

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: LATINA WOMEN: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS LEADING TO A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COMPLETION

Patricia Ann Kompare, Doctor of Education, 2014

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Examining the perception of factors that contribute to Latinas completing a college degree will allow for better understanding of this underrepresented population in higher education. While data show that a growing number of Latinas are enrolling in higher education in the United States, the number of Latinas obtaining college degrees is considerably lower when compared with their non-Latina counterparts. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to examine Latina college graduates' perceptions of the factors leading to their completion of a four-year college degree. Using autobiographical narrative inquiry and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), four Latina college graduates from a Mid-Atlantic region university were interviewed. The LatCrit framework identified six forms of cultural capital that contribute to cultural wealth. This study examined the perceptions, factors, and attitudes that enable Latinas to complete a bachelor's degree. The study further examined what steps these Latina graduates take to persist in college and obtain their degree, how they perceive what they do, and what their beliefs were regarding the contribution of Latino cultural capital to increasing academic success.

LATINA WOMEN: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS LEADING TO A FOUR-YEAR  
DEGREE COMPLETION

by

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## DEDICATION

### *Dedicacion*

This dissertation is dedicated to *mi abuelo, Vicente Trevino Garza, mi abuela, Francisca Aguilar, y mi madre, Patricia Martinez*, who instilled in me the value of education, their love for family, importance of challenging inequality and, above all, *nunca darse vencida*.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*If culture is what sets one country apart from another, then educate women and you shall have a school in every home, for it is she who shapes the family and stamps upon society the seal of her culture.*  
~Ana Roque de Duprey, Puerto Rico, 1899

#### Introduction to the Study

Education is commonly linked to a range of personal and societal benefits, including a higher standard of living and improved social well-being. Education prepares individuals for opportunities to participate as competitive members in society. In a country built by the hands of immigrants, the American concept of the value of education is not new to its diverse cultures (Baum & Flores, 2011). Immigrant parents hope that their sons and daughters will pursue successful careers and have promising futures. Latinas, in particular, are realizing their potential in the social order. This is evident in the record numbers of Latinas, surpassing the number of Latino males, enrolling in college (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Parents hope to see their daughters' faces alongside those of United Farm Workers of America co-founder Dolores Huerta, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, or Excelencia in Education President Sarita Brown. It is affirming to a younger generation of Latinas to see these Latina women as role models and examples of what they can achieve with dedication toward their goals.

The Latino population in the United States is approximately 20.5 million (Maes, 2010). Alma Morales Riojas, president of MANA, a national Latina organization, states, The demographics are clear. The trend will be that by 2033—if not sooner—one fifth to one third of the population will be Latino or Spanish-speaking, and we



have to invest in an educational system that gets as many [of these] kids as possible to graduate or continue their education (Rivera, 2008, para. 2).

Even though the Latino percentage of the general population in the United States is increasing exponentially, the number of Latinos graduating from college remains low (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, Zang & Notter, 2013). Latinos as a whole are “the fastest growing ethnic group, but the most poorly educated” (Gandara, 2010 p. 24) of all major ethnic groups. If education is so highly valued by Latinos, why are so few of them graduating from college? This question must be explored because, by 2016, one of every six undergraduate students in the United States will be Latino (Maes, 2010, Background Information, para. 2). By 2050, Latinas are expected to represent nearly one quarter of women of all ages in the United States (para. 1). These data must be recognized and these voices need to be heard in order to assist Latinas in achieving higher education success.

The increasing demographics in the United States show that Latinas are college uneducated and represent 48.9 percent of the total Latino population (para. 1). The demands of cultural tradition, detachment from their environment, and gender difference of females getting a college education have shifted, as evidenced in the growing number of Latinas enrolling in colleges (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006). More recently, 46 percent of second-generation Latinas have matriculated in college and are closing the gap in college enrollment, about the same as non-Latina White women (Llorente, 2012). However, the number of Latina college graduates has not maintained the same pace as the increase in enrollment. While there is an increased number of Latina graduates, they remain underrepresented in a four-year degree completion compared with their non-

Latino counterparts. Latinas lag behind their non-Latina counterparts by 18 percent when it comes to obtaining college degrees (Llorente, 2012). Given the growth of the Latina population, the American economy and society benefit strongly by garnering the talents of this select group of women who have much to contribute to society. To safeguard its future, the United States must develop leaders in this emerging Latina population. According to Valverde (2008), a college education prepares Latinas to take on leadership roles in the country's economic and social development.

This underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education seems contradictory to the high value that Latinas place on education. According to the Zalquette 2006 study of Latinas at a large urban university, 100 percent of the students agreed that education is the key to a prosperous future and the key that unlocks the doors to a better life. They also believe that it is very important to study and be competitive in school. A similar view of the value of education is cited by Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta (2010) that [Latino] parents and school systems agree that “although many Mexican American parents do not have a college education, they play an active role in providing support and motivation for their children to do well in school and seek a college education” (p. 62). Latino parents have high aspirations for all their children and, regardless of adversity, they will go to great lengths to provide an education for their children.

Examining the perception of factors that contribute to Latinas completing a college degree will allow for better understanding of this underrepresented population in higher education. In 2000, a White House initiative proposed the idea of translating cultural wealth into academic success (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Furthermore,

literature supports the belief that cultural wealth increases educational opportunities (p. 47).

This study examined the perceptions, factors, and attitudes that enable Latinas to complete a bachelor's degree. The study further examined what steps these Latina graduates take to persist in college and obtain their degree, how they perceive what they do, and what their beliefs are regarding the contribution of Latino cultural capital to increasing academic success.

### Background

Demographics in the United States are changing rapidly, and Latina students show an increasing presence in higher education. This represents a positive trend; however, Latinas' enrollment is the lowest when compared with other ethnic groups (Llorente, 2012). Since the 1990s, the Latina population has increased enrollment in higher education; however, Latinas remain underrepresented in higher education (Gonzalez, Jovel & Stoner, 2004). While more Latinas are attending and graduating from college than a decade ago, these rates are not keeping up with the growing population (Puente, 2012). This gain continues to mirror the challenges present in the journey to higher education. These challenges will persist if Latinas continue to be underrepresented in four-year degrees attainment. It is urgent to understand how Latinas who have four-year degree can provide a paradigm for future Latinas enrolling in higher education and if cultural wealth has contributed to their achievement. The challenges and sacrifices revealed by Latinas' experiences provide insight for other Latinas.

In 2008, the number of U.S. Latinas represented a large and influential segment of the U.S. population; indeed, at 14.4 million, the Latina population represents the fastest

growing minority. Although there is a growing number of Latinas attending college, the numbers are considerably lower when compared with their Black and White counterparts (Fuerth, 2008).

When compared with White females, many Latinas have been considered at risk for negative school outcomes by the educational system (Sy, 2006). Due to familial obligations and expectations, some Latinas may experience negative school outcomes, such as fulfilling family obligations that may detract from the time students devote to focus on college studies (Sy, 2006). Some of these women are also at risk of dropping out of college, due to the conflict between their cultural beliefs and values and those of their surrounding environment. Accordingly, this conflict can result in academic non-persistence (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

It is important for educational systems to empower Latinas by helping them foster cultural wealth to succeed in their educational endeavors. Moreover, there is a need for greater representation of Latinas in professional roles. For example, Latinas account for only 4.4 percent of graduations with bachelor's degrees from colleges and universities nationwide. This underrepresentation further reflects a need for investigation (Puente, 2009).

#### Statement of the Problem

While data show that a growing number of Latinas are enrolling in higher education in the United States, the number of Latinas obtaining college degrees is considerably lower when compared with their non-Latina counterparts. Latina college students face different educational barriers from their non-Latina counterparts and have common external characteristics that impact their academic achievement. According to

the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) and the Mexican American Legal Educational Defense Fund (MALDEF), Latinas have goals to complete college and have professional careers; however, challenges such as discrimination and gender stereotyping undermine their course (NWLC, 2009). According to the NWLC and the MALDEF, this affects Latinas' self-confidence and performance, leading to lower graduation rates (NWLC, 2009).

According to recent information by the executive director of the Campaign for College Opportunity, some factors that contribute to this lag in graduation rates by Latinas include poverty, language barriers, and lack of college information (Puente, 2012). Many Latinas come from lower socioeconomic status (SES) families, and a high percentage of Latinas live in poverty. In the total U.S. population in 2010, 25 percent of Latinas lived in poverty and 53 percent lived in low-income households (U.S. Latinas, 2008). These high levels of poverty reduce college access and employment opportunities and, as a result, these communities often cannot nourish healthy educational outcomes. In 2007, Latinas not born in the United States represented 52 percent of the total Latina population, and 76 percent did not speak English well (U.S. Latinas, 2008). In a nationwide survey sponsored by the Nielsen Company and Stanford University, Professor Emeritus of Education Michael Krist noted, "The language barrier is still a serious risk factor for [Latinos] Hispanics, and the odds of completing college significantly drops" (Yen & Armario, 2010, para. 5). This information reaffirms that language barriers hinder many Latinas from preparing themselves with the prerequisites necessary to prosper in college.

In many cases, Latinas are the first in their families to attend college and are unaware of the financial and academic requirements needed to navigate the educational system. Although Latina parents have high expectations for their daughters, they often can offer little guidance with college admissions and scholarships, due to their own limited education (Sy & Romero, 2008).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to examine Latina college graduates' perceptions of the factors leading to the completion of a four-year college degree. Using narrative inquiry and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), four Latina college graduates from a Mid-Atlantic region university were interviewed. The LatCrit framework identified six forms of cultural capital that contribute to cultural wealth. Narratives provided insight into whether and how Latinas employ cultural wealth in completing four-year college degrees.

LatCrit challenges the ideology of deficit thinking. Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory identifies "middle class culture as standard and the abilities, and networks of People of Color, hold very little, if any, value" (Yosso & Garcia, 2007 p. 153). This deficit interpretation does not take into consideration the accumulated assets of communities of color. Challenging deficit thinking validates overlooked forms of cultural knowledge and shows the experiences of the lives and histories of marginalized communities in historical context. Latinas live in culturally wealthy communities, filled with "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used to survive" (Villalpondo & Solorzano, 2005, p.154). These forms of knowledge, also known as funds of knowledge, refer to the behaviors and values Latinas learn in their communities.

According to Yosso and Garcia (2007), scholars note that Latinas “create and draw from communal funds of knowledge” (p.154). It is important to investigate whether funds of knowledge are perceived as factors leading to college graduation. The purpose of this study was to learn from Latinas if they employ cultural wealth in academic success.

### Significance of the Study

Increasing the level of educational attainment of citizens is necessary for an educated society. Latinas constitute the largest minority group in the United States and attention to their education is a priority. They are a growing presence and, in order to create a competitive society, they need to occupy a dual system and be truly bicultural. The field proposed by this study is enriched by the cultural wealth that Latina women impart; therefore, increasing their educational attainment will be key in shaping the education of future generations (Cuadraz, 2005).

By preparing Latinas for college, society benefits as a whole. Many Latinas will be the first in their families to attend college and, because their parents may not always understand the language, they are unable to address financial or academic demands – or assist their student(s) with the necessary support to benefit themselves and society. Higher education provides Latinas with knowledge for informed decision making and develops competencies that contribute to choice.

