

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LATINA/O PEER
MENTEE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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2012

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This research is about the peer mentee experience of Latina/o students. For this purpose, a group of nine participants were selected, who were part of a peer mentoring program in a Mid-Atlantic public university. The experiences they shared were interpreted through the methodological lens of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Mentees are the recipients of the mentoring efforts, but regrettably they are rarely considered, and most often, they are taken for granted when studying mentoring. Hence, this study is twofold. It begins to amend the present void in the literature on the role of the mentee within mentoring, and it is a reminder that mentoring in its various forms is a relationship of two, thus it is a dyad. Moreover, sometimes the members of a mentoring dyad are also part of a group. Therefore, the work of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger helped to illuminate much of the road covered in this study. His philosophy served to interpret what mentoring is, Being-in-the-world-with-Others, a concept which he coined as *Dasein*. Other philosophers such as Gadamer, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur contributed to the explication of the peer mentee experience.

The research methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology transforms human experiences into a textual interpretation. Max van Manen's guidelines were used for conducting the study. This study begins with the insights gained through reflecting on the

epiphanies that led to the encountering of the Latina/o peer mentee experience.

Questioning this phenomenon then ensued to reveal the assumptions that have been made about the peer mentee experiences resulting in their taken for granted within a peer mentoring dyad. An interpretation based on the conversations with former mentees, is presented to reveal the themes that constitute a peer mentee experience for Latina/o students. Finally, this study concludes with the analysis of some ideas that can serve as recommendations for future peer mentoring programs, participants, and supporters of this approach to enhance the experience of those who may become peer mentees.

In summary, what this study reveals is that the peer mentee experience is the result of loneliness and prejudice that Latina/o students are able to overcome when they have a good peer mentoring experience. This interpretation is done following Clark Moustakas' philosophy of being. Peer mentees receive guidance and help alleviating their solitude, which in this study is interpreted as *being-with*. Consequently, peer mentees find purpose and are reminded of the reason why they stay in college, which herein is interpreted through the existential concept of *being-for*. Finally, this study reveals that being a peer mentee is finding or making sense of being in college and recovering a sense of belonging, which is interpreted through the phenomenological concept of *being-with*.

Lastly, the purpose of this study is to begin filling in one of the voids in the mentoring practice, the peer mentee experience. Although it must be said that mentoring has been powered by good will; nonetheless, its practice has been limited due to the lack of understanding of what being mentored is really like for those who are the target of the mentoring efforts: the mentees. And although mentees are rarely mentioned, they are, nonetheless, always present within a mentoring relationship because they are the Other to

whom mentoring is directed. Future recommendations to improve this practice involve fostering community, creating a sense of belonging, and advocating for a pedagogical experience that is liberated of prejudices and assumptions about Latinas/os, in addition to continuing the support of peer mentoring.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LATINA/O PEER MENTEE STUDENTS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

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DEDICATION

To one of my mentors, Carolina Rojas Bahr, and my mother, Marina Riquelme. Although for special reasons they will never be able to read this work, they always believe in me.

To all my previous mentors.

To the peer mentees of *La Familia*, who more than telling me their stories, they truly opened their hearts to me.

Thank you all!!!

Dedicatoria

Dedico esta disertación doctoral a una de mis mentoras o madrinas académica, Carolina Rojas Bahr y a mi mamá, Marina Riquelme. Pese a que por razones muy especiales ellas nunca podrán leer este trabajo, siempre supe que ellas creyeron en mí.

También, a mis previos mentoras y mentores.

A los mentees, que más que compartir sus historias, abrieron sus corazones y confiaron en mí para contar tal como ellos vivieron la experiencia de ser un mentee y como esto le dio sentido a su vida de estudiante.

