program, after she began to consider leaving the department of education.

Maria Felix offered a different way to think about social and navigational capital, that in many ways captures the essence of Community Cultural Wealth,

Because I've always been an investigator. I learned that and that I should be a researcher so I know what I need. I always had this mindset because I came from the streets. You can quote me when you're writing this. I don't mean to sound like a certain way, but my social life was that I saw people hustling. I saw people getting money. I saw people doing things so I'm like, "What do researchers do? They hustle. They get money. They get what
they need and they do more with it," so this was my mindset, like all that rap music, all that stuff. It was like, "Okay. I'm going to hustle my way to the top. I need this. Where am I going to find it? I'm going to go to the minority student mentoring place. I need this. I'm going to go to the women's in sciences tutoring place. I need this. I'm going to go to the cultural house. I need this. I'm going to get a job in doing research." Whatever I need, God allowed me to find a way to get there, and so I've always had faith in God and he's opened the doors for me. I think my strong value with faith, that nothing seems hopeless or too hard, even though at the moment it was like the most crushing thing in the world, like after I fall and I freaked out and I got all frazzled like a little mouse on a wheel then I'm like, "Okay, where are we going with this?"

Maria Felix used the skills that she learned in the streets, those social networks to navigate the academy at multiple levels as an undergraduate and graduate student, both master's and doctoral level. The relationships she built helped in many ways including her research, “I’m cultivating my own work, I’m setting my own funding I’m working with my own networks, I’m establishing those networks, building those relationships studying the research and doing interventions analyzing the data. I feel like those two chickens where they’re making bread and all of want bread at the end and the ones like help me. Umm and this, do you wanna help me sow the loaf of bread and I just wanna share it with the community like all my skills and talents.”

It was the relationship that Cherríe created in high school with the Society for Hispanics Professional Engineers (SHPE) that helped her navigate being a chemical engineering student. Though she eventually transferred to a different program, she shared, “things I worked with SHPE I created all these program for retention of Latinos in engineering.” As an engineering major she was in a themed dorm, however she found it to be geared towards white women and so
with SHPE she was able to learn the ropes of college as a science major and a woman. Through SHPE, she helped develop “a summer program so we would invite students who would have ... Who got into the university and went to a bad high school, something like that, to come and spend like a week before classes started. But we would let them know all the different resources that were in the university and let them know like, SHPE makes this and how to get help and make sure that if they were struggling then they knew where to go.”

For Gloria, the social networks, while small, that she had created helped her in multiple ways in the doctoral journey. She was advised by her mentor, “if you’re gonna be here, you’re gonna work here, you’ve gotta learn how to work with white kids too. Like there’s a lot of white people, a lot of white kids here, you gotta do that,” who also wrote her letter of recommendation for admission to the doctoral program. This mentor, was also a high ranking administrator. Unlike the other mujeres, Gloria, did not belong to any program for minority students, she was not heavily recruited either. Gloria, did however, have a network through a Latina based sorority that she joined as an undergraduate. Of all of the mujeres, she is the only one that was part of a sorority.

In another instance, when Gloria was about to drop out, she shared that, I was in contact with [a friend], and she was like hey there’s this conference in May, you should try to present some of your work. And I was like ok, so I’ll put in a proposal. If it gets accepted and I go there and I talk to people who clearly don’t know me or anything about the project, and they don’t think it’s stupid or crazy or doesn’t make sense, I’ll try to keep going. But if I get there and they’re like this makes no sense, god knows what you did; then I’m just gonna drop out because I can’t keep doing this.
And Dr. AMAZING was there and she’s like wow. She came to my session, and I was like wow! That’s cool! Alright. She’s like “how are you, what’s up?” and I’m like you know I think I’m gonna drop out… And she was like, call the secretary and tell her that I’ll be your advisor. Like I’ll fill out the form, I’ll email her today. I don’t think you should quit because you’ve done so much work. Like it would be a waste for you to drop out.

So for Gloria, the social networks that she had formed helped her gain the validation she needed to move forward in the program. She was able to show her work to others and most importantly gain an advisor that was there for her so that she could finish her work. It was this relationship that she needed to move forward, but most importantly it was the insight the advisor and her friend were able to provide that helped her navigate a space that she no longer felt welcomed in. As she shared, “because unless people like you, unless you’re a cool kid, nobody gives a shit what you’re doing. Nobody cares. I wasn’t recruited to be you know, a grad student in the department. No one cares what I’m doing. It doesn’t matter! So I have to figure out a way to do this for myself. You know? And to show that I can finish something that I started, but also to hold the project to the integrity of the kids that it’s about. You know? That it’s about this important space.”

Each mujer, found a network that led them to resources and developed strategies to navigate the academy, the space they did not belong to. They achieved this, however, through first their familial capital, that watered and tended their aspirations for schooling and an education. Familia that valued education heavily, and that assisted them to get that education in whatever way they were able to, economically, or by letting them go off to college. It was through these acts that these mujeres, then furthered developed social networks that became
instrumental in navigating the academy. Teachers, counselors, advisors, friends, and extended family members were also instrumental and supported their development of navigational capital that changed their educational path and because of them are now en route to becoming doctors, PhD’s.

*Linguist Capital*

Linguistic capital reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills. In addition, these children most often have been engaged participants in a storytelling tradition, that may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, stories (*cuentos*) and proverbs (*dichos*) (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78 - 79).

“‘We’re going to have to control your tongue,’” the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from m mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode…

‘We’re going to have to do something about your tongue,’ I hear the anger in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. ‘I’ve never seen anything as strong or as stubborn,’ he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?” Adding, “who is to say that robbing people of their language is less violent than war?” (p. 2947).

For the *mujeres* there were two levels of linguistic capital. The first level was the ability to speak Spanish, or more like having the space to speak Spanish and learn to read and write Spanish within the school setting. Both Sor Juana and Emma experienced some of the more terrorizing forms of language robbery. From early schooling, Sor Juana and Emma were both
placed in English only classes and they either learned or failed. Cherríe, began in a Spanish-English bilingual program, but when she moved school she was placed in an English only class with limited Spanish resources. She began to do poorly in school. She went from an A student to a C-D student. She had to learn quickly or she would completely be left behind.

In graduate school, Sor Juana, has had to reclaim the Spanish language for the purpose of accessing her research as well as to provide some sort of understating of higher education and graduate school to her home/family and the community,

I don’t know I think as time goes on and like I open up a little bit more about the research and try, cause also it’s a little harder to explain in, at least for me sometimes I have trouble trying to explaining in Spanish you know. Umm trying to translate some of the meaning behind all of this, like why is this important? So, it’s also been a struggle with myself being able to convey that message of like why this matters you know. Doing the academic talk without the academic talk and then doing it in Spanish. Umm, so (laughs) it’s a balancing act. But I think umm when I talk to them a little bit more about when I start talking about the meat packing plants and like I wanna know why you ended up here? I wanna know you’re the working conditions, I wanna know what’s happening inside. Then my mom gets really excited she’s like do it! Do it! Show them what’s happening. I think they’ve been very supportive, they’re just like aww it’s gonna take you forever! And then I try to explain the whole well if I’m going to be a professor, I still have to go through this I try to explain the whole tenure track process.