Addressing the Latina underrepresentation in the college graduation gap and increasing the percentage of Latinas who graduate with a four-year degree provides a snowballing effect for younger Latinas. They benefit from seeing Latinas achieve success and move on to successful careers. Latina role models provide a familiarity that speaks

clearly to younger Latina generations. Most important, Latinas may recognize that their cultural wealth is a richness that they may never have realized was crucial. In sum, Latinas learn that they have a voice.

This research added to the knowledge base of Latinas' employment of cultural wealth. The participants' voices provided an essential model and better understanding to help identify practices that improve college completion.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What are Latinas' perceptions of the factors leading to four-year college degree completion?
2. Are Latinas aware of ways to employ cultural capital transmitted to them by their family?
3. What do Latinas envision for the future of Latinas in higher education?

The research questions provided an opportunity for each participant to explore her personal situation and the factors that contribute to graduating from college. These were the fundamental questions that guided the study. The researcher sought discovery, reflection, advice, and guidance that might aid other Latinas planning to pursue higher education. These research questions segued into the interview questions that provided an opportunity for a deeper conversation about the participants' lives, highlighted their personal experiences in the college environment, and shed greater light on their schooling experiences and support systems (see Appendices D and E). These participants may never have considered these components as related to graduating with a four-year degree.



## Conceptual Framework

According to Yosso (2005), Latino Critical Race theory (LatCrit) is a framework that introduces an alternative concept of community cultural wealth, embracing at least six forms of cultural capital that are unacknowledged or unrecognized and comprise community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). These forms of cultural capital acknowledge ways in which communities of color build on generations of resources to thrive and adapt to social structures in order to persist (Huber, 2009). The six forms of cultural capital that contribute to community cultural wealth are aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. These forms of capital are not static and draw from each other as forms of capital that are interrelated and overlap, given different circumstances and social situations. According to Yosso and Garcia (2007), the LatCrit framework also reframes the deficit perspectives and recognizes culture as a resource rather than a detriment (Huber, 2009).

## Research Design

This study used a qualitative, narrative-inquiry approach to examine the factors that Latinas perceive will lead to college graduation. Creswell (1998) states “researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Therefore, qualitative research can be defined as “a multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 15).

The study’s key concern was to develop a qualitative description of the individual student’s perceptions of “what went on” leading to graduation (p.15). The narrative qualitative approach of this study and its emphasis on students’ perceptions guided an in-

depth inquiry into the meanings that individual students attach to the factors that contribute to college graduation.

### Assumptions

Several underlying assumptions influenced the design of this study. Latina graduates who have attained a four-year higher education degree employed cultural wealth in their academic success. This assumption is consistent with Yosso's (2005) LatCrit framework. Additionally, a cultural element such as transformational resistance helped Latinas overcome challenges they faced throughout their schooling history while achieving their academic and educational goals.

### Limitations of the Study

Moustakas (1994) spoke of the concept of "epoche," which is to bracket or set aside one's experiences as a researcher. Based on positionality, the researcher found it difficult to bracket or suspend beliefs as data drawn from interviews were analyzed. The goal was to present a fresh perspective on the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) stated that true or complete bracketing rarely is ever achieved. Likewise, although the researcher may have been able to bracket, she was not able to completely set aside her experience as a woman. The researcher's experiences as a graduate in higher education differed considerably from those of the participants. In accordance with the suggestion by Moustakas (1994) – that the researcher reveal his or her own experiences –the researcher decided to include a personal subjectivity statement. Another limitation was relying on self-reports from respondents because self-reports ask the person for information directly. The advantage is that the respondent gives her perspective, but it is also taken into account that a person can deceive herself or others.

## Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The narrow focus is specific to self-identified Latinas who successfully gained entrance to a four-year college and completed their bachelor's degrees in the United States. This study was completed in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Males were excluded from participation in this study. Females were chosen as participants based on the first four qualified for the study. The site was at one of the nation's preeminent public research universities that has a total enrollment of approximately 38,000 students, of which approximately 38 percent are minorities. This site was selected because it serves 7.5 percent of Latinos in its total enrollment population. This is a state-funded university that offers guidance, direction, and assistance to Latinas, while also enjoying an active Latino alumni network that supports the interests of the university.

## Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 is a summary of relevant literature on women in education, specifically Latina graduates from four-year colleges. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the research design and the method used in the study. The research method employed was qualitative and consisted of interviews with Latina women who have successfully completed bachelor's degrees. Findings of the study are summarized in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, as well as implications for future research and practice.

## Summary

Latinas lag behind all other ethnic groups in college graduation. After decades of research exploring their lack of academic success in higher education, little progress has been made in their representation in four-year colleges. Latinas face barriers that

challenge access to higher education but also possess cultural capital acquired through funds of knowledge passed through their family and community environment. Examining the factors Latina graduates perceive as contributing to a four-year college degree attainment will provide insight into the ways they employ cultural wealth.

### Definitions of Terms

Some of the terms used in literature related to Latinas are interchangeable, while others are not. Therefore, the following terms are defined so that the reader can clearly understand their meaning as they relate to this research study.

**Four-year degree:** A four-year degree is equivalent to and interchangeable with a bachelor's degree earned for undergraduate courses that can take more than four years to complete. The university in this study is a nonprofit state university.

**Latina:** Latina refers to Spanish-speaking women of a pan-ethnic (similar ethnicity) group who "self-label" and identify themselves as Latinas (Novas, 2008). Latina women represent 18 sovereign nations and Puerto Rico, U.S. Commonwealth (Uno, para. 2).

**Latinos:** The plural term Latinos has two distinct meanings. When referring to gender neutral, the term identifies both males and females as a unit, but the term is also used when referring only to males, depending on context.

Hispanic or Latino: These terms are used interchangeably according to ethnic preference, referring to persons of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses” used to empower people of color (Yosso, 2005).

LatCrit: LatCrit is a branch of CRT that extends the critical race discourse to address Latina experiences (Yosso, 2005). It represents an “ongoing search for a framework that addresses racism and its accompanying oppressions beyond the Black/White binary (Yosso, 2005).

Cultural Capital: Cultural capital “refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities valued and shared by specific groups in society” (Yosso, 2005). Cultural Capital is interchangeable with cultural wealth as it refers to forms of inherited behaviors and values learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people.

Funds of Knowledge: Funds of knowledge refer to the “accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133).

Deficit Thinking: Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students do not enter school with the normative cultural skills and education is not valued; therefore, they are at fault for poor academic performance (Yosso, 2005).

People of Color: People of color refers to persons belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Since the 1960s, in the struggle for educational equity, the progress of Latinas in higher education is minimal at best (Delgado Bernal, 2001). The data continue to show that Latinas are the most poorly educated of all ethnic groups and hold the lowest representation in college-degree attainment at all levels—bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees (Cuadraz, 2005). The reflection of Nieto Gomez de Lazarin speaks to the past quarter century of progress for Latinas. She notes, “The educational system leads the [Latina] to a dead-end street” (Cuadraz, 2005, p. 215), implying that the educational system is an unproductive undertaking for Latinas. As a group, Latinas have made minimal progress in academia, evident at all levels of higher education (Cuadraz, 2005). *The Civil Rights Act of 1964* and *The Higher Education Act of 1965* were put in place to provide the “poor and talented” with access to higher education. However, nearly five decades later, the dead-end street continues to avert academic achievement for Latinas.

Cuadrez (2005) chronicles the evolution of Latinas in higher education and examines the undergirding of their development in a literature review that spans three decades. The “poor and talented” are forgotten women, a nonexistent, invisible minority spanning decades of literature, and still decades later continue to reaffirm that not much has changed in higher education for Latinas. The question in the 1960s was, “Are the researchers destined to find themselves in another three decades reiterating what is already known and lamenting once again the severe underrepresentation of [Latinas] in institutions of higher education?” (p.216). According to scholars, Latinas are becoming a

majority in the minority, representing an alarming attrition rate in two- and four-year colleges and universities (Cuadrez, 2005).

Delgado Bernal (1997) described a transformational resistance framework to understand how some Latina students traverse the educational system. She posited that Latinas progress on the path of “resistance for liberation,” in spite of, but aware of, social inequities by opposing ideas and ways that are disempowering to attaining an education. Latinas engaged in a “resistance for liberation” focus on ignoring the complications in front of them and keep moving forward, even if at times they must step backward. Bernal’s study lends to understanding Latinas’ “internal transformational resistance in which an individual’s behavior is subtle or even silent and might go unnamed as resistance” (p. 625). These resistance strategies are part of the cultural knowledge that allows Latinas to overcome obstacles.

Through subtle or silent resistance for liberation, moving forward in education, Latinas educe spiritual guidance: *con el favor de Dios*, (God’s will be done). Spiritual rituals concentrate around individual beliefs and practices woven together like a tapestry. These beliefs are similar to threads of spirituality woven throughout Latinas’ identities and world views (Delgado Bernal, 2001). The energy of spirituality emerges from the cultural knowledge base that reassures Latinas how to negotiate and navigate on a daily basis. There are similar threads in how Latinas “connect their spirituality to their educational journey, their learning, or their desire to help others” (p.634).

Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the demographic growth is due to a surge in the birthrate rather than immigration (Cesar, 2011). Latinas regulate the growing population increase and contribute to the generational shift, all the more reason



to focus on their educational attainment. Discussion is required to explore the future of the increasing Latina population and their underrepresentation in higher education.

This study addressed the issues Latinas in higher education face and their perception of the factors that have contributed to their successful completion of a four-year college degree.

### Background

College enrollment in 2001 indicated that Latinas remained underrepresented in college and college-degree completion (Sy & Romero, 2008). A key component of educational success in higher education is maintaining family relationships as they adjust to college (p. 215). There is a strong tie between Latinas and the home environment. *Familismo* (the relationships of family) emphasizes loyalty to the family, putting the needs of the family first, regardless of personal needs (Sy, 2006). This cultural value is firmly engrained and remains strong in second and third generations (Sy & Romero, 2008). Family obligations may be particularly important and more often fulfilled by Latinas than White or Asian American adolescents (p. 215). In fulfilling these obligations, Latinas face conflicting demands that can compromise academic outcomes. Cultural values, such as *marianismo* (saintly femininity) emphasize the submissive nature of women's roles, prioritizing family above the individual (p. 216).

Research indicates that Latinas have family expectations to fulfill, including sibling caretaking, financial contributions, and language brokering (Sy & Romero, 2008). Latina daughters are likely to take on the role of surrogate parent, especially in contributing to helping the family. Another expectation, although not required and

voluntary in nature, is financial contribution that is based on the perceived need of family circumstances, according to the Latinas studied (p. 215).

Latino parents are at the threshold of change, encouraging their daughters to be independent and pursue the education necessary for their advancement in the social hierarchy (Cervantes, 2010). This may be part of the reason that there has been an increased number of Latinas enrolling in higher education.