¡Muchas gracias a todos!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thank you to Dr. Francine Hultgren. Thank you Dr. Patricia Arredondo, Dr. Ana Patricia Rodriguez, Dr. Carlos Zalaquett, Hugo Enrique Aravena Mendez, Dr. Jay Stewart, Dr. Ellen Williams, Dr. Rob(ert) Waters, Dr. Susan Komives, Dr. Courtland Lee, Dr. William (Bill) Strein, Dr. Christopher Lester, Dr. Elisa Velasquez, Dr. Milton Fuentes, Dr. Carlos Zalaquett, Dr. Mary Cotrand, Dr. Maritza Gallardo, Dr. Adelaida(Ade) Santana Pellicier, Dr. Delgado-Romero, Dr. Pamela Pasley, Dr. Beth Firestein, Dr. Colleen R. Logan, Dr. Michael Kocet, Dr. Evie Garcia, Dr. Maria del Pilar Grazioso, Dr. Samuel T. Gladding, Dr. Holger Floerkemeier, Dr. Mark Brimhall Vargas, Dr. Marsha Guenzler-Stevens, Dr. Renetta Garrison Tull, and Dr. Patricia Thomas. Forgive me if I omit anyone, but the memories will always be in my heart.

Thank you to the many friends and colleagues who have helped me so much: Mary Lou Bakker, Ted Cunningham, Dottie Chicquelo, Yanira Pacheco, Pamela Allen, Cynthia Banuls, Maria Carolina Rozas, Clara Leyton, Tonya Esposito Oliver and Brian Oliver, Sra. Simona Leonso, Sra. Lucia Berrios, Sra. Zoila Leonso, Jose Elias Figueroa Claverias, and forgive me for not mentioning everyone.

Mentors can also be peers. Thank you Maritza Gonzalez, Lorena Escobar, Alejandra Rodriguez, Bertita Rodriguez, Gabriela Aguayo, Georgina Johnston, Paul Kalinowski, Rhonda Hinkle, and my many peers and friends in Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, Utah, California, Arizona, Florida, Chile, Spain, the UK, and Germany.

Gracias a los perritos, Auggie, Atlas, and Rippley that entertained my mother through the many years and hours that graduate school took me away from her, and the friends of Crispus Attucks Park in Washington, D.C. Thank you to all my friends!

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CHAPTER 1: TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON THAT CALLS MY ATTENTION

Finding My-Self And the Other

Ode to the Mentor

The Pleading

Guide me, and teach me.
Lead me and support.
Act to help and grow.
'cause I want to see
my own path with my own soul.

Mentor! Although it is me who decides,
It is for you to advise.

The Listening

Hear my Yes, when it's NO!
Hear my No, when it's YES!
But let it be me who sees,
with you to assist.

Mentor! Although it is me who decides,
It is for you to advise.

The Talking

Let my talk bring you in,
But your heart to summon in
With care, but not pity;
Being strong and witty.

Mentor! Although it is me who decides,
It is for you to advise.

My-self and the other --who I am and who they are-- reveal points of comparison in the formation of identity, whereby, we differentiate ourselves from others. Paul Ricoeur describes the identity of the self as a force that moves us into the limitation of one over/across the others, within an ethical action of the existence of being, *Da-sein* (Ricoeur, 1982, 1990/1992). The discovery of my-self occurs in a new setting, the United States of America, as I begin to pursue graduate education. My finding collides with a

time of new settlement, as Heidegger would say, a time to dwell to build, and to build to dwell. In his book *Poetry, Language and Thought*, Heidegger writes, “We attain to dwell, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 144). This building creates something new, but perhaps also involves a form of deconstruction in order to dwell in this way.

The experience of mentoring altered my life at a time when my-self, I, became more academic due to a professional decision. I believe that we are not always fully aware of what we live, until we reflect on it. As I ponder the meaning of a mentoring experience, I build my concept of this phenomenon that interests me, and then I question it: the peer mentee experience of Latino students.