In other instances, speaking Spanish or their home language has been as an act for (re)claiming their Mexican identity,

People that I grew up going to elementary, middle school, they never knew I was born in
Mexico until one, they would hear me speak Spanish for whatever reason I spoke Spanish around them which was never really. Two, when I would say I’d gone to Mexico for vacation. Then it dawned on them like, “Yeah actually, you were born in Mexico.” The majority of people think of me as Native American or Indian or some, actually one time in Madison I got, someone thought I was Asian (Sor Juana).

Cherríe adds,

People ... They don't act like that but the minute I introduce myself I know now that I have to say my name in Spanish so that they know that I'm Latina right away. So I'm "Hi, my name is XXX (heavy Spanish pronunciation) and then they're like, "Oh, I thought you were white." You know, like always. But I know it's like the first thing I do is introduce myself in Spanish and then just, they know that I belong. Even if you read my name (Cherrie).

Using language to assert her Latina identity within her own community, and at the same time asserting her name with a foreign accent or the way it is suppose to be sounded out to assert that she is not part of the dominant group, she is not white;

I mean I think even before that I always knew I have to like, let them know that I was one of them. I've always been aware of that part. I just wasn't aware of the privilege that came with being white that was the part that I wasn't aware of. But I was always aware that I had to you know, when I met other Latinos I had to let them know that I was Latina because they would have no idea...a lot of my friends are also white. So we all go through the same things and we always just tell each other, "Oh, just make sure you say your name in Spanish." Or like ... We'll try to do something that makes it sound like we're really Mexican. So that people know that we're also Latinos (Cherrie).
For Maria Felix, her use of Spanish was critiqued and used against her when creating the data collection instrument, an interview guide;

We know what an interview guide looks like and the language in it. So I wrote one in English, I wrote one in Spanish cause I was doing a pilot study for health and wellness and dimensions of wellness for Latinos. This is what my focus was, and this is what my focus was with her. And then I did the interview guide and she didn’t edit anything she just wrote in the comments, “where did you get your ideas from? This is completely outrageous.” And then she highlighted a section that said, “Now I’m going to ask you questions” she’s like “What the hell is this? This is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard” she’s like how could you call yourself a native speaker, and she’s like you’re gonna say “to you? “You’re gonna say to you? That’s her comment, that’s like her only comment and I stood back and I like not only is she berating me and being super deconstructive but she’s also calling me out for my native tongue? First of all, my native language is Spanish, it is so what? But all the students that are in your lab are foreigners from Latin America. You would never accuse them of having poor English right? And then you’re gonna tell me because I wrote to you in a sentence? Instead of I’m going to ask you it said I’m going to ask you? Like. And that was when I was like I can’t even anymore. There’s no there’s nothing you know? There’s from this point on I feel that the only thing that she sees in me is my flaws

The critique of Maria Felix use of Spanish in her research was insulting and not a critique that would be encouraging. As such, it served as a way to call her out of her Otherness. Even though Maria Felix adds that “my education as a youth before high school, I never had a friend who wasn't Mexican and you know, I spoke Spanish until I was able to go to school and learn
English.” And so, showing that her first language was Spanish. More likely the Spanish that most of the participants in her study spoke rather than the formal or native Spanish of Latin America.

Similarly, Emma, used her ability to speak Spanish as way to connect her college experience and research to the community. It was important for her to maintain the language,

The Y. The YMCA in Chicago. I couldn't take it so I quit and then I was just there off for a couple, 2 months or so. Then I actually got a job as a head start teacher and visiting the kids in Chicago. It was really awesome because I got to work with my very own community. I get to travel to different homes within the community and get to interact with other moms and the little kids. I get to speak Spanish. There was some Spanish Speaking going on.

The other level linguistic capital, is being able to code switch form academic jargon and that of the streets or the home. However, the mujeres share that is not always easy to do or navigate through,

   It was okay for me to use that language here but then ... I don't know. Then if I talk kind of like a Chicagoan or if I talk like I do back home here, people don't take me seriously here. If I talk academically back home, people think I'm contentious. It's just like what the fuck? I'm not trying to be contentious, I'm just trying to use the vocab that I've learned now. I'm not trying to prove myself that I'm better than you. It was tough.

The navigating through speaking Spanish, but also within academic jargon and basic English or street/home forms of speaking is a skill. A skill that they have had to master in order to be able to be part of the multiple worlds that they live in. Anzaldúa (1987) adds,

   There is no one Chicano language jus as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a
Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

Collectively, however, the *mujeres* agree that “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue – my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.” As such, (re)claiming their home language and ways of communicating with their community even as it counters the academy.

*Resistant Capital*

Finally, resistant capital, Yosso (2005) refers to this as “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 80). Adding that, this form of cultural wealth is grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color (p. 80). For the *mujeres* in this study, this was similar to what Villenas and Moreno (2001) share in their work of the contradictions that Latina mother face as they try to teach their daughters to *valerse por si mismas* (value themselves and be self-reliant) within structure of inequality such as racism, capitalism and patriarchy. As such, parents, in this case the mothers are instructing their daughters to engage in behaviors that challenge the status quo. I have always shared with friends, that my mother raised me like a boy, because she had always told me that I could not rely on anyone, that I could not show emotion, that I should work hard and without complaining, and yet when I was afforded the opportunity to leave for college, she suggested that young ladies did not leave home. As such, I had to figure out a way to get what I
wanted but help her get what she wanted. I went to the college in my county, but I would live on campus, and that was not negotiable. That is what she had taught me after all.

The *mujeres* in this study, all share resistant capital. If they did not have this, they more likely would have not made it this far. In every aspect of their life – gender, social class, race/ethnicity, they’ve had to learn to respond in an oppositional manner, resist subordination and as such become producers of counter-narratives to the majoritarian narrative.

Early on in school, Gloria had a difficult time with math, she felt that it would be the one thing that would hold her back in going off to college. She had already shortened the list of colleges she would apply to because she was told that college cost too much money, however it was her interaction with her counselor that made it clear that she had a different challenge to overcome,

She was like, "Well, I don't know. You're really nice and you're funny and you're doing really well but I don't know if you're smart enough to go to these places." She's like, "I'll write you a letter, but I just don't want you to get your hopes up." I was like, "Well, I'm going somewhere. I don't care where it is but I'm going to get out of here. So can you write the letter or not?" Pretty much in the kid way. You can't be all like, "Look lady," when you're 18. She wrote the letter and I was like okay and I applied. I actually, got sad about it because I was like, "Okay, maybe I'm not good enough to go. I'm really struggling with math and I'm going to have to take some math. I don't really know what I want to do but I know I just want to get out of here." I'm like, "Well, whatever, I'm just going to try."

Gloria, already faced multiple issues at home, especially with going off to college and having to pay for it on her own. However, she knew that college was the next step for her. She would not
give up on going, regardless of what it took. She had done her research and knew that Wisconsin State would be a great fit, financially. As a doctoral student, even when she faced multiple challenges, including almost 8 years to finish the degree, she still took risks. She would put a foot in front of the other. By taking a chance to present her work at a conference and listening to her friend, she was able to find the support she needed to move forward and finish the degree.