Parental guidance in access to higher education may be limited. Parents can provide emotional support but may have difficulty providing information and other types of support. Parents may have problems providing advice about courses and career planning necessary for college adjustment. Financial support, necessary in most cases, finds Latinas vying for financial access to afford a college education. This may present a higher risk of conflict, due to inadequate negotiation skills between the home and school contexts (Sy & Romero, 2008). Few Latinas find the resources to help their higher education endeavor and the talents of many promising Latinas remain untapped.

The educational pipeline shows that Latinas face disparity in U.S. schools and lag behind the national average. Yosso (2006) states that, due to conditions of poverty, lack of optimal schooling, and poor academic preparation, Latinas are not cultivated for the rigor of higher education. Cultural values and strengths may begin to erode in circumstances where outcomes are bleak. According to Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura (2006), the female educational pipeline data showed that, for every 100 elementary school Latina students, 54 will graduate from high school and 11 will graduate from college. It should be noted that high school graduation rates are commonly cited as measures of a group's educational progress; therefore, approximately 50 percent

of these Latinas will not graduate from high school and 90 percent will not graduate from college (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006).

Espinosa-Herold (2007) posited that Latina mothers build on funds of knowledge as an emblematic pathway to construct passage toward higher education. Through the use of *dichos* (proverbs) and *consejos* (experiential guidelines) embedded in family discourse, mothers transmit to their daughters the intergenerational values and beliefs of their culture. In the case study focusing on Latina mother-daughter pedagogy, Espinoza-Herold (2007) found that the Latina mothers constructed a relational space using *dichos* (proverbs) for thought and action in problem solving. These mother-daughter interactions can be influential in Latinas' life choices.

Latinas are recognizing their potential, as evidenced by their increasing college enrollment. They have witnessed their parents' struggles and want more than their parents have achieved (Cervantes, 2010). "Today's generations of Latinas are finding more family and parental support to obtain a higher education" (p. 51). They value education and respect their family's experiences as an incentive for better futures.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Critical Race Theory*

Race permeates our belief systems and ideologies. Oppressed groups learn to value the Western canon and subtle beliefs, while disparaging contributions of their own traditions (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that allows understanding of racial inequality. CRT questions "the ideologies, narratives, institutions, and structures of society through a critical conceptual lens," encouraging the thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of people of color to add to the literature

and share their points of view through oral histories and cultural epistemologies (p. 11). Critical legal scholars developed the CRT movement with interest in transforming the marginalized experiences of people of color (Delgado & Stephanie, 2001). “Critical race theory draws from and extends a broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women’s studies” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25).

During the 1980s, legal scholars felt limited by the conversations involving critical theory, race, and racism. In an effort to highlight race in the foreground and focus on critical themes, CRT emerged from the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement. CRT scholarship initially focused on the civil rights legislation and progressed from the limits of the Black/White binary to include the histories of other people of color that have also been shaped by racism and subordination (Yosso, 2005).

In education, CRT centers on the experiences of people of color and questions middle class values as the norm. This framework recognizes the importance of authentic knowledge as a resource to understanding the lives of people of color (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). CRT acknowledges that information can be shared through storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos* (folktales), *testimonios* (testimonies), chronicles, and narratives (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005).

Major figures in the CRT movement who worked together in studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power include the ethnic representation of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. Marie Matsuda, among these scholars, views Critical Race Theory as follows:

“the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) extended Matsuda’s view of CRT and describe five tenets of CRT in education that can be used to inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy collectively as another lens to existing scholarship. These tenets in education are as follows (pp. 25-27):

1. *Intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination* acknowledge that race and racism are a fundamental part of defining how U.S. society functions.
2. *The challenge to the dominant ideology* challenges the notions that research is objective or neutral that does not include the epistemologies of people of color.
3. *The commitment to social justice* offers liberation from class oppression.
4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge* recognizes that the lived experiences of people of color, including storytelling, family histories, *cuentos* (folk tales), testimonies, and narratives, are critical and legitimate.
5. *The transdisciplinary perspective* analyzes race and racism in historical and contemporary contexts using “scholarship from ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, law, and other fields to guide research.”

Under the same premises that collectively inform scholarship, Gloria Anzaldua, feminist, scholar, and a guiding force in the Chicano Movement, urges the following:

*Necesitamos teorías* [we need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross

borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods . . . We are articulating new positions in the “in-between,” Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies . . . social issues such as race, class, and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. In our [cultural] theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of existing ones.

—Anzaldúa (Soloranzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23)

According to Yosso (2005), Anzaldua challenged that development of new theories allows one to understand the lives of minorities whose voices are not represented in the majority scholarship. Yosso (2005) defined CRT as a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices and discourses” (p. 74). This study used LatCrit, a branch of the broader CRT framework lens, to listen to the stories of Latinas who have attained a postsecondary degree. The CRT lens nurtures, empowers, and gives Latinas the opportunity to share their insight and experiences (p. 74). Their experiences, based on their perceptions, constructed their reality of the factors that contribute to their success.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) uses stories and counterstories from the voices of the oppressed to provide the perspectives of the minority to counter the perspective of the majority narratives. CRT provides a mechanism to understand and broaden the experiences of people of color. Accordingly, Latina voices are a “move away from silence, giving voice to our experience” (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 626).

Latinas shared their perception of the factors that contribute to their degree attainment. This study further investigated, through the LatCrit lens, if and how Latinas draw from what they have learned in their homes to navigate educational obstacles.

#### LatCrit

In the 1990s, the application of CRT to the issues of Latina educational attainment provided another school of thought to examine the issue of educational inequity (Yosso, 2005). LatCrit theory, a branch of the broader CRT framework, extends the discussion to address the layers that comprise Latina experiences (Yosso, 2005).

According to Yosso (2005), cultural wealth is the “total extent of an individual’s accumulated assets and resources” (p. 77). LatCrit is the accumulation of at least these six forms of cultural capital working together as a dynamic process. These accumulated assets and resources include, but are not exclusive to, aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (p. 77).

*Aspirational capital* is the ability to hold on to hope through hardship and inequality, often without the resources to bring hopes to fruition. This is understood by Latinas who dream and believe in a better and brighter future, regardless of circumstances or ways to achieve these goals. *Con el favor de Dios* (In God’s favor) is often the guide that all is possible if a higher power is acknowledged. According to Yosso (2005), Gandara’s work with Latinas has shown that, although Latinas experience the lowest educational attainment, they maintain consistently high aspirations for their children (p. 79).

*Linguistic capital* is associated with communication and related intellectual and social skills in more than one language. This form of capital includes engagement in

traditions of storytelling and listening and recounting oral histories, parables, and proverbs. This repertoire may include memorization, attention to detail, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme, among other nuances of language and the ability to communicate through art, music, or poetry. Bilinguals put multiple social skills into place when translating for adults. The increase in vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, metalinguistic awareness, and civic and familial responsibility contribute to social maturity (p. 79).

*Familial capital* refers to the knowledge cultivated by the *familia* (family) that reveals community history, memory, and cultural intuition. The immediate and extended family, possibly including close friends, nurtures this form of capital. The ties cultivated through these relationships teach the value of maintaining a healthy community relationship. These family ties also teach lessons that inform consciousness and recognize pedagogical practices learned through *consejos* (experiential guidance) that contributes to the educational context (p. 79).

*Navigational capital* is the ability to negotiate the path not built with the community of color in mind. Examples include strategies necessary for Latinas to navigate through university campuses in the presence of stressful situations or conditions that put them at risk of academic failure (p. 80).

*Social capital* is the supports and networks of people that provide instrumental and emotional help to navigate society's institutions. Scholars note, "people of color utilized their social capital to attain education, legal justice, employment and health care and returned the information gained to their community" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Delgado-



Gaitan (2001) ethnographer's research further confirmed, "families transcend the adversity in their lives by uniting with supportive social networks" (p. 105).

*Resistant capital* is nurtured through the oppositional behaviors that challenge inequalities. It is grounded in resistance to unequal conditions of the marginalized.

According to Yosso (2005), African American mothers raise their daughters as "resistors."

They teach their daughters to believe in themselves and barrage societal messages

devaluing and belittling Black women. Latina mothers also consciously instruct their

daughter's to *valerse por si mismas* (value themselves) and conserve an attitude that

challenges the status quo (p. 81). According to Yosso (2005), scholars refer to pedagogies

of the home and transformational resistance as feminist and culturally based knowledge

that extend ways of knowing beyond formal schooling and allow some Latinas to adhere

to resistant capital.

These six forms of capital in and of themselves are not static but overlap and build on each other to form community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). As with the

"principles of a kaleidoscope, the dynamics of these forms of capital contribute to the

intricate changing arrays of cultural wealth which refer to behaviors and values that are

learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people" (p. 75). Delgado Bernal (2001)

posited that Latinas have assets that they bring to higher education. Latinas balance,

negotiate, and draw from their bilingualism, biculturalism, and commitment to

communities as they navigate educational obstacles. The LatCrit lens allows for stories

and counterstories from the voices of the oppressed to provide the perspectives of the

minority to counter the perspective of the majority narratives. CRT and LatCrit provide a

mechanism to understand and broaden the experiences of people of color.

### *Funds of Knowledge*

According to Kiyama (2011), understanding and incorporating families' preexisting cultural knowledge increases college access. Funds of knowledge is a term originating from Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg and documents nonmarket exchanges that influence political and economic forces, evolving into general knowledge, cultural exchange and the transformation of cultural and behavioral practices (25). Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) interpreted funds of knowledge as "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Kiyama, 2011, p. 25). Funds of knowledge are the "cultural glue" sustaining relations beyond the nuclear household and extending resources by clusters to develop networks (p. 25).college

Kiyama (2011) highlighted research showing how funds of knowledge might influence educational opportunities for students: Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama provided evidence that the funds of knowledge framework can be useful in viewing Latinas from a non-deficit perspective; the framework's usefulness allows for the process of understanding college preparation, access, and aspirations of students. This continuing discussion "is critical given that many educational environments do not value the capital representative of families' significant resources" (p. 25).

Delgado Bernal (2001) drew on the work of other researchers seeking to learn how Latinas negotiate and balance their "biculturalism, bilingualism, and commitment to communities" (p. 623) in relationship to their education. This knowledge provides scholarship on pedagogies of the home—the cultural knowledge that serves Latinas and helps them "survive and succeed within an educational system that often excludes and

silences them” (p. 623). Until recently, the educational journey of Latinas has not been considered an important research topic. There are studies that investigated barriers and identified information and college choice, but there is limited work on the factors Latinas employ in their academic achievement and college preparation.

According to Delgado Bernal (2001), pedagogies of the home serve as a knowledge base that allows Latinas to negotiate the daily experiences outside their culture, provide strategies of resistance that challenge perceptions held about Latinas, and challenge the norms of higher education. The feminist scholarship explains “ways of knowing” that extend beyond formal schooling (p. 624). This pedagogy of the home extends the existing discourse on critical learning by allowing cultural knowledge and language to take the position of the dominant ideology (p. 624). This allows Latinas to draw upon their own cultures and collective experiences to appreciate themselves in order to resist domination of the majoritarian society.