The word Mentor usually is associated with terms like adviser, counselor, preceptor, teacher, instructor, guide, tutor, and guru (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 848). The roles of mentors, then, are very complex; they puzzle me and at the same time interest me very much. When is a mentor all these roles at once? Do mentors play all these roles? Do mentors feel any pressure to play one role over the other at times? Which one of these roles do mentees want their mentors to play the most? Are these really roles? Might they be better understood as ways of being? Phenomenology helps to address this notion.

As a phenomenological pedagogue, van Manen states, we tend to conceptualize our living quite eagerly, and only sometimes we analyze our experiences (van Manen, 1997). However, it is through a pre-conceptual naming of our lived experience, where we can convey the naming of our experience as we initially lived it. As van Manen explains, “Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, or reflect on it” (1997, p. 9). Better said, it is

through a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, where the meaning or essence of an experience is obtained in order that the lived experience of peer mentees can be understood. I am called to research the lived experience of peer mentoring for Latino students, being a Latino student myself, having been mentored, and now being engaged with a Latino mentoring program at a large university. Various forms of mentoring have become popular models for engaging youth so called “at risk” or with social disadvantages (Colley, 2002).

The Origin

The word “origin” comes from the Latin word *oriri*, meaning to rise, and Orient--from where the sun comes out. The *Webster’s New College Dictionary* defines it as “a coming into existence or use; beginning” (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 955). But not all believed origins are always the real origins (Roberts, 1999, 2000). For example, although mentoring has one etymological origin it has a double historical origin. Also, the discovery of mentoring has a double origin in my life.

The word mentor comes from the Greek root *ment*, meaning to mind. “According to Klein, *Men* is ‘one who thinks,’ ‘*tor*’ is the masculine suffix, ‘*trix*’ the feminine. Therefore, mentor is a man who thinks, and mentrix, a woman who thinks” (as cited in Roberts, 1999, p. 84). Additionally, if we look at the suffix ‘*ee*’ as the one who receives an action, we could say that mentee is the one who is *thought about* by someone who thinks, either a man or a woman. However this does not fully explain the whole meaning of the word mentoring, as we know it today. Levinson, in his classic book of human development, *The Season’s of a Man’s Life*, brought back the idea of mentoring to the twentieth century industrialized world, and he reveals its complexity:

The mentor relationship is one of the most complex, and developmentally important, a man [woman] can have... No word currently in use is adequate to convey the nature of the relationship... The term ‘mentor’ is generally used in a much narrower sense, to mean teacher, adviser or sponsor. As we use the term, it means all these things, and more. (1978, p. 97, brackets added)

The mentee as recipient of the action of mentoring receives something that a mentor gives, and how both the mentor and mentee understand mentoring is what the relationship aims at. Although, not always, mentor and mentee have the same “aim.” Mentoring can be more complicated when both parties conceptualize and define mentoring differently. Stammer says, “There is no ‘single animal’ called mentor [referring to mentoring], rather [it is] a group of tasks associated with the role” (as cited in Roberts, 2000, p. 148, brackets added).

I have been a mentee many times in my life, but for most of those times, I have not been aware of what to call that experience or that I was living that experience. Most times, mentoring occurs as a natural process. What is it like being a mentee? When did I become a mentee? Was being a mentee a passive role? Who mentored me, a “not-knowing” mentee? What definitions of mentoring help us become aware of mentoring when we see it or live it?

Going back to the dualities of mentoring, historically, the double origin of the concept of mentoring in the Western world was first referred to in *The Odyssey* by Homer, and second in *Télémaque, fils d’Ulysse* by Fenélon (see Riley in Fenelon, 1994; Roberts, 1999). On my part, the first time I heard the word mentoring, and noticed it, was during my enrollment in a mentoring program for undergraduate students at Bowling Green State University. Previously, I had experienced mentoring without knowing what to call it other than friendship and guidance.