She also created her own path/steps towards finishing the degree, such as,

I, I don’t participate in a writing group, but I write five days a week. And if I see people I’m like hey, how are you? Good to see you. But it doesn’t stop me from writing. It doesn’t say, oh well, you know [so and so] is not writing today so who am I gonna write with. It’s snowing outside oh, I can’t go to coffee I can’t write today. It doesn’t matter, I have to write, I have to put myself in that situation where I’m sitting with my computer and I have my notes with me and I feel like I’m stuck. There’s nobody there with me. But, the papers and me. And I just have to keep going, and keep going, and keep going.

Adding,

“I think that I make people uncomfortable. There’s no other queer, butch woman in the fuckin department. But there’s nobody else in the department that looks like me, that acts like me, that’s trying to get at what I’m trying to get at in the way I’m trying to get at it. I’m not a high femme. Like I’m not out there doing shit that these other girls are, like that’s just not me. I’m not putting my race ahead of my sexuality, or my gender in front of my race. Like, they’re all together at the same time I’m sorry that makes people uncomfortable I’m sorry that’s hard for you, but that’s me. You know? Like I’m gonna talk about things that I’m gonna talk about, in the way that I need to talk about them. Cause I’m 35 years old. And I’m just, I’m too old to beat around the bush. Like I’m not
just gonna do that anymore, Like I just can’t. So I’ve had to learn how to do it without them. I just, I couldn’t be sad about it anymore. Because that was stopping me from progressing. So I take what I need to take and I’m gonna move forward.

Finally, sharing that

the reason again, the reasons why I started are not the reasons why I’m finishing. There’s no romance involved in this at all. It’s not romantic anymore. It’s probably not even sexy anymore. It’s just a project. That matters! It’s something that I did. But, I’m not trying to change the world, I just wanna make an intervention in this small little piece. I don’t know if I can change the world anymore but I know that for my sanity that I have to finish.

For Maria Felix, the sentiment is very similar. She allowed for a long period to be abused by the mentor she called advisor and friend, she added “when I started I was doing it for her, I was doing it for my community I was doing it for God, but not for myself. I was like I’m just gonna endure it and me voy a aguantar y lo voy hacer cause I need to do it for all these little people.” She also feels pressure to continue because she “will be the first Latina Mexican, first generation American born woman to graduate from my department. There’s no Mexican women in my department. There’s hardly any women in my department.” However, the other reason why she feels the need to finish is,

I have a commitment I have a call I have a responsibility all those things. To act against injustices and to position myself in a place where I will be well equipped and credentials to have that talking point to say like you can have all these different viewpoints on Latino’s and and you can look at all these statistics but I can stand here clearly and show you that I’m not, and speak to you as a mentor or a cheerleader or somebody who’s been
through what most of a lot of these youth in this country are going through and I will still be here. Despite all the people trying to hold me down.

Both Cherrie and Sor Juana, had to fight to be able to go off to college. Sor Juana shared that she had to hurt her father’s ego for him to understand the value of going to University of Wisconsin, “Then just making my case. I work hard to go to this school. It is the best school in the state. I think that hit their pride and they were like, OK, we'll let you go then.” She added that, “I think they're happier because they see that me going away definitely paid off. They realized that if I stayed I wouldn't be in grad school. Or wouldn't have figured out what I wanted to do with my life.” She had to stand her ground in order for her to be able to go off to college. Similarly, Cherrie had to do the same once in high school but she lost that battle and ended up going to her neighborhood high school, yet for college she was not going to let that happen. She adds, “They were supportive of colleges. I think I mean, we were expected of college. They weren't supportive of me going away to college but they were supportive of college in general.”

However, when it came time,

It was when they realized that I was going away to college that it just was not acceptable to them. So it was just like a good six-month period of friction there. Their favorite thing is the school makes the student ... No the student makes the school; the school doesn't make the student. So they believed that going to Richard Daly, the community college, was equivalent to any university. Yeah. The only person that was supportive was my sister. But everybody else was like, "No, you're not going.” So I pretty much just didn't tell them I was leaving until like a month before I left just to avoid all the fights.

Cherrie’s family eventually came to terms with her going away to college. The only thing that they now constantly remind her is to not ask for money, because she opted to leave Engineering
and continue on to pursue graduate school, she would be a poor student for ever, at least that is how they see it. Nevertheless, they are proud of her. Even as such, Cherrie knows that she is doing this because it is important and she enjoys the work. She gets to do research and get paid. She knows that with this degree, if she goes into the academy but in the School of Business, she will still be as successful as if she had gone into an engineering job right after college. With the exception that she would be doing something that she enjoys.

Emma, faced high levels of discouragement at the graduate level. In one of her journal entries she wrote,

Towards the end of the semester I began to realize that the concept of pursuing a PhD was sort of superficial. I was told that my actual research would be disregarded, and trying to bring about change in the United States’ educational system would be impossible. And I completely understand that doing research in general is beneficial because it helps bring relevant issues to the forefront. However, I felt as though some of my peers were not pursuing their PhD degrees for the betterment of society, but did it for egotistical reasons. That was sort of discouraging, it feels as if these people are in competition with one another, comparing who’s smarter, which is something I despise. I am more about actually caring for the community, and actually getting involved and ACTUALLY bringing about change, so if the PhD wasn’t going to secure that, what is the point in wasting my time and money in something that seems much more of a personal gain. Maybe it’s the environment (being an R1 institution and a PWI) and/or the lack of support for its Latin@ students, but for now I know for sure that I want to delay obtaining my PhD and hope to continue working in the community, for the community.

Emma continues by adding,

However, feeling outta place wasn’t the reason why I decided not to pursue the PhD. I strongly believe that other individuals end up going through similar or different life circumstances that might impede their academic pursuit, but I guess my circumstances would be considered dire compared to the majority of my peers. I think that family (particularly my brother), peers, and some faculty along with my own self-drive helped me persevere and finish my first year of graduate school. My brother and friends kept me motivated throughout the way, mostly because they know I made it this far and want to see me finish, but most of them didn’t completely understand why I was in graduate school. I would have to say that the few faculty members I met were able to provide the full on support I needed. Both of my job supervisors and some of my professors were very supportive, and did try their best to convince me to stay and also provided on-going support. However, I also have a strong self-drive, if I start something I must finish it no
matter how unbearable it may be. I wanted to prove it to myself and others that although ‘I’m just a kid from the hood’ I was able to make it this far, and so can others.

Though Emma, did not continue on to the PhD, that drive is still very much in her. She did prove to many that she was able to succeed. They may not ever know her own personal reasons for not continuing on, at least not at this instance, but she still remains as part of a very small percentage of Latina/os to earn a high level of educational attainment. Furthermore, this is just the ending of one the chapters in her life, but not the end of her book/story.

Summary

In this chapter, through carefully selected excerpts from the mujeres testimonios and the use of community cultural wealth model highlight the ways and strategies used by these mujeres to navigate and excel in the educational pipeline. Through their testimonio, the mujeres in the study addressed and reflected on the research questions proposed by this study, in particular exploring how their current and past experiences influence their completion of the doctoral degree as well the impact of the K through 16 (college), has had in preparing them to navigate graduate education. Key to these questions, was the role of family, culture, gender and class.