Latina feminist pedagogies are taught through culturally specific ways and behaviors. Mothers generally pass this knowledge from one generation to the next to provide an understanding of the reasoning behind why things happen under certain conditions. The teaching and learning in cultures are evident in the works of multiple feminists. Delgado Bernal (2001) cited several examples of teaching and learning within cultures: Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot wrote about “ancestral wisdom” being a powerful piece of healthy legacy imperative for cultural survival from one generation to the next (p. 625); Leslie Marmon Silko wrote about how the Pueblo people maintain and transmit culture dependent on collective memory “to maintain and transmit an entire culture” (p. 625); similarly, Patricia Hill Collins wrote about the role that African American mothers

take in socializing their “Black daughters to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions” (p. 625). The teaching and learning in the Latina culture is key to the survival of Latinas as they engage in negotiating with and struggling through higher education.

### *Deficit Thinking*

According to Yosso (2005), deficit thinking takes the position that minority students do not enter school with the normative cultural skills, and education is not valued; therefore, they are at fault for poor academic performance. In Gandara’s (1982) classic article, “Passing Through the Eye of the Needle” study on 17 low-income, high-achieving Latinas, conclusions were reached that challenge the cultural deficit model. The Latinas studied reported the influential role of their mothers, thus refuting the common stereotype that Latina “mothers are passive and homebound.” In the same study, findings were that parents cultivate a strong work ethic, a spirit of independence, and emotional support levels needed by their daughters during their educational process.

According to Yosso (2005), Bourdieu and Passeron argue that the knowledge of the upper and middle class is considered valuable capital, and accessing this knowledge can provide social mobility through formal education for those whose knowledge is not deemed valuable in a hierarchical society. Bourdieu’s insight is a way of interpreting the low academic and social outcomes of people of color compared with the outcomes of Whites. According to Valenzuela (1999), the assumption is that people of color do not have the capital for social mobility and are at a disadvantage because of the lack of knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital” necessary to maximize success (p. 70).

According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), Valencia and Solorzano point out the consistent scholarship of cultural deficits in relation to students of color, which claim that they lack the biological traits necessary to be academically successful. These biological-deficiency models used in the majoritarian scholarship support theoretical models that posit people of color to be biologically deficient compared with Whites (p.28). In 1916, Lewis Terman claimed the following

high-grade or border-line deficiency . . . is very, very common among Spanish-Indian and Mexican families of the Southwest and also among Negroes. Their dullness appears to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come . . . Children of this group should be segregated into separate classes . . . They cannot master abstractions but they can often be made efficient workers . . . There is no possibility at the present of convincing society that they should be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding (p. 30).

Injurious arguments persist when referencing the abilities of Latinos. Yosso (2006) explained that researchers continue to rely on at least two deficit models – genetic and cultural. There is little empirical evidence to support these models but the argument continues to be addressed. Jason Richwine’s (2009) Harvard dissertation conveyed the same argument that Latinos have lower I.Q.s and represent a reality that must be confronted in the United States.

Solorzano & Yosso (2002) cited several examples of deficit thinking: Sowell claimed that “the goals and values of [Latinos] have never centered on education” (p.28) and that many [Latinos] find the process of education “distasteful” (p. 28); Lauro Cavazos, during

his tenure as secretary of education, stated that “[Latinos] have always valued education . . . but somewhere along the line we’ve lost that” and that parents deserve much of the blame for the dropout rate (p. 28).

Deficit thinking positions the minorities at fault for poor performance because of a lack of normative cultural knowledge and skills that neither value nor support achievement. These assumptions lead to the default banking method (Yosso, 2005). Efforts therefore aim to fill the deficit with forms of capital deemed valuable by the dominant society (p. 75). Gloria Anzaldua challenges that people of color can also be empowered by theories (1990). According to Yosso (2005), an alternative to the Bourdieuean cultural capital theory is an alternative concept called community cultural wealth (p. 75). This concept includes the unacknowledged and unrecognized cultural assets that people of color possess.

Master narratives provide a limited account in representing an ethnic group and a narrow depiction of what it means to be a Latina. “A master narrative essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group’s cultural life” even to the point where members of the group cannot recognize themselves (Soloranzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). This ideology of racism in master narratives is the “monovocal” account that engenders stereotyping and misrepresentation of Latinas (p. 27).

## Summary

Latina graduates are underrepresented in higher education. Research has examined the graduation rates of marginalized women, and Latinas continue to be the least represented in four-year college completion.

Delgado Bernal (1997) noted that Latinas use positive strategies to navigate educational attainment. Subtle resistance strategies are learned in the home and community and serve as a cultural knowledge base. In accordance, Solorzano extends the scholarship of CRT and describes five tenets that inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy collectively for Latinas. Yosso (2005) addressed six overlapping forms of capital that contribute to cultural wealth for Latinas in everyday life.

Without research on Latinas, we will not have the inclusion of a different voice, a voice from the margins. Solorzano, et al., (2005) also posited that ideas and voices of people of color need to be included in the discussion. The voices, paradigms, innuendos, and nuances shared by Latinas will be documented, highlighted, and exposed for all to read, digest, question, and ponder—but at the very least become part of the discussion.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) attest that a person's race and gender cannot be separate considerations from his or her personal experience in a social context. These attributes influence one's perspective and interactions with others. According to Bridges (2010), White women see gender as prominent in their lives, but Latina women first have to contend with the issues of race. Cuadrez (2005) posited that being Latino and female undermines an individual's self-esteem as being academically prepared. If there is equity and equality in education, then women of color need to be part of higher education to create new theories for those at the bottom of society's well (Yosso, 2005).

The theoretical framework that is most conducive for Latina research is LatCrit theory. The researcher is feminist because the life stories of women are significant. However, the researcher's insights were drawn from LatCrit theory because it is crucial to this study. Latina women may encounter different barriers in higher education. They are diverse and they may understand themselves differently from conventional wisdom (Oropeza, 2010). Although they are considered at risk—disadvantaged by language and socioeconomic status—Latinas may not see these characteristics as deficits (para. 3). Further, Latinas may have different experiences and resources to overcome those barriers.

### Conclusion

Latinas are becoming a majority and remain the most poorly educated of all ethnic groups. The few that navigate higher education may experience the social inequities and understand the obstacles by resisting the obvious that prevent their progress in higher education. Delgado-Bernal (2001) referred to this as transformational resistance learned from mother-daughter interactions, part of the resistance capital in cultural wealth.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This study examined the lives of Latina college graduates. The major research question that guided this study was what are Latinas' perceptions of the factors leading to a four-year college degree completion? This chapter begins with a discussion of the study's design and sampling techniques. It then proceeds to a description of the institutional context and the rationale for selecting the Mid-Atlantic region. This is followed by a discussion of the data-collection, organization, and analysis process. The summary and explanation of the limitations of the study conclude the chapter.

#### Research Design and Appropriateness

This study used a qualitative approach, which is a method most appropriate when examining human behavior in its social context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The intent of qualitative methods is to study an experience understood narratively (Clandinin & Huber, in press). Clandinin and Connelly (1990) posited that the narrative method of research design is the best way of representing and understanding experiences. They further believe that experiences happen narratively and that the experience is collaborative between the researcher and participants over time. To understand the complexity of race, gender, and power in the social context of Latinas completing a college degree, an autobiographical narrative inquiry of the pathways to graduation was conducted. Bruner (2004) posited, "the stories we tell about our lives... [are] our "autobiographies" (p. 691). Narrative inquirers consider that stories told are part of cultural conventions and language usage (Bruner, 2004). Also influencing autobiographical narrative inquiry are

the characters in the stories, the plotlines and audiences to whom the stories are told (Bruner, 2004). Freeman (2007) wrote “The interpretation...of the personal past...is a product of the present and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it” (pp. 137-138). The present “along with the self whose present it is” are also transformed through the process (Freeman, 2007). Autobiographical narrative inquiry allows for Latinas to tell their stories about their educational process.

A qualitative research design was most appropriate for this study, because narrative research captures the life experiences of a small number of individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative research allows collecting information and situating the individual experiences within personal, cultural, and historical contexts. The stories can then be reorganized into a framework. *Restorying* is a way of reorganizing stories by gathering the information, analyzing key elements, and then rewriting the stories in a chronological sequence. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1990), emphasis on sequence with a beginning, middle, and end sets narrative apart from other types of research.

In contrast, quantitative methods typically include surveys and experiments, closed-ended questions, predetermined approaches, and numeric data. Quantitative methods use practices of research—based on standards of validity and reliability—and observe and measure information numerically. This study was designed to develop an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of Latinas; therefore, it does not use these strategies, methods, or practices of inquiry and does not provide quantitative or numeric description of a population (Creswell, 2003).

## Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

Among Latinas who completed bachelor's degrees in the United States,

1. What are Latinas' perceptions of the factors leading to a four-year college degree completion?
2. Are Latinas aware of employing cultural capital transmitted to them by their family?
3. What do Latinas envision for the future of Latinas in higher education?

The research questions provided an opportunity for each participant to explore her personal situation and the factors that contribute to graduation from college. Question 1 allowed for a broad look at the experiences—both positive (opportunities) and negative (barriers)—of their particular situations. Participants were encouraged to give details of the opportunities and barriers they faced. Question 2 was pertinent because it allowed Latinas to reflect on culture, question if there is a relationship to college completion, and think about the skill set necessary for survival and success in higher education. Question 3 allowed the voices of Latina college graduates to be heard. The researcher sought discovery, reflection, advice, and guidance that might aid other Latinas who plan to attain higher education. These questions segued into the interview questions that provided an opportunity for deeper conversation about the participants' lives in the college environment. These participants may have never considered these components as related to graduating with a four-year degree.

## Participants and Sampling Frame

The sample selection of participants in this study represents a purposeful, rather than a random sample. Purposeful sampling is intended to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon under consideration and from whom the researcher can learn the most (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). According to Patton (1990), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study” (p. 169). Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Without interaction, purposeful sampling may be impossible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The overall goal of this research was to capture and accurately convey reality, be it reality of an event or of an experience or the true experiences of a population.

### Description of Sample

Participants were first recruited by sending an e-mail message via the university’s graduate professional organization listserv as well as a listserv for a graduate diversity scholarship. The researcher also contacted known Latinas who were obtaining their master’s degree at this university. Additionally, the researcher contacted Latina/o professors and asked that they forward an announcement to Latina graduate students. Furthermore, the researcher posted flyers (Appendix A) at the campus to recruit potential participants. The message explained that a study was being conducted on academically persistent Latina students with a bachelor’s degree and asked for volunteers willing to share information about their educational backgrounds and experiences.

The selection criteria specified that students must be (a) Latina or of Latina descent, (b) have attended U.S. educational settings, and are (d) first-through-third-

generation immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Snowball sampling was used to identify potential interview participants. This type of sampling allowed the researcher to consult with individuals who knew about other individuals who could provide rich information (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

For this study, the researcher interviewed four Latina graduates. This number was determined based on the small percentage of Latina graduates at the university as suggested by autobiographical narrative researchers who said that narrative research is best for capturing the life stories of a small number of individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The criteria for the selection of participants were as follows:

- Self-identified Latinas.
- Graduates from an undergraduate program.

Latina students who met the criteria were selected from a Mid-Atlantic region university. The researcher functioned as a cultural insider—that is, one who understands the realities of the experience being examined from an insider’s perspective. Building a collaborative and interpersonal relationship with each Latina student was the researcher’s intent. The researcher and the participants discussed the social, cultural, and political practices and policies within the higher education world, from the standpoint of a Latina.

#### Role of the Researcher

The researcher was a cultural insider, third-generation Latina, whose interest in the topic stems from her personal experience and background. The investigator is a Mexican-American born to first-generation migrant parents. The combination of personal

background and professional work lead to the inquiry of the role cultural wealth has on academic achievement.

To ensure trustworthiness and address potential conflicts, the researcher used member checking, peer examination, and note clarification of the researcher's biases. According to Merriam (1988), member checking involved taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study and asking if the analysis was acceptable. The participants' responses would be considered throughout the study. Peer examination would involve asking peers to review, interpret, and offer feedback on interview transcript findings and asking peers to comment on tentative interpretations. Merriam (1988) informed reviewers to keep two questions in mind. "How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is really there?" (p. 201).

According to McAllister (2010), readers and researchers need to be aware of biases that can affect the study. Clarification of the researcher's biases and position as a cultural insider would allow understanding of the researcher's assumptions, world views, and theoretical orientations. The following section addresses the researcher's interest, and hence identifies biases and maintains awareness of these biases throughout the study.

### *Researcher Biases*

The researcher is an only child reared by immigrant Mexican paternal grandparents. The migrant family traveled the western region of the United States finding work in the agrarian fields of California and Texas. The family includes the researcher's paternal grandparents, her father and mother, and four younger siblings. Although education was highly encouraged by the parents, only one of the siblings (an aunt) graduated from high school. The researcher experienced strong ties in the Latino culture, causing perplexity

in understanding segregated schools and the hierarchy of race. *La llave es la educacion* (education is the key) is *el credo* instilled by paternal grandparents with less than an elementary formal education. The Civil Rights Movement of 1964 allowed access for minorities to higher education and gave the researcher entry into *el mundo de la universidad* (the world of the university).

### Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Participants contacted the researcher through information provided on the flyer (see Appendix A). The researcher made contact with the responding candidates and reviewed selection for criteria (see Appendix B). After the selection process and four interviewees were identified, the interviews were scheduled and the researcher asked each participant to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix C) indicating they agreed to the terms and conditions of this study and voluntarily chose to participate.

Every attempt was made to choose a convenient time and place to schedule the interviews. Interviews were conducted on a university campus in a quiet private location in the library to decrease environmental noise and distractions. The room for the interview was secured through the public services office.

In preparation for the interview process, it was important to note ethical considerations. Therefore, the researcher attempted to play a neutral role, without interjecting values or opinions to respondents' answers, as this could have a negative effect on building rapport with the participants.

### Instrumentation

Two instruments were used to gather data on respondents' background and experience: (a) a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) and (b) a semi-structured

interview protocol (see Appendix E). The demographic questionnaire included questions about the age, ethnic/cultural background, grade point average, Pre-K–12 schooling background, parents' and grandparents' place of birth and level of education, and siblings' level of education. Respondents were then interviewed using the semi-structured protocol developed specifically for this study (see Appendix E). All of the questions for the protocol were derived from existing literature related to schooling experiences that have impacted the academic achievement of Latina students (Fuerth, 2008). For samples of central interview questions and sub-questions, see Appendix E.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with permission of the participant and transcribed for accuracy. Transcriptions of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by a private transcription service.

#### Data Collection

The timeframe for conducting the semi-structured face-to-face interviews was within a window of three weeks. The interviews began with the demographic questionnaire and continued with the investigator's interview protocol questions (Appendix D and E).

The research questions were addressed during the interviews. These in-depth interviews acquired details on the experiences of the participants. Each part of the interview focused on a different portion of the women's lives. The first segment explored their experiences from birth through high school, while the second segment explored the college years until the participant's attainment of a four-year college degree and future intentions. Through the dialogue, each woman's life story (in her voice and from her vantage point) was illuminated. Follow-up questions were guided by the words that the



women used as a point of emphasis during the interview. All interviews were taped and transcribed by the researcher with the participants' permission.

### Data Analysis

All data was combined and analyzed using content thematic analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) to “determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondents’ view of the world in general and the research topics in particular” (McCracken, 1988, p. 42). This goal was accomplished through coding and schematic organization of the storymap. Coding was used to “expand and tease out the data to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30). In analysis, the researcher worked to find the voices of the participants and hear their stories in a particular time, place, or setting using a storymap (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). This method of analysis helps to organize the recounting of the chronological events within a rubric (Bridges, 2010). The analysis of the interviews is organized and themed.

Grbich (2007) posited that data collection will lead to patterns, relationships, and interconnections. As noted by Grbich (2007), the data analysis process includes bracketing the researcher’s own experiences with conversations with the participants – and then drawing themes from the conversations.

After the data was bracketed, they were *horizontalized*. According to Patton (2002), this allows the researcher to treat the data as equal in value. The data were then clustered and organized. The researcher consulted with the Latinas involved in the study after the interview tapes were transcribed to ensure accuracy and clarity and to seek feedback regarding the interpretations of their experiences.

## Summary

This study examined the lives of four Latina women in higher education. Narrative inquiry was used to give voice to Latina graduates and to provide insight into factors throughout their lifetime that ultimately led to successful completion of a bachelor's degree. The data was dissected using content thematic analysis, which yielded categories and relationships among the information. A storymap was used to organize the information into particular timeframes, locations, and settings. The researcher continued to self-reflect throughout the study and bracket assumptions and preconceived notions. The researcher is a Latina, which makes her both an insider and an outsider regarding the participants' college experiences.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

Chapter 3 introduced the methodological procedures used in this study. The results from the study are presented in this chapter. Using qualitative inquiry, the data were collected through the results of interviews with four participants. The qualitative autobiographical research design was appropriate for the study because the data collected addressed the research questions and provided insights, perceptions, and experiences of the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). One of the desired outcomes of the study was to identify those factors that Latinas perceived led to completing a four-year degree. Another desired outcome was the benefit of the findings to establishments that guide the educational development of students. Other outcomes included the significance of the findings for Latina women aspiring to complete a four-year degree.

Chapter 4 will describe the key elements and categories in which data collected from the Latinas' transcribed interviews were organized, as well as the themes that surfaced in each category after coding of the data is described. The first part of the interview contained a screening protocol and demographic questionnaire (Appendix D), which consisted of 12 questions used to screen and understand participants' background history and struggles in the educational process. The second part of the interview (Appendix E) contained 14 items related to the research questions. Interviews were recorded on a personal audio recorder and sent digitally to Rev Transcriptions, a private transcription service. The analysis of the transcribed interviews was coded to facilitate the emergence of themes and patterns. Using the coded references under the framework of cultural wealth facilitated the development of a hierarchical order of responses related

to the interview guide questions (see Appendices D and E). Coding produced information assigned as core themes and subthemes revealed within each core theme.

### *Research Questions*

Four Latinas from various pan-ethnic subgroups informed this study by explaining the perceptions of their experiences in higher education and the factors they believe contribute to graduation from a four-year college.

(1) Gia is second-generation Latina, born in the United States to parents from El Salvador. Gia learned the importance of education through her parents, who had not graduated from high school.

(2) Frida is a first-generation Latina, born and raised in Puerto Rico. She came to the United States when she was 16 years old. There is a long tradition of teachers in her family.

(3) Rebecca is second-generation Latina, born in California. Since her father's death when she was 5 months old, she has lived in Texas with her mother and grandparents. There were teachers in her family as well.

(4) Sofia is a second-generation Latina, born in the United States to parents from El Salvador. Her parents had an elementary school education.

### *Research Question #1*

What are Latinas' perceptions of the factors leading to four-year college degree completion?

The participants in this study identified four key factors that they feel are essential for Latinas seeking to complete a college degree. The women explained that several factors play a part in Latinas' academic success; the importance of resistance capital,

family support, mentors, and intrinsic motivation were repeatedly cited as key factors. The following section describes how each of these factors played out in the lives of the women studied.

### *Counteraction*

Each of the four women interviewed recognized that Latina women face numerous challenges on their path to college completion. The four of them also noted that it is essential for Latinas wishing to pursue a college degree to be prepared for the obstacles they will face. They suggested that when students are aware of the obstacles, they are able to plan how to overcome perceived challenges. Throughout college, each of these women recognized the obstacles put in front of her and developed skills and strategies to help overcome her challenges and proceed toward completing her college degree. According to Yosso (2006), Latinas' ability to persevere and overcome obstacles by cultivating skills that challenge inequality is referred to as resistance capital.

Gia's resistant capital was being motivated to work toward completing the college application process. As the first in her family to go to college, she had to figure out how to apply on her own. Her parents encouraged her to persevere. They offered emotional support and the example of hard work and integrity necessary to succeed, but they could not help her complete the application process. They would tell her to keep trying until she was satisfied that she produced her best effort.

I didn't have anyone to guide me through the college applications. It was kind of like I'm the first one; figure it out on your own. My parents had no idea about it so there's no way that they could try to explain the process to me. For them it would be difficult. They would encourage me to see what it's like. But they couldn't

give me a heads-up. If it didn't work one time, they would urge me to revise it.

They would assure me I had time to get it the way that I wanted it to be.

Not feeling equipped with the tools to navigate the application process made it hard on Gia. Her parents comforted and encouraged her, but they did not have the skills to help their daughter. Their *consejos* (experiential guidance) encouraged her to move forward in spite of the challenges. They consoled her, telling her others made it through the process and so would she. Besides, if she did not get it right the first time, she could keep trying until she was satisfied. Moments of frustration did not deter her. Gia had a dream and would see it through to completion. These findings tie in with Gloria and Segura-Herrera (2004), noting that a large percentage of Latino parents have low levels of formal education and cannot pass on to their children how to be successful in college.

Gia's parents, however, offered instrumental support; for example, making sure there was a quiet environment conducive to working and thinking in the home so she could make progress toward her goal. Gia's parents did not have a formal education but were successful in providing multiple teaching strategies to show her that they were involved and valued her education, challenging the inaccurate idea that Latino parents don't care.

After Gia entered college, she faced additional obstacles. Soon after classes began, she realized that she was not academically at the same level as her peers. As a result, she was forced to enroll in remedial classes to advance her basic skills in English and math.

Sometimes I felt I was not prepared or ready with the knowledge necessary to go to college. I went to a four-year university straight from high school and within

the first year I was taking remedial classes for English and math. So I felt lower than the rest of the students going to the school.

Having to take remedial courses caused Gia to doubt herself and led to feelings of insecurity. Oseguera et al. (2008) argued that Latina students are vulnerable in college because they tend to have low academic self-esteem. In spite of this new doubt, Gia pushed herself and was determined to do well in the remedial classes and the classes that followed. She exceeded the skills necessary for achievement and proudly shared, “Hard work paid off. I graduated on time and I went on to get my master's with straight A’s.”