A community cultural wealth model, offered the opportunity to showcase the various capitals and how they are connected, used and developed throughout the educational pathways of the mujeres in this study. Their testimonios offered insight on how they managed to navigate and move towards the final goal, the PhD. These mujeres bravely shared their testimonios so that their experiences be acknowledged, valued and recognized, because too often they are silenced and pushed to the sides.
Chapter 6: Discussion, Recommendations and Final Thoughts

This study explored if and how life history and *testimonio* as methods can assist in understanding the ways *Mexicanas* develop strategies for navigating higher education, in particular the doctoral journey, in the Midwest. A life history method offered the opportunity to examine the educational trajectory of five Latinas of Mexican descent as *they* recalled it, as *they* remembered it, anecdotal snapshots. A *testimonio* offered me the opportunity to expose the *papelitos guardados* of contradiction as well as resistance of the multiple oppressive institutional structures the *mujeres* belonged to through out educational journeys. Furthermore, through *testimonios*, the *mujeres* narratives become more than just the retelling of a story – they depicted a sense of urgency that moves me beyond just sharing their lived experiences, challenging me as a researcher and so their voices become counternarratives to the dominant narrative about Latinas in education. As such, the act of *testimoniar/*testimonio then “turns the established narrative on its head, seeing through, resisting, and subverting its assumptions” (Anzaldúa 2002, p. 561). Their *testimonios* reclaim these experiences and embraces them as sources of strength enable them to succeed.

Furthermore, by using Community Cultural Wealth, with roots extending from Critical Race Theory and LatCrit, it exposed narratives that counter the deficit narratives of Latina/os and education. CCW was also instrumental in answering the following questions - 1) What strategies did first generation *Mexicanas* employ when navigating their doctoral studies at public, Research I and Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in the Midwest, and what role, if any, did family, culture, gender and class play in their formation as Mexicana scholars? Furthermore, it sought 2) to understand the impact of their K - 16 experiences in preparing them to navigate the doctoral
journey and 3) if these past experiences and the daily experiences have had or have any influence on the completion of the doctoral degree? All within the context of being Mexicanas from the Midwest.

The Midwest, also known as the Heartland, has a long history of Latina/o/Mexican/Mexican American (im)migration. In fact, specifically Chicago in Illinois, has a rich history of Mexican residents. The first large groups of Latina/o immigrants to Chicago and the Heartland were Mexicans who arrived as contract workers to replace soldiers and other European ethnic workers during World War I, that is early 1900s. Mexican immigrants moved to neighborhood near the industries that recruited them, such as South Chicago because of the steel mills, Back of the Yards near meatpacking houses, and near the West Side area close to vast railroad networks and light industries like candy making and clothing manufacturing (Kerr, 1975). By the 1930s, Chicago became a Mexican immigrant hub, outside of the Southwest (Kerr, 1975). Therefore, the presence of Mexicans in the Heartland is before the turn of the 20th century. Even Sor Juana reminds us that the Mexican presence, especially in the meatpacking industry in places like Green Bay has been there since the 1990s, at least. We both stress an importance to research the experience of the Mexicana/o in our own disciplines because they have for too long been erased from the text.

The need to conduct research in the Heartland also stems from my own experience in the recruitment of participants for this study. The University of the Midwest, is a top ranking, public, Research I, PWI, yet my department of study is one of the most diverse programs in the nation. At least in the student body. Therefore, I did not think it would be so difficult to recruit participants for the study. Nevertheless, the recruitment took over six months. A snowball process did not work, instead it was other peers of mine that would ultimately be key in helping
me get the five participants for the study. Having to go through made it clear that this work mattered and that there was a need to research this particular region.

Getting participants for the study was difficult, even though by 2013, the Midwest was the home to 7.3% Latina/os, with Illinois making up 3.9% and being the in the top five states where Latina/os reside. Illinois (16.4%), Indiana (6.4%), Iowa 5.4%), Michigan (4.7%), Minnesota (4.9%), Missouri (3.8%), Ohio (3.3%), and Wisconsin (6.3%), are considered the eight states to constitute the Midwest. Illinois is the home of the largest Latina/o population as well as the largest Mexican immigrant population (724,845), followed by Indiana (102,777), Michigan (83,896), and Wisconsin (80,515) (Paral, 2009). With 31% of Latina/os aged 17 and younger living below poverty and 19% of the 18 – 64 age bracket living below poverty, with a median income of $21,000 (Motel & Patten, 2012).

In the state of Illinois 20% of the 25-year and over Latina/o population had less than a high school education, 29% had at least a high school education or had received their GED, however even those with a high school diploma still fell about 11% points lower than the 40% U.S. born non-Latinos (The *Illinois Report 2012 Chapter 2*, Chapa, 2012). Also, 31% had some college, with at least 14% having a bachelor’s degree and about 6% having some type of advance degree. Yet, 20% of U.S.-born Latinos with a college degree (BA) or higher is still 12% lower than the 32% of the U.S. born non-Latinos (Chapa, 2012). Nationally, Latina/os make up 17% of the U.S. population that is over 56 million people. They are currently 22% of the K – 12 populations. The median age of Latina/os is 27 years of age. Only 20% of Latina/o adults (25 and older) has earned an associate degree or higher compared to 36% of all adults, that means that 2 out of 10 Latina/os have some level of higher education while of all adults 3.6 of every 10 have earned a degree (Chapa, 2012). In 2012, Latina/os earned 7% of all master’s degrees.
conferred, in total they only represented 3% of Latina/o adults that held a master’s degree. In that same year, 5% of doctoral degrees conferred were earned by Latina/os, less than 1% of the entire Latina/o population. As of 2013, a total of 141,000 Latina/os had earned a doctoral degree as the highest degree earned, that same year only 1,200 of Latinas had earned a doctoral degree (Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014, 2015). The low educational attainment of Latina/os in the Midwest, mirrors that of the nation; the one difference being that the narratives of these students are rarely discussed or researched at the same extent as other regions of the country. Stressing the need to further research this specific area due to the richness of the history of Mexicana/os in the Midwest. And so this study adds on the current state of Latina/os, more specifically Latinas, educational attainment in the Midwest. Furthermore, suggesting that there is a lot more work to be done, researched, in this area and specifically on the history and current state of Latina/o educational attainment, lived experiences, and policy implications.

On another level, the mujeres testimonios and CCW exposed the hypocrisy of meritocracy. In this study all of the mujeres were in the “college track.” Being on the college track did not save or prevent any of the mujeres from not being academically ready for the college curriculum. Emma, Cherrie and Maria Felix, were students in the Chicago Public School system that instead of offering quality schooling and curriculum across schools, students had to take exams, pass them, and then find their way to the school, whatever that meant (taking the bus, train, carpooling). Finding a way to the school was one of the challenges that the mujeres in this study faced, because they were all smart and passed the exams, however, they were not permitted to go tot the school because they were too far. Therefore, the mujeres relied on their familial and social capitals to navigate the various stages of their educational trajectories. Emma shared on a journal entry,
Another hard aspect was dealing with peers/classmates; I would have to say that I extremely felt out of place. I mean I did have friends, but it was just hard to relate on many levels. Most of my friends, even those from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds, were not first-generation students. Many of my peers had parents whom already have a Master’s or a Phd, and a few of my peers even attended some of the best schools in the nation. I felt out of place since I was a first-generation, and also I never had the education they had, since I was a product of Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

For Emma, just like the other mujeres, having done well in school and being accepted into a top ranking college and then doctoral program did not mean that she would be saved from being reminded that she was still having to catch up. Having to accept this did not take away the fact that she was a first generation Latina from inner city Chicago and that she had parents that did not just lack high levels of educational attainment but also lacked the language skills. Even, when going to a good school like Sor Juana and Gloria had done they were still unprepared for what college had installed for them. The grades, the A’s and B’s, could not protect them from being the token brown person, from having to prove themselves in class because they were brown women, or save them from having to have multiple jobs so that they could survive financially. At the doctoral level, being accepted based on a combination of requirements including GPA and grades did not protect Gloria and Maria Felix from having turbulent and traumatic relationships with their advisors that jeopardized their goal of earning the doctorate degree.