Another challenge the Latinas students faced was a new awareness of being culturally different and being looked at stereotypically. Sofia was aware of the negative stereotypes of Latinos and, for a time, was ashamed to be identified as a Latina. She felt, it was “weird considering my high school was majority Black and Latino, but I think it had to do a lot with gang activity.”

Exhausted from hearing about all of the negative stereotypes associated with her people, Sophia took it upon herself to learn more about Salvadorian culture and history, which gave her a different perspective and a greater sense of self-worth.

Afterwards I was like, that’s silly and that’s stupid. I can be my own person.

I started looking up historical events and people. I wanted to know more about the people. I learned a lot about the Salvadorian civil war and the *Guerilleros* and how they fought for their rights. I learned about poets like Roque Dalton, who wrote about rebelling against the government. A lot of it was like, hey, no one really talks about these important people.

Sofia's incessant curiosity and search for her history encouraged her to research what she had not learned in her academic education. Furthermore, she felt additionally excluded because, even in her Latin American history college courses, only Mexico and the major Central and South American countries were discussed. It was cathartic for her to learn that El Salvador had been exploited by the United States, had been colonized by Spain, Guatemala, and Mexico. They suffered massacres of indigenous people. For Sofia, these facts supported validity, legitimacy, and legacy in learning the counterstory of her history.

The Latinas in the study demonstrated resistance capital at various stages in their college career. As first-generation college students, Gia and Sofia were forced to manage the application process on their own. They persevered and ultimately were both accepted into four-year colleges. Once in college, Gia faced academic challenges that lowered her self-esteem and caused her to doubt her ability to do well in college. In spite of having to take remedial courses, she decided that she would do her best. Sofia used resistance capital to overcome the negative stereotypes she continued to hear about Latinos.

### *La Familia*

Familial support is extremely important to Latina students, especially in an academic environment where Latino ethnicity is sparse. Schneider and Ward (2003) proposed that peer support may be rather substantial nor provide the emotional support of the family. One of the main factors that ensures emotional and institutional adjustment for students' successful college experience is the family.

All four participants described having supportive family members. For example, Gia explained, "My parents always made sure I was doing well in school." Rebecca said



she had support from her family and added, “She [her mother] was a very strong person and I have inherited many of her qualities.” Sofia’s parents could not help her academically but were very supportive. She stated, “I don’t think they’re clear on what I do in regard to my studies and all that it really entails, but they’re always very proud.” Frida added, “Constant support of my parents helped me most.” These findings are consistent with other studies on Latina college students, indicating that family support is crucial to retaining Latina students until graduation (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gonzalez, 2005).

Family expectations and values motivated participants, as indicated in these examples. Rebecca and Frida expressed that there was always an understanding that they would go to college. Sofia said that her father always had in mind that she had the potential to go to college. In their explanations of family expectations, participants explained their personal desire to pursue higher education. Sofia stated, “I just felt that I just wanted to go through the challenge of achieving at my highest level to see if I could do it while I was still young.” Frida expressed much the same sentiment. “Growing up, I knew it was pretty much the next step for me,” she said. Cavazos et al. (2010) noted the importance of valuing education in the Latina household, supporting this finding.

The Latinas in the study demonstrated the cultural knowledge nurtured among families. Delgado-Gitan (2001) recognized lessons modeled to teach caring, coping, and providing so that an individual is never alone in dealing with problems. These lessons inform emotional, educational, and moral consciousness to maintain connection with the community. The students carry familial capital into the educational environment because this identity has been shaped in the home and community.

### *Mentors*

All four women described the significant influence of mentors. Rebecca attended mostly private schools, except for a year and a half in which she attended a public school. During her public-school experience, she recalled the influence of one Latino teacher. He provided exposure to the American culture and helped his students think of the possibilities beyond their immediate socioeconomic status. She liked that he exposed the students to experiences that were different from her home environment. He took them to the symphony and theater. Her curiosity heightened and she wanted to experience more. Rebecca was so inspired by her teacher that she even chose to study in the same field as he, math. This is particularly significant as this is an area in which Latina women remain underrepresented.

He was just very special. He made his students feel special. Looking back at my schooling, Mr. Guerrero was a highlight of my education. All my math teachers were very encouraging. Besides, I liked the subject, so that's why I decided to study math.

Sofia's teachers and a few friends were influential in helping her advance on her path to get her degree. She formed strong bonds with teachers because she had difficulty making friends with her peers. Anxiety issues forced her to choose a select group of friends, but did not prevent her from forming a study group. The study group provided the human motivation they all needed to make it through college.

I do have a lot of support from my friends too because they were also struggling.

A lot of my friends are first generation as well. Not necessarily Latinos, but a

couple are from the Caribbean, but a lot of them also, I guess understood the same problems.

Frida and Gia had mentors in their family who supported them through their four years of college. Frida had multiple family members she could turn to for help, but her father and grandfather were important role models whom she turned to for guidance. They were the heads of the household and advised on family matters. Gia was close to both parents but she looked up to her father as a mentor. She knew she was daddy's little girl. "I think mentors are very important. You have someone to either look up to or that you could go to when you don't know what to do. That is the key." This finding was supported by Tinto's (1993) theory of retention that highlights how a mentor's influence on academic and social integration can increase a sense of belonging in the educational setting.

Participants also explained the supportive role that the mentors in their communities played in their persistence. Two of the four participants referred to their friends as being supportive. For example, Sofia mentioned "the constant support and motivation of my friends." Frida described the importance of having members in the community on whom to depend if she had questions or problems with the academic work she had to complete. "There was always someone in the community to reach out to."

The Latinas in the study demonstrated social capital by networking to find teachers, friends, and family to help them advance their position. Rebecca's mentor, Mr. Guerrero, provided her with exposure to a culture different from her experiences. Frida and Gia turned to the resources within the nuclear and extended family network to advise them on matters of importance. Sofia considered her parents as mentors for emotional

support. She also had a few close friends who struggled and they bonded to support each other.

### *Intrinsic Motivation*

All the participants described hard work in pursuing their four-year college degree. They explained what contributed to their intrinsic motivation, including the ability to provide for their parents and the desire for upward mobility and economic benefits. Sofia's parents have shared the hardships they endured in El Salvador and the sacrifices they made to come to the United States. It had been difficult living in the United States as illegal immigrants barely able to provide for the three of them. This was a driving force for her and gave her the desire to get an education so that she could help out her parents.

I just kept trying to push myself, because I longed to provide for my parents so they wouldn't have to work. My parents were born in a really poor rural area and had a difficult life. My motivation was to graduate from college, so I could be financially comfortable and take care of them when they're older.

Gia recognized that barriers would be in the way of her progress and prepared herself with personal affirmations. "Regardless of whatever economic background you come from, keep in mind that it is possible to make it. Even though you're going through struggles, just make sure that you don't give up, no matter what. She also believed that as long as you continue your education it is good for you.

I think being educated makes you want to continue your education throughout your life and your career. I think education provides that for you. That thirst for knowledge means it is never too late to learn something. There's always something new to learn.

Frida believes a person has to work hard, but also insists that inner drive or inspiration is essential: “It has to come from within yourself. You have to have the heart. You have to have the guts. You have to have that passion for going toward what you want. It comes from inside.” This finding ties to a Cavazos et al. (2010) study of students who had endured struggles but felt the experiences had a positive impact on them.

The Latinas demonstrated aspirational capital by believing in their dreams, in spite of difficulties. Sofia wanted to get her Ph.D. while she was still young, so she could secure a job that afforded her the means to provide her parents with a better life. Gia’s parents warned that she should prepare herself in the face of adversity and Gia did not lose hope that she would get through college if she asked for help. Frida was resolute to find and use her inner strength and move forward. These women faced hardships, but did not lose hope that if they kept going, they would be successful.

### *Research Question #2*

Are Latinas aware of ways to employ cultural capital transmitted to them by their family?

Latinas depend on the role and value their families place on education. They cultivate historically accumulated knowledge and skills learned in the home for individual functioning and well-being, referred as “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992). According to Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992), these “funds of knowledge” assist in gaining access to resources and developing social networks.

Social Networks

The participants in this study developed ties to mentors within their social networks and depended on them for advice. They describe having teachers and family members who took an interest in them and guided their efforts.

They built authentic relationships within their communities and used resources to guide them when they were not knowledgeable of a situation. Burciaga and Erbstein (2010) stated that members of the community who dedicated time to give individualized support to students provided critical assistance and cultivated social capital. Recipients developed trust and felt unconditional support. These Latinas pursued mentors for their knowledge and guidance to navigate through social institutions. These relationships continue to exist for all but one of the women.

According to Gia, mentors in the family can become a double-edged sword that both motivates and discourages. Although her parents were her primary mentors, she noted the importance of teacher mentors in her life. They provided advice when her parents could not advise her. She also realized mentors within the family do not always serve the same motivational purpose for individuals. Although many of her cousins looked up to her, there were those who felt discouraged by her success. Gia was motivated, driven, smart and worked so hard. Instead of looking to her as a mentor, they felt that they would never be able to accomplish what she has achieved.

Similar to Gia, Rebecca expressed that she had support from her family. She added, “She [her mother] was a very strong person... I learned from her to be strong, to be tenacious, and to work hard.” In her family, the expectation was that she would go to college. There was never a doubt. Although she had a mentor who exposed her to social culture like the symphony and theater, she regrets that she did not have other mentors

because she feels limited by not being exposed to more. She is a curious person and wonders if she had had more exposure, whether she might have been a doctor or an engineer, because she would have known about these careers.

Sofia preferred to remain in the classroom during recess and help the teacher rather than join her classmates. Until she was 10 years old, the family was transient and needed to establish a home for themselves. Her parents were anxious and overprotective, overcome by the pressures of living in a new country. Sofia felt comfortable with adults and was not interested in interacting with her peers. She was close to her cousin and they lived together and were inseparable. She shared that teachers showed great interest in preparing students for college. Sofia knew that a lot of teachers took a personal interest in her. She developed a strong relationship with her advanced placement psychology teacher, who pushed her academically. She continues to communicate with him and gives him updates on her progress. Sofia also regarded her family as mentors because they provided her with emotional support.

### *Linguistic Capital*

Latinas' understand the importance of speaking the primary language of a country. They observed as their parents faced obstacles from not knowing how to communicate in English. It was evident to them that they had to learn English and remember that communication in their native language was the home base of knowledge they would transfer into learning English. At home, they learned through a variety of language and communication skills. Oral histories presented opportunities for them to listen, memorize, recount, and learn from proverbs, *cuentos* (stories), or *dichos* (sayings). Translating for their parents taught them crucial linguistic skills including vocabulary, audience

awareness, math skills, teaching and tutoring skills, family responsibility, and social maturity. Sofia and Frida felt it was easier for them to learn English because they were exposed to the language much earlier than their parents.

### *Research Question #3*

What do Latinas envision for the future of Latinas in higher education?

#### *Counter-Storytelling*

All four women were proud of their family traditions and shared their cultural stories; they continue their traditions with their families and friends. They suggested that it is important to remember who they are, where they come from, and whose family they represent. According to Cervantes (2010), “it is important not to bring shame to the family name by following the traditions and values of the family and helping each other no matter the situation.” For Frida, it was a constant reminder every time she went out in public. “Remember who you are and whose family you represent.” She understood that the community was her audience and was to be treated respectfully.

Pride in their family traditions and the stories they have heard handed down from ancestors are the same stories they use to relate to the Latino students they now teach. Latinas challenge the existing modes of historical scholarship as “monovocal” and want to add their stories to the master narrative taught in schools. Latinas become empowered “hearing their own stories, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make arguments to defend themselves” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). These Latinas wanted to share their experiences and their cultural knowledge. They wanted to tell the counter story, the story told from their perspective. “Storytelling and counter-storytelling can strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and



resistance” (32). Anzaldua (1990) challenged “If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories” (p.xxvi). Latinas have shared their histories, experiences, and their lives, revealing the cultural wealth that shows how they struggle, survive, thrive, and graduate from four-year colleges.

As an example of counter-storytelling, Sofia was curious about her parents’ ancestry. She was an only child and spent a lot of time alone with her parents. As she experienced their preoccupation and anxiety about family issues and living in the United States illegally, she had many questions about her culture. Her parents shared their limited knowledge, which affected her deeply. Learning about their suffering in inequitable conditions encouraged her desire for knowledge about the history and language of her ancestry. She taught herself Spanish language grammar and researched the history of El Salvador. She discovered many reasons to take pride in El Salvador’s history.

### *Self-efficacy*

Believing in oneself and in the ability to succeed regardless of barriers are forms of resistance; a person who believes she will be successful in certain situations. These four women went directly into a four-year college after high school because they believed in their abilities and felt higher education was expected by at least one of their parents. Rebecca was a hard worker and took pride in her abilities. She was confident and was not afraid to fail:

It was a work ethic kind of thing, a pride kind of thing. You do something and you're going to be successful in it because you're going to work real hard to make it be that way. I guess I'm silly enough not to think that I'm going to fail.

Sofia reflects on the dual system that has to be in place to live in two types of societies. The American society is much individualistic and competitive. In the Salvadoran culture, family, respect, and community are central to Latino society. For this reason, Latinas need to navigate both societies with equal aptitude.

If you don't have that competitiveness in you, this [American] society will eat you alive. The Latinas' culture is surrounded by community at the polar opposite of the American culture.

With their belief in their ability to succeed, Latinas used resistance to transform negative experiences into positive outcomes. Within the sociology of education, resistance theories show struggle with structures by creating personal meaning. Delgado-Bernal (1997) defined transformational resistance as the positive strategies Latinas use to reach their goals. By engaging in transformational resistance, Latinas oppose disempowering ideas and create their own meaning. These forms may be subtle or silent and may not be recognized as resistance. Sofia resisted the inequities she faced during her university years and used strategies to empower herself.

### *Funds of Knowledge*

These women felt that it was essential to learn the histories and values that uniquely represent their cultures so they can take pride in knowing their ancestry. "Latinas would like to understand historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual well-being and

functioning” Moll et al., 1992). These are skills acquired in the home that build confidence outside the home. Rebecca’s mother was a bookkeeper and worked after hours at home. Rebecca helped her mom and developed a love for numbers that she has used in many of her careers. Kiyama (2011) discussed families preexisting understanding of how families encourage, teach, and create a culture of education, particularly for postsecondary studies. The Latinas in this study learned to build on their families’ experiences.

### *Linguistic Competence*

The women strongly believe that speaking more than one language is essential in today’s society. Yosso (2005) explained that language adds to the development of multiple social skills, including “increase in vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, metalinguistic awareness, and civic and familial responsibility” in place when translating and listening to adults. The Latinas in this study all noted that being bilingual provides marketable qualities in career opportunities. They all spoke Spanish exclusively at home, but learned English quickly and translated for their families. They navigated societal systems in order to help themselves or be role models for others. If they failed to receive formal instruction in their first language at home or school, they depended on themselves and learned to read and write in their native language. They felt linguistic competencies were an asset, especially in a country where Spanish has become the second most spoken language. All four women worked with Spanish-speaking populations and sought to improve the chances for the Latino population to advance in all aspects of their lives.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of five components: contributions of the study, limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations for policy, and recommendations for further research. The research summary frames the major issues that led to this research venture and provides a summary of the interviews that were from the perspective of four Latina women. The results of this study highlighted the barriers and obstacles Latinas encounter as they pursue higher education.

The students had diverse experiences, depending on the time they attended the university. One Latina is still pursuing her Ph.D. and the others have graduated and have at least a master's degree. The major issues identified in this chapter are the types of capital—familial, resistance, social, linguistic, navigational and aspirational—encountered by the participants in the study. Lastly, this chapter includes recommendations for additional research on how Latina participation in four-year colleges and/or universities can be increased.

Prior research on Latinas in higher education has looked at challenges encountered in being a new minority in college, but further investigation needs to be conducted on the unique backgrounds and experiences of Latinas. Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) noted that the increase in enrollment has not kept pace with the growing population of Latinos, due to barriers including structures and practices that preserve White norms. Having Latinas' perceptions as the focal point makes this study unique and adds to the existing body of literature on students' perceptions, various capital subunits, and cultural wealth.

## Research Questions

Prior to beginning the research, the following research questions were developed to provide the structure for data collection and analysis.

### *Research Question #1*

What are Latinas' perceptions of the factors leading to four-year college degree completion?

#### *Familial Capital*

The researcher found that the women's perceptions highlighted the fact that family support is a strong contributing factor to going to college or university. Latinas are aware of cultural values practiced in the home and community and depend on that support to help them. The influences in the home represented high expectations and a strong value system. These Latinas were aware of their parents' economic situations and influenced by their parents' perseverance to support their families. All participants stated that when the time came to go to college, they knew they wanted to achieve their goals.

#### *Resistance Capital*

The researcher noted that the women who participated in the study were aware of the unequal conditions of marginalized people. They learned through culturally based knowledge that they were equipped with cultural support beyond formal schooling, allowing these Latinas to hold on by using resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Using their resistant capital, they were able to move beyond negative school experiences.

### *Social Capital*

All the Latina women found mentors to help them understand the system and guide them through experiences unknown by their parents. They valued education and built bonds early. All, but one of the women, continue to keep in contact with their mentors. Aside from teachers, different types of mentoring relationships contributed to the study. Latina organizations provided networking opportunities with similar objectives to help these Latinas go to college. Family members also mentored some of the women by locating resources to help them graduate.

### *Aspirational Capital*

The researcher found that intrinsic motivation guided the four Latinas to find ways to keep moving forward toward their goal of going to college and graduating. These women had to negotiate and struggle with various structures such as societal expectations. However, through all of the struggles, these women held to a strong belief system that one must never give up. All of the women had financial struggles and all found different resources to help them finish their degrees. They did not let those challenges deter their goals and they aspired to surmount the language barriers, inadequate preparation in school, and other temporary deterrents in order to stay on track.

### *Research Question #2*

Are Latinas aware of ways to employ cultural capital transmitted to them by their family?

### *Social Capital*

The researcher found that all four women were proud of their family traditions and were willing to share their cultural stories and traditions. They maintained that it was

important to remember who they are, where they come from, and whose family they represent. These women felt that it was essential to learn the histories and values that uniquely represent their cultures so they can take pride in knowing their ancestry.

### *Linguistic Capital*

These Latina women strongly believed that speaking more than one language is essential in today's society. They felt that they were lifted up socially by speaking more than one language. Communication in more than one language proved their intellectual competence. Through language, stories, histories, traditions, and values shared and they are able to recall many memories of the exchanges during family gatherings. They revealed that they developed social maturity by listening to their parents' stories and translating for them. Yosso (2005) explained the development of multiple social skills, including "increase in vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, metalinguistic awareness, and civic and familial responsibility" in place when translating and listening to adults.

### *Research Question #3*

What do Latinas envision for the future of Latinas in higher education?

### *Resistance Capital*

The researcher found that these Latinas have begun to crack the glass ceiling and are experiencing success in many venues of society. These Latinas understood the dual system they must navigate to have the function in both cultures. They understood the challenges and resisted the notion that they could contemplate but their share would unlikely be realized. They are on their trajectory for the "more in life" that education offers. They understood the dual system they must navigate. Within the two cultures

these Latinas were able to see the impact they are making on the American society. They found their voice and broke down barriers while gaining their purpose in life and intellectual and social confidence. Their various occupations included teachers, assistant principals, principals, community liaisons, and nurses.

### *Navigational Capital*

The researcher found that these four women went directly into a four-year college after high school because they believed that it was an expectation in their families. The women navigated the system so that they would find the resources for college, be successful in college, and then search for employment opportunities different from those of their parents.

### *Contributions of this Study*

This study is unique in that it provides a comprehensive analysis of the elements that fostered completion of a four-year degree by Latina students. The research study provided empirical support for Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory and her theoretical concepts. The research also provided additional research in the area of multicultural issues as related to Latinas in higher education. The barriers and challenges were cited as examples of the means by which the educational experience may affect the experiences and perceptions among Latinas. Likewise, the supports and motivating factors were named to better understand the elements contributing to the academic success of Latina students. This is critical because most of the literature on Latinas and education has focused on the challenges they experience instead of the factors they perceive that help them succeed. Furthermore, this study allowed Latina graduates to share their experiences with the expectation that Hispanic Educational Institutions might learn more



about Latina women.

### *Limitations*

The researcher found that there are potential limitations to the study. Bracketing one's experiences as a researcher is difficult to achieve. Using positionality may make it difficult to stop one's own beliefs from different vantage points (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher, I had to be aware of how my position both as a woman and a Latina influenced my perceptions of the data. Additionally, the researcher found that relying on self-reports from the participants can cause a limitation because they ask for information directly and the researcher interjects her perspective, and that could be deceptive.

Another limitation is that the study was conducted on a single Mid-Atlantic, public, research-extensive institution. Because the study took place on a single campus, the findings may not be generalized to other Latinas attending other four-year campuses. The inclusion of Latinas who attended community colleges and transferred may generate an array of other dimensions rather than those who maintained attendance at a four-year college for the complete time period.

Another limitation is that the study did not focus on one specific pan-ethnic group within the Latino community. Due to the heterogeneity within the Latina/o community, this study analyzed four female participants who are part a small group of the Latino community located in the Mid-Atlantic United States. This community represents two women from El Salvador, one Mexican from California, and one from Puerto Rico. By analyzing the perceptions of specific Latinas, one must ask, would dimensions of Latinas perceptions vary? Would dimensions of cultural wealth differ from different pan-ethnic

groups?

### *Conclusions*

This study looks at the six forms of capital that contribute to cultural wealth and are addressed by Latinas in response to the demographic protocol and interview questions. According to the perceptions of the Latinas in this study, they engaged the six forms of capital to varying degrees. Findings included factors contributing to Latina students' academic success leading to graduation from a four-year college.

The factors perceived by the Latinas include counteraction to distorted messages, *la familia*, mentors, intrinsic motivation, social networks, linguistic competence, counter-storytelling, self-efficacy, and funds of knowledge. The conceptual framework of community cultural wealth used in the study encompasses these factors. The most prevalent forms of capital relied on by the four women were familial, resistant, aspirational, and social capital. The women relied on navigational and linguistic capital to a lesser degree because, by this stage in their educational career, they had learned the English language and had navigated matriculation. They continued to rely on all the forms of capital in their struggle to establish their visibility.