Furthermore, by schools privileging grades as knowledge, it then subtracted and devalued the educación of the mujeres. In many Latina/o communities, especially Mexican culture, the education from school is just as important and has the same value as that of educación. An educación, is not always learned through textbooks. Valenzuela (1999) defines “educación [as a] fundamental cultural construct that provides instruction on how one should live in the world. With its emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality, it provides a benchmark against which
all humans are to be judged, formally educated or not” (p. 21). Therefore, even though the majority of the mujeres parents, and even siblings, had limited educational attainment or none at all, it did not mean that they were not educados or lacked respect for others and how to conduct themselves in public spaces. Furthermore, I argue that this educación is what served the mujeres as a foundation for their love and yearning to learn and so moving through the “pipeline.”

In addition, CCW stressed the importance of family and the role their racial/ethnic culture, gender, and socioeconomic status played in their formation as future and soon-to-be Mexicana scholars. Through out their early schooling (K – 12th grade) in order to become successful academically they were taught that they would have to give up a part of their cultural identity whether that be language (no longer speaking Spanish) or being placed in college bound courses with predominately White students as the only way to successfully persist through the educational pipeline. For mujeres like Sor Juana and Gloria this meant not seeing themselves as needing support programs that would help them through out their early school and eventually navigate higher education. However, they quickly learned, just like the other mujeres, that these programs were necessarily for their survival in a space that they were not meant to be in the first place. Multiple times all of the mujeres shared how at one point or another they were made aware that they were different - the Other, and even when they were welcomed as part of the inner group/dominant group it was because they did not “appear/look” to be the Other. As the mujeres moved through and entered college their interactions with the dominant group, while maintaining their home and cultural values, forced the mujeres to Be even more Mexican. This occurred more and more often as they were questioned about their racial/ethnic identity because they didn’t look like a Mexican; whatever that meant. These experiences demonstrated that there is a prescribed idea of what a Mexican, or Latina/o, looked like for the dominant/white students
on the campus. Nevertheless, each mujer disrupted the ideas of what a Mexican looked like, behaved as, or spoke. Furthermore, each mujer’s testimonio also highlighted the diversity within the Mexican community and how they experienced the U.S. school system.

- Hey, hippie girl, you Mexican? On both sides?
- Front & back, I say.
- You sure don’t look Mexican.

A part of me wants to kick their ass. A part of me feels sorry for their stupid ignorant selves. But if you’ve never been farther south than Nuevo Laredo, how the hell would you know what Mexicans are supposed to look like, right?


Look, I don’t know what you’re talking about when you say I don’t look Mexican. I am Mexican. Even though I was born on the U.S. side of the border.

(Cisneros, 2003, p. 353)

The mujeres in this study are both called out and embraced for being and not being “Mexican.” For example, they are accepted by the dominant group until they are found out to be Mexican and because they have been accepted are expected not to be like the other Mexicans. As such, the flip side of this is that the mujeres than reject the dominants group acceptance and embrace their racial/ethnic/Mexicanness per se. However, the way(s) that they do so is differs from mujer to mujer. An example of such was in the way they identified for the study ranging from Mexicana to Mexican American and Chicana. Complicating the mujeres Mexicanas experience(s) within the educational pipeline, meaning that the experience(s) is not homogeneous within Mexican people.
Furthermore, a CCW model brings forth how the doctorate journey for the *mujeres* has been one of transformational resistance defined by Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) as “student behavior that illustrates both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice. In other words, the student holds some level of awareness and critique of her or his oppressive conditions and structures of domination and must be at least somewhat motivated by a sense of social justice” (p. 319). Through their doctoral study this transformational resistance looks like putting *Coyolxahqui* back together (bodymindspirit). To Anzaldúa, *Coyolxauhqui*, the Mesoamerican moon goddess that according to legend had her body cut up and the pieces buried in different places by her brother Huitzilopochtli is

a symbol not only of violence and hatred of women but also of how we’re split body and mind, spirit and soul. We’re separated. I think the reason this image is so important to me is that when you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She’s no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in anticolonial struggle, has been to put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit. That’s why for me there such a link between the text and the body, between textuality and sexuality, between body and the spirit (in Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, pp. 524-525)

The *mujeres* in the study are reclaiming the myth of *Coyolxauhqui*, writing for social justice and theorizing “that seeks a holistic reunification of the bodymindspirit” (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, p. 525). These *Mexicana* scholars in the making engage their work in ways that seek to reunify the bodymindspirit. Like Gloria writes,

*There is a small part of me that wishes my parents would allow themselves to be happy for me and learn how to love me in the way I need. I wish they could have been a part of my PhD journey and I wish they could see me graduate in May. But my parents left me when I needed them and I had to keep going despite their inability to try and support me*
and love me for who I was becoming. I had to learn how to be proud of myself and support myself. Of course I developed new relationships with colleagues, friends, and my partner to cultivate a kind of queer familia. Without the support of my partner, my two little dogs, a few sorority sisters, my new advisor, a few life long friends, and my own sheer will to keep going I know that I would have already dropped out. No one can do this alone—at least someone like me. It will kill you or you will kill yourself—if you don’t find different kinds of support at different stages of the PhD journey.

In the research that each mujer chose to conduct in their doctorate I find that they are on a path of healing/(re)connecting their selves: bodymindspirit. For example, Gloria shares

my methodology chapter talks about how me as a researcher and how I embody different marginalized subjectivities how that affected the research. I’m a Chicana butch and I really wanna do a project about queer youth. Because it’s really important to me that stories get told where kids aren’t dead or dying. Like I know there's more to kids than that, and as an adult I feel like I have the access and opportunity now to like help and share those stories

And Sor Juana adds,

but my thing has always been looking at labor and how umm labor has played a big big role in Mexican immigration into the Midwest or basically it’s in a lot of different places in the U.S. Umm but like then my questions like “how did Mexican immigrants and Latinos end up in Green Bay in the late 20th century when there were places such as Chicago and Milwaukee so close by that already had established communities?” like why are people wind up so far north to very cold weather where there isn’t a community where they don’t you know, there’s nothing really there. In such a late time period. And so, just like many decades ago it’s been labor like recruitment of workers to work in mainly the meat packing plants…Of Green Bay, and so what’s interesting is that at this point like in the 80’s and 90’s meatpacking has kind of lost its edge in the big cities like
in the big historically meat packing cities like Chicago, Kansas City, another cities of the Midwest. Pero, in Green Bay it just started growing when it was dying everywhere else

Maria Felix also shares,

my research line is that I’m focused a lot on oral histories and the potential for health intervention analysis. With a community health assessment that’s been ongoing three years where I’ve done work, many different projects on assets and deficits of community, community health assessments, inventory, oral history and then I’ve done a whole plan of work… my dissertation is a critique on kinesiology practices as they’re funnel to communities of color or umm I think minority communities seeing that the recommendations

The work and research projects that the mujeres ultimately chose to engage in are responses to the multiple injustices and the marginalization of both the communities of color they belong to as well as their intersectionalities of class, gender, sexuality and citizenship. Through the doctorate they have made it their objective to (re)claim themselves; bodymindspirit, putting Coyolxahqui together and (re)engaging in transformational resistance, as strategies to complete the doctorate degree.

**Recommendations**

Through testimonios, each mujer, in their own words shared recommendations to other Latinas thinking about graduate school, especially the doctorate. The first part of the list is recommended for the individual, the second part The recommendation as a list is a call for direct and immediate action. As a list, it is hoped that the instructions are as direct as possible leaving very little for misinterpretation.
To other Latinas:

1) Go into a doctoral (PhD) program for you, make this decision on your wants and interest, it is a selfish act
2) Be as informed as possible, not just on the program but on the faculty in the program

Department, Graduate College and University:

3) Intentional and purposeful recruitment of Latina and Latino graduate students
4) Encourage, mentor and guide Latina/o graduate students
5) Educate yourself (current faculty) on the complex, complicated and layered histories of Latina/os and the educational pipeline
6) Insert Latina/o readings into the “regular” classes, do not make research on Latina/os in education “alternative” readings
7) Value the experiences and conocimiento that Latina women bring to school
8) Straightforward, direct, guidelines and steps to obtaining the doctorate – a list of number of classes, exams, proposal defense, guidelines and samples of doctoral thesis
9) Foster a sense of community in the department/program, among Students of Color
10) Guaranteed funding is key [fellowships STRONGLY recommended]
11) Intentional and purposeful hiring of Latina woman faculty, from the U.S. [if they are first generation, even better]

Precolligate:

12) Provide quality college preparatory courses/curriculum across districts
13) Believe in Latinas academic potential, challenge them, rigor academics

These recommendations serve as starting points to change and strengthen the pipeline for Latinas focusing on low income, first generation, Mexicanas. It is recommended to not just be accepted to a doctoral program but complete the doctorate. Latinas of Mexican descent have the lowest educational attainment of all Latina/o groups and simultaneously are the lowest paid and fastest growing group to be head of households. As such, there is an urgency for this particular group to be part of the 1% to hold doctoral degrees because not only do their lives depend on it but so does the next generation.

Policy recommendations are needed at different levels of the educational pipeline. For example, an expansion on preschool accessibility especially in low income and segregated communities. In this study, neither mujer shared that they were enrolled in preschool or any form pre-kindergarten program. However, it has been found that preschool attendance is a key
determinant for high school completion and college attendance. I would like to add that it is not just about attending preschool but a bilingual/bicultural or culturally relevant curriculum in preschools should be the norm. Children should have an educational experience that matches what they are learning at home. While in California there is a current push for universal preschool for all, as Head Start programs are being eliminated, Midwest states like Illinois and Wisconsin should consider universal preschool at no cost especially since states like Illinois and Wisconsin are witnessing an increase in Latina/o populations particularly from Mexico and other Spanish and indigenous language speaking communities. Going a step forward a no cost preschool can be crucial in eliminating the economic gap among Communities of Color, particularly with women of color earning gaps.

At the K – 12 level increasing the number of Latina/o and/or bilingual/bicultural or possibly Midwest natives as teachers and administrators can have an impact on retention and graduation rates for first generation, low income, Students of Color at the high school level. Similarly, that can be said for college enrollment. A policy recommendation would be an agreement between local high schools and colleges/universities to increase the number of teachers from the local areas. Therefore, future teachers would be encouraged, mentored and guided through their college years to become a teacher in the community they are coming from. An incentive to consider is lowering college tuition or eliminating it completely. Cost of college attendance and teacher salaries are at a mix match. A future teacher cannot afford to have the current average loan debt and still be a good teacher.

A recommendation, in particular for the Chicago Public Schools is to eliminate its current segregatory practices through the test taking practices to determine if students can attend the college preparatory high schools. These college preparatory high schools not only have higher
standards for their students, more qualified teachers, less turn over, etc. but they are also not accessible to students that live on the “other side of town.” Even if students like the *mujeres* in this study do well and pass the test they cannot afford to attend the “free” college preparatory high school because they are located away from low income Communities of Color. This is a form of segregation that should be addressed at the local, district, state and federal level. In fact, this should be considered a violation of student rights. A policy recommendation is to eliminate the practice of testing and eliminate the college preparatory high schools. Instead the resources including teachers should be redistributed through the Chicago Public Schools. More efforts should be placed on hiring a diverse teacher and administrative body for the schools as well as distribute funds on the basis of need and not necessarily on merit. As such, rethinking the No Child Left Behind policy. Finally, the curriculum and teacher training should be on a raced-gendered framework – using a community cultural wealth model or something similar so that we can begin to work with our students from an assets based model rather than a deficit thinking model.

Within academia, the recommendations vary by level as well. However, it is clear that institutions of higher education need to be intentional in the hiring of their faculty, staff and administration. According to the American Association of University Professors “The Demographic Dividend: Why the success of Latino faculty and students is critical” report (Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012) as of 2012, only 4% of tenured or tenure-track female faculty members in the U.S. were Latinas, 78% were white, 7% were African America, and 7% were Asian American, and only 3% of female full professors were Latina. As Latinas, they are charged with additional responsibilities and evaluated differently than their peers. For example, Nuñez and Murakami-Ramalho (2012), shared that “women often face institutionalized sexism
and are expected to take on additional professional responsibilities, such as uncompensated university service, that impede their ability to advance from the junior to the senior faculty ranks.” Adding, “because of their dual status as women and as members of an underrepresented group, Latinas are more likely to encounter racism, stereotyping, lack of mentoring, tokenism, uneven promotion, and inequitable salaries when entering the academy.” As such, the colleges and departments have a responsibility to promote equity all across. The continued lack of support and equity for Latina and Latino faculty will decrease the number of hires within this racial/ethnic group. At this particular university, University of the Midwest, a research I university that prides itself in their research and faculty should then take action on the research and hire a more diverse faculty, staff, and administration. Furthermore, evaluate promotional material (evaluations, portfolios, or the forms that is decided to grant promotion to faculty, staff and/or administrator) to ensure equity at all levels.

Finally, institutions of higher education must acknowledge the demographic changes occurring around them. While Latina/os are becoming the largest racial/ethnic group in the country, they are only a part of a changing demographic in the United States. The U.S. does not look like it did 20 years ago. It is quickly changing. It just happens that Latina/os and more specifically Mexicans are becoming the face of the U.S. student body at all levels from Kindergarten to graduate education (even if in small numbers). Nevertheless, too many institutions especially the elite and/or flagship of the state refuses to acknowledge this. I strongly recommend to look at the Hispanic Serving Institutions best practices and apply them either institutionally or by department/college.
Final Thoughts

This was a purposeful research project. As a first generation, Latina of Mexican descent from a low income/working class background I found myself at odds with the academy, not just at the doctoral level but throughout. However, just like some of the *mujeres* in this study, I too was systematically tracked to be in the better classes and therefore was successful in school. But that did not mean that I was prepared. I relied heavily on my family and social networks I was developing at every level of my schooling to be able to navigate and survive the many phases of the schooling process, K – 16 and graduate education. At the doctoral level, I found myself feeling that I needed to reject part of who I was, racially/ethnically, in order to achieve. But just like the *mujeres*, I began to resist. That created friction. That meant I had to expose that I was not such a good girl/school girl. By demanding to be acknowledged, to be visible, I was disrupting dominant narratives of Latina(s), just like the *mujeres* in this study have and continue to do.