In the Latino culture, the family serves as the primary social structure and main source of support for individuals (Williams, 1990). The women employed familial capital to capitalize on their families' lived sociocultural experiences. *La familia* represents the accumulated knowledge of their ancestry. They take pride in their family traditions and stories handed down through generations. These stories represent their heritage. They want to learn their unique histories and cultural values that empower them to take pride in

themselves. In the absence of historical knowledge, they searched to learn in depth about their culture. They depended on funds of knowledge to cultivate their social, emotional, and intellectual sense of self while building ties to their community. Latinas perceptions indicate that family support, home and community influences, cultural values, and parents' perseverance contributed to their graduation from a four-year university.

The four Latinas in the study were strongly aware and understood that racial prejudice permeates society and, although they had experienced unequal conditions, they elected to transform those experiences by challenging the status quo. They learned and depended on culturally based knowledge beyond formal schooling to resist negative experiences of marginalized people. Latinas understood that in society exists a dual system they must navigate in order to function in two cultures. They hold on to transformational resistance and use positive strategies to oppose disempowering ways. Gaining purpose through education builds their intellectual and social confidence.

They maintained hopes and dreams in spite of facing barriers because they wanted to improve their socioeconomic positions. These Latinas have strong aspirations for a better life for their parents and want to improve their economic status. They exhibit healthy moral judgment by respecting their parents as mentors and understanding that being educated in the Latino community does not solely focus on academic performance. Being educated also means developing healthy moral values (Contreras et al. 2002). Therefore, to be educated includes having good judgment and value education, which their parents strongly promote.

Latinas build early bonds with mentors to guide them through the educational

system, which is unknown to their parents. They sought Latina networking opportunities to fulfill their objective of higher education graduation. They tapped into on their social capital by using the community resources as encouragement and affirmation that they were not alone in their struggles and would represent those who have supported them.

Latinas agree that being bilingual is essential in today's society; it improves their intellectual competence. They affirmed their social maturity by translating for their parents and listening to their stories. Linguistic capital speaks to the stories handed down through generations. Using their home language was a powerful way to acquire and exchange information outside of school; it built their confidence and encouraged them to be academically successful.

All four women went directly to a four-year college because they believed that it was what their parents' expected. Villanueva and Buriel (2010) posit that strong academic performance for some students may be a way for them to express gratitude. These women are eternally grateful to their parents for the sacrifices they made for them to get an education. Latinas use intrinsic motivation to negotiate societal structures, language barriers, inadequate school preparation, or other temporary deterrents embracing a strong belief system that "one must never give up." Additionally, they were driven by great desire

The Latina shared their perceptions of the factors that contributed to their four-year degree completion. The perceptions exhibited by participants in this study are consistent with cultural capital employed among Latina students. They navigated the system and found resources to complete higher education and have employment

opportunities different from those of their parents.

### *Recommendations for Policy and Practice*

#### *Recommendation #1*

The role of mentors and role models appears to be an influential factor leading to the success of Latina students. The mentor relationship influences social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development for positive outcomes (Rhodes & Du Bois, 2008). It is crucial that educators, mentors, and advisors increase their knowledge of Latinas' cultural backgrounds and the impact of cultural factors on their achievement. Therefore, schools and colleges should have mentorship programs in place to guide new Latina students as they navigate through the educational system to solidify their decision making process. Schools and colleges should also have representatives from various Latina cultural and ethnic backgrounds in different professional roles on campus.

#### *Recommendation #2*

Latino communities are places of multiple strengths; communication and language provide an impetus to transform and empower the assets already abundantly in place. Latinos are at the center of economic, political, demographic, and cultural forces as participants with linguistic assets that play an important role. Linguistically, more federal programs are needed to encourage the use of their native and second language to promote Latino communication and scholarship. These programs could be developed for after-school sessions at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

### *Recommendation #3*

Latino groups need to use more funding from local, state, and federal levels to create organizational structures and information networks that provide high-stakes resources and more motivation for Latinas to persist in their schooling. High schools, colleges, and universities should offer financial resources geared toward recruiting Latinas and providing them and their families with information regarding the application process for these awards.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The results of this study provided detailed descriptions of the perceptions of four Latina woman and the factors that contributed to their four-year degree completion. The data inspired recommendations for further research. Recommendations for further study are as follows:

#### Recommendation #1

Future research should focus on successful Latinas with degrees to examine the factors that helped them transition into the career world.

#### Recommendation #2

Further research should be conducted on the experiences of first through third generation Latinas who are full-time students. This study focused on Latinas who had already completed their four-year academic careers. Future research in this area may identify more factors leading to minority students' successful matriculation, and additional or similar challenges that these groups face.

### Recommendation #3

A longitudinal study should be conducted using elementary school-aged students in order to look at the factors that form the foundation leading to high school completion and college readiness. In order to build effective college readiness initiatives, it is timely to step up and strengthen high school and college readiness agendas.

### Recommendation #4

A study should be conducted to see if the level of exposure to professional women increases Latinas understanding of community cultural wealth and encourages them to connect with role models for similar career choices and college pathways in high schools leading to a four-year degree completion. Emphasis on understanding the value of community cultural wealth at an early age reinforces the types of innate capital learned from their families and communities.

## APPENDIX A

### Flyer to Solicit Participants for Study

Attention:

Latina Graduate Students

We are conducting a research study and we need you!

We are looking for Latina volunteers to be interviewed on their schooling experiences and factors contributing to their academic success throughout their higher education.

Please help.

If you are not a Latina graduate student, but know someone who is, please give this to your friend.

All information will be confidential. You will be screened over the phone.

Benefits of participation include furthering research in the area of Latinas' academic success in higher education.

Note: This research is being conducted through the University of Maryland and will be approved through the Institutional Review Board.

#### **Contact**

**Patricia Kompare**

**Researcher and Ed.D Candidate**

**240-461-8244**

**[patricia\\_a\\_kompare@mcpsmd.org](mailto:patricia_a_kompare@mcpsmd.org)**



## APPENDIX B

### Selection Criteria for Study

1. The participant must be a female graduate student from a U.S. university who has completed a bachelor's degree.
2. The participant must describe herself as Latina and come from a first through third generation.
3. The participant must be willing to discuss her schooling experience and the elements that contributed to her academic success with a researcher while the interview is recorded and later transcribed.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Project Title</b>                   | Latina Women: Perception of the Factors Leading to a four-year College Degree  |
| <b>Purpose of the Study</b>            | <i>This research is being conducted by <b>Patricia Ann Kompare</b> at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you can provide rich information. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the perception of the factors leading to college graduation.</i>  |
| <b>Procedures</b>                      | <i>The procedures involve participating in face-to-face semi structured interview of approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You will be asked to respond to 16 questions. The researcher will audio record the interviews and transcribe the responses. These interviews will be scheduled at a time and location convenient to the participants.</i>   |
| <b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b> | <i>There are no known risks associated with participation in this research study.</i>  |
| <b>Potential Benefits</b>              | <i>There are no direct benefits to participants. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study from improved understanding of the perceptions of the factors that lead to four-year graduation for college.</i>  |
| <b>Confidentiality</b>                 | <i>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a password protected computer. All data will be destroyed one year after completion of this dissertation. All responses will be kept confidential, and the participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Only the researcher will have access to the information obtained directly from the interviews. If we write a report or an article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with a representative of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i> |
| <b>Medical Treatment</b>               | <i>The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the</i>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p><i>University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b></p> | <p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dr. Carol Parham</b><br/> Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education (CHES)<br/> Room 2215 Benjamin Building<br/> College of Education<br/> University of Maryland<br/> College Park, Maryland 20742-5415<br/> E-mail: <a href="mailto:cparham@umd.edu">cparham@umd.edu</a><br/> <b>Patricia Ann Kompare</b><br/> 12708 Lime Kiln Road, Highland, MD<br/> E-mail: <a href="mailto:patricia_a_kompare@mcpsmd.org">patricia_a_kompare@mcpsmd.org</a><br/> (301) 854-2984</p> |
| <p><b>Participant Rights</b></p>              | <p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>University of Maryland College Park<br/> Institutional Review Board Office<br/> 1204 Marie Mount Hall<br/> College Park, Maryland, 20742<br/> E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a><br/> Telephone: 301-405-0678</b></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>   |

|                             |   |  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Statement of Consent</b> | <p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>Please return this consent form in the attached postage paid envelope to Patricia Kompare at the address above by July 15, 2013.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p> |  |
| <b>Signature and Date</b>   | <b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT<br/>[Please Print]</b>   |  |
|                             | <b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b>   |  |
|                             | <b>DATE</b>   |  |

## APPENDIX D

### Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethnic/cultural background?
3. Are you currently continuing your education? If so, how far along are you in your pursuit?
4. What is your current major?
5. What is your GPA?
6. What was your GRE Score?
7. 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.
  - (f) 3 generation: Born in the U.S. of U.S. born parents and foreign born grandparents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).
8. What is the highest level of education that your mother completed?
9. What is the highest level of education that your father completed?
10. Do you have siblings?
  - (a) If so, what are their ages?

APPENDIX D (continued)

(b) Have any of them attended college?

(c) If so, what is the highest level of education they completed?

## APPENDIX E

### Investigator's Interview Protocol

Project:

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interview Questions

Interview Script

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. With your permission, I will record this session so that the conversation can be transcribed afterwards. My committee members and an outside auditor will read the final transcription. Any quotes from this interview may be used in the dissertation publication; however, your true identity will always remain confidential. Only I will know your identity and will respect and protect it.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview process, please 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 the consent form that you will need to sign in order for me to continue with the interview (I will hand them the consent form, verbally review it with them, and then have them sign it voluntarily).

Do you have any questions about the consent form?

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

I would now like to start tape-recording. Is that all right with you?

APPENDIX E (continued)

I would like to start with your story of self, family, community, and schooling in your past experiences, present intentions, and your future intentions.

I would like to ask some basic questions. Are you ready to continue?

What factors influenced your decision to seek a college education?

What factors influenced your decision to continue in higher education?

Can you tell me what the higher education experience has been like for you?

Have you encountered any barriers or struggles as you have navigated through your higher education?

What factors helped you succeed/get this far?

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?

What recommendations would you give to educators to help Latina students further their education?

What could high schools, colleges, and/or universities do to encourage Latinas to further their education?

What else would you like to tell me about your experience as a Latina who has pursued a higher education?

Is there anything else you would like to share that I have not asked you about?

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].



APPENDIX E (continued)

Do you have any questions or me?

Where would you like me to send the transcripts?

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

## APPENDIX F

The term Latinos embraces a multitude of Spanish-speaking peoples representing the countries of:

Cuba

Puerto Rico

Dominican Republic

Mexico

Nicaragua

Costa Rica

Guatemala

El Salvador

Honduras

Panama

Venezuela

Columbia

Ecuador

Peru

Bolivia

Chile

Argentina

Uruguay

Paraguay

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