By taking on this study and exploring the experiences of Latinas of Mexican descent through *testimonios* I learned how deep the commitment for education is from Latino families. Though they may not always show it in way that the dominant group would want them to Latino families have high aspirations for their children, especially if they themselves were limited on their own educational aspirations. Adding to current research on Latina/o family educational aspirations as well as Latina academic success. Something else that I took from this study was how painful of a process it is to pursue a doctorate. Many of the *mujeres* in this study have been deeply wounded by the academy, they have scars that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives, myself included. Exposing the multiple contradictions at all levels of schooling from Kindergarten to the doctorate. However, the *mujeres* push forward, excel and finish, highlighting their resiliency and their ability to grow. Like a *nopal* (cacti) that grows in arid and semi-desert...
areas constantly fighting a hostile environment. As such the leaves become sharp thorns, a *nopal* does not have the luxury to have leaves like other plants because the strong sun dehydrates them and would be the only tender element in that thirsty land that quickly consumes any desert dweller. And even then with limited water or a nurturing environment they persist and birth *tunas* - the prickly fruit or what I consider the *mujeres* research projects/dissertation, that is not necessarily easy to peel or is as sweet as other fruits but it is a result of the environment/climate that they have fought through to be able to survive/grow.

I am humbled and honored to have had the opportunity to meet all five of these *mujeres*. Their journey to the doctorate has not been an easy one, not that they were looking for an easy path, yet they have strived. Gloria, after eight long years defended a dissertation/project that she was extremely proud of. Maria Felix, stayed on course even after parting ways with her advisor of over seven years. Cherrie continues to find ways where she can contribute to research on the role institutional and systematic racism impacts racial, ethnic and gender minorities in the workplace. Sor Juana is narrowing down the time period she will focus on for her research project, where she will insert the contribution of Mexican labor in less commonly researched geographical spaces like Green Bay, WI. And finally, while Emma opted to leave the doctoral journey, she did so knowing that a PhD is still an option because she is capable of doing the work. It is a matter of finding the mentor(s) that will nurture her intellect as well as her social justice agenda.
References


of Utah, Utah.


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DC: U.S. Department of Education.


Appendix A

Email (example):

Good afternoon PROGRAM DIRECTOR,

How are you? I am emailing you because I was interested if you could possibly help me in a study for my dissertation that I plan to conduct for the rest of this semester, fall 2013, to the end of Spring 2014. I am doing a study on Latina women, of Mexican descent, that are doctoral students in all (open) disciplines of study at the graduate level here at the University of Illinois. I would be interested in interviewing some of the students that participated in your program, most likely from the past 5 years. I have attached the email body that can be sent to the students in hopes to begin the recruitment process.

Please let me know if you are able and open for this request.

Thank you,
Mariana

(SAMPLE EMAIL TO STUDENTS)

Dear Student,

My name is Mariana Garcia and I am a graduate student in Educational Policy and Organizational Leadership interested in documenting the educational experiences of Latina women, in particular those of Mexican descent, that are first generation and of low income background that are currently in a doctoral program across disciplines. My research seeks to examine the everyday experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs across disciplines at a Midwest University, who are also from a Midwest state. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and will not affect your grades, registration or enrollment in any way. This is a three time 60-90 minutes in length interview. Each interview will be audio-recorded and will take 60 – 90 minutes in length each. Throughout the interview observation notes will also be taken. These observations are more relevant to the space (location being met at: home, office, on-campus, etc.) If you have any questions about the project or if you wish to participate, please contact me at garcia47@illinois.edu

Thank you for your help

Sincerely,
Mariana Garcia
Student Investigator
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Garcia47@illinois.edu

Dr. Yoon Pak
Project Investigator
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
yoonpak@illinois.edu

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Appendix B

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
College of Education
Education Policy, Organization and Leadership
Informed Consent

Title: *Mujeres Mexicanas* in the Academy: Narratives from the Midwest
Responsible Project Investigator: Yoon Pak, Ph.D.
Investigator: Mariana Garcia

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study that examines the everyday experiences of first generation, low income, Latina (of Mexican descent), women doctoral students from a Midwest state that attends a Midwest university. In an effort to better understand the educational journey and experiences for first generation and low-income Latina women from the Midwest, we are asking for your help in participating in this study. This study will be led by Dr. Yoon Pak, professor in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership Department, as the principal investigator in this research study and Mariana Garcia, a doctoral student in the Education Policy, Organization and Leadership Department.

In an effort to capture the educational experiences from Kindergarten to graduate education, this research study will be based on a life history method. As such, you will be asked to participate in a total of three 60 – 90 semi structured interviews, which will be audio recorded. If you choose not to be audio recorded, the investigator will take diligent notes on the conversation. We ask that you please answer all of the questions to the best of your knowledge. Nevertheless, you may choose to skip or discontinue answering the questions at any time, as your participation is completely voluntary. In addition to the interviews, it is possible that the investigator will conduct general, but not intrusive, observations. For instance, the interviewer might take notes about the surroundings while conducting the interview or take field notes at campus locations where interviewees hang out. The main purpose of these observations is to get a better sense of how participants navigate while on and off campus. Participation in this research study will not affect your grades, registration, enrollment, or relationship with the University of Illinois in any way. You will not receive any immediate or direct benefits from participating in this research. However, this research study will provide a better understanding of the everyday experiences of first generation, low income, Latina (of Mexican descent) doctoral students across disciplines from the Midwest attending a Midwest University. It is the hope of the researchers that the findings will help university administration, faculty, and counselors better serve and support Latina women across disciplines in a culturally competent manner. There are no risks in participating in the study beyond those experienced in everyday, ordinary life.

The research principal investigator (RPI) and second investigator will be the only ones to have access to the data collected. Upon transcription, interviews will be stored on a password secured computer. Transcriptions will be kept in a secured and password locked laptop to ensure confidentiality. The investigators will disseminate research results in the form of academic papers, dissertation, journal articles, and presentations at scholarly conferences. Any presentation or publication of data will not identify you as a participant, unless you have indicated that you would like your interview responses to be linked to your name in research reports and/or presentations. No information derived from this research project will be voluntarily released, except as specifically required by law.

If you have any questions regarding this research study please feel free to contact the researchers. You may also call the IRB if you feel you have been injured or harmed by this research. If you have any
questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.
I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please check your preferences on the lines below.

To have you audiotape our conversation as part of your research and analysis:
I agree ☐ don’t agree ☐

For the purpose of this study and its dissemination, I prefer that you use
A pseudonym ☐ My real name ☐

I have been offered a copy of this consent form. Yes ☐ No ☐

By signing this form I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older and that I have read and understood the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

___________________________________ ___________________
Participant Signature Date

Thank you for participating in this research.

Best Regards,

Yoon Pak, Ph.D.
Responsible Project Investigator
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Mariana Garcia
Investigator
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Appendix C

Interview Script:
I would now like to start tape-recording, is that alright with you?

I want to thank you for participating in this study, *Mujeres Mexicanas* in the Academy: Narratives from the Midwest. I will be recording this session and it will be transcribed afterwards. Once the transcriptions are completed, you will be able to review and have the opportunity to make additions or express any concerns about it. The final transcription will be read by my committee members and an outside auditor. Any quotes from this interview may be used in the dissertation publication, however, I want to remind you that your true identity will always remain anonymous. I will respect and protect your confidentiality.

If at anytime you feel too uncomfortable during the interview process, please stop and let me know. We can either take a break from the interview or terminate the interview if necessary. I would like to give you a moment to read a consent form that you will need to sign in order for me to continue with the interview.

1. Do you have any questions about the consent form?

2. Having read the consent form, do you still agree to be a part of the study?

I would like to start with some basic questions if you are ready to begin.

3. What is your ethnic/cultural background?

4. What generation Latina are you?
   (a) 1 generation: Foreign born, arrived in the U.S. after the age of 16.
   (b) 1.25 generation: Foreign born, arrived in the U.S. between the ages of 11 and 15.
   (c) 1.5 generation: Foreign born, arrived in the U.S. between the ages of 6 and 10.
   (d) 1.75 generation: Foreign born, arrived in the U.S. before the age of 5.
   (e) 2 generation: Born in the U.S. of Foreign born parents.

Family/Culture [INTERVIEW 1]

1. Do you remember anything about your first year of life?

2. How would you describe your family?

3. What characteristics do you remember most about your grandparents?
   a. What do you like most about them? What do you like least?

4. How would you describe your parents?
   a. How would you describe your mother’s personality and emotional qualities?
b. How would you describe your father’s?

c. What are some of the best and worst things about them?

5. What is the ethnic or cultural background of your parents?

6. Were there any stories of family members or ancestors who emigrated to this country?

7. What was it growing up in your house or neighborhood like?

8. What are some early memories of cultural influences?

9. What family or cultural celebrations, traditions, or rituals were important in your life?

10. Was your family different from other families in your neighborhood?

11. What cultural values were passed on to you, and by whom?

   a. What beliefs or ideals do you think your parents tried to teach you?

Early Education/ K - 12

12. What are your family beliefs about education?

13. Have you attended schools only in the United States? If not, how long did you attend school in Mexico or
    another country? What differences did you see in US schools and Mexican schools?

14. Describe your first day of school [in the U.S.]

15. Do you feel you were put into the appropriate grade level?

16. What method did the schools use to teach you English? [If it applies]

17. What helped you adjust to your new school?

18. What did you enjoy most about your school?

19. What did you least enjoy about your school?

20. DO you recall a positive memory in your early schooling? (K – 6th), how about a negative experience? How
did you over come it?

21. How would you rate your parents involvement with your school activities?

22. In your upbringing what specific things did your family do to help you in your schooling?

23. What motivated you to do well in school?

24. How were you treated at school by teachers and other students?

25. Which family members have been most influential or supportive in your educational journey?

26. Were there any major transitions/changes from elementary school to middle school to high school?

   a. Did you notice a change in parental involvement? Would you share an example of how it
      changed?

27. Do you recall a positive experience in middle school? Negative?

28. How was high school like?

29. How prepared were you in your classes? Did you take the proper classes to go to college?

30. Tell me a story when you first learned you could go to college?

31. Did your prior schooling prepare you for college? If so, how? If not, who/what helped?

32. Do you recall a positive experience in high school? Negative?

33. Tell me a story of an individual who was most influential in getting you prepared for college?

34. If you could do your schooling over again what would you change or do differently?

College [Interview 2]

35. If you can, in detail, tell me about your family’s reaction when you announced that you wanted to go to
    college?

36. How did you describe your college experiences to your family?

37. What do your family members know about your college experience? What is something that your parents
don’t know about in college?

38. Did any of your family members visit you at your college campus? What were their first impressions? If
    they didn’t visit, what were some of the barriers that prevented them from visiting?

39. What role do you play in your family?

40. What roles do the women in your family play? Men? Children? Elders?

41. Discuss the challenges of living way from your family (for you and your family members).

42. How would you describe your college experience? (Probe both academic and social experiences)

43. What were your greatest fears about coming to college? How did you overcome those fears?

44. Was there ever a time when you wanted or thought about dropping out from college? If yes, could you
    expand?
45. What have been your greatest challenges in college? What was your most negative experience in the classroom and outside the classroom?
46. In your opinion, are Mexicans (Mexican immigrants) different than US born Mexicans? How are they alike?
47. What are the challenges that you have experienced in college as a Latina [Mexican/Mexican immigrant]?
   As a female in college?
48. Did your family experience any stress when they first arrived to the U.S. If so, how did they deal with their challenges? Do they still experience these stressors?
   a. If so, how do you deal with family stress while in college?**
49. What lessons from your immigration experiences do you apply in college or as a college student?**
50. What was your major in college?

Graduate School/Doctoral Journey [Interview 3]
51. When did you decide that you would pursue a doctoral degree?
52. Anyone in your family hold a PhD? Did you know anyone that did?
53. What factors influenced your decision to seek a doctoral education?
54. Did you discuss with anyone that you would be applying to graduate school? PhD programs?
55. What was your family’s reaction?
   a. Friends?
   b. Community members?
   c. Others?
56. Can you tell me what the doctoral education experience has been like for you?
57. What is it that you study?
58. How did you come to this topic?
59. How many of your faculty are Latino? Faculty of color? Women?
   a. Did this have a role in your decision to apply to the program?
   b. Does it matter that there are (aren’t) faculty of color?
60. What stage on your doctoral program are you in?
61. What are the steps that you must take to complete your PhD
   a. Coursework? Units?
   b. Exams?
   c. Early research?
   d. Prelim?
   e. IRB?
62. So far what has been the hardest part of the doctoral program?
63. How much support have you gotten from your faculty?
   a. Dissertation advisor?
   b. Peers?
   c. Friends?
   d. Colleagues?
   e. Family?
   f. Partner?
   g. Other?
64. Have you encountered any barriers or struggles as you’ve navigated through your doctoral education?
65. What factors helped you succeed/get this far?
66. If you could give other Latinas in high school or undergrad any advice as to what may help them succeed in college, what would that advice be?
67. What recommendations would you give to educators to help Latina students further their education?
68. What could high schools, colleges, and/or universities do to encourage Latinas to further their education?
69. What else would you like to tell me about your experience as a Latina who has pursued a doctoral education?
70. What have I forgotten to ask that you feel is important?
71. If you could give advice to other Latinas in high school or undergrad as to what may help them succeed in college, what would that advice be?
Those are all of the questions I have for you at this time. Here is my email address, if within one week you decide that you would like to add anything to the interview, please do not hesitate to email me with additional information [Card with email address will be handed to the participant]

What questions do you have for me?

Where should I submit the transcripts to?

Thank you again for participating in this research study. I really appreciate your time and contribution.