At Bowling Green State University where I was House Director for a Greek fraternity, one of my colleagues from the Department of Resident Life was recruiting people for a mentoring program for which he was a Graduate Assistant. I was highly motivated to enroll in any program or activity that would keep me busy, and keep my mind away from missing my friends and family back in Chile. I thought that it would be equivalent to tutoring another student. I had tutored before, and I enjoyed working with people. Besides, his enthusiasm was so contagious that the idea of being part of such a program seduced me.

The *first* origin of my awareness of mentoring occurred when I first attended a meeting of this program. It was a training session with the Director, a tenured professor I had met before, and some other graduate students. When they asked people who previously had been mentors in the program about their experiences, I was mesmerized. I was impressed with their enthusiasm and desire to continue in the program. Two people really made an impression on me. An older woman, who was a campus police officer, gave a moving testimony of how much she felt she had helped a girl the previous year, and according to her, now that mentee was a “successful” student. Then, an older man, a resident of the small town where the university was located, bore his testimony on how important this “labor of love was.”

Everybody seemed to feel good about being part of this mentoring program; everyone seemed to share this *joy* for mentoring, and their fervor throughout the two-hour meeting reminded me of a religious service. Something made everyone feel *good*. Two mentees, who arrived late to the meeting, bore their testimony as well and said they liked the program, but no one gave a firm idea of *what* mentoring was or *how* it differed from

what professors or friends do. This meeting reminded me of the evangelical Pentecostal services I saw back in Chile where former Catholics converted into the evangelical faith. For me, the mentoring process seemed to be shrouded in mysticism, mystery, and blind faith. Somehow by the end of the meeting program, I also was captivated by the program. But this was not the first time I was to live the mentoring experience, although this was the first time I knew what to call this phenomenon, and I was aware of how it could manifest itself. Nevertheless, despite my choice, this experience made me thoughtful and doubtful.

But what truly *is* mentoring? Who mentors whom? What is so important in mentoring? Are we aware of what transpires in a mentoring relationship that makes us effective mentors? Does mentoring always turn out to be a good experience?

Colley says:

Mentoring, as a planned activity, has undergone a spectacular expansion in North America, the UK and other countries over the past two decades. It has become an integral aspect of initial education and continuing professional development in business management, teaching, healthcare and many other fields. It has also become especially popular with policy-makers as an intervention with disadvantaged young people. Mentoring... has drawn hundreds of thousands of professional practitioners and volunteers... The very word 'mentor' has acquired a mythical status, suggesting almost superhuman powers to transform the mentee in the face of all odds. (2003, p. 1)

Upon joining this mentoring program, I was beginning to have an awareness of the transformative power in mentoring relationships.

The *second* origin of my awareness of mentoring occurred when I joined a peer mentoring program during my first year of doctoral study. The program called "*La Familia*" was an informal, but seasoned, program that had been carried out for a few years among Latino students. What called my attention at that time was how loose and

informal the program was. Although both mentors and mentees sustained the belief that they were very happy with the program and their relationship, the results varied greatly from pair to pair, and there was a great attrition rate within the program.

Roberts (2000), after conducting an extensive review of the literature on mentoring from 1978 to 1999, concludes that the definition of mentoring is evasive because it changes from author to author regarding the roles of the mentor and mentee. Jacobi (1991) concurs that the role of mentors and mentees is not clear, nor is it determined whether or not mentoring has been adequately defined. Both authors indicate that the experience of the mentee is rarely analyzed. Most of the time, it is the mentor who is at the center of the process.

Upon reading Roberts' (2000) article, "Mentoring Revisited: A Phenomenological Review of the Literature," we learn that the most vague part of mentoring is what really happens to and with the mentee and how the mentee truly lives this experience. Because the mentee also is involved in the compelling process of mentoring, he or she rarely questions if there is something wrong in the relationship or if s/he is being treated "right" (Colley, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002, 2003b). Because of this, it is the mentee who has become my major interest. I have been a mentee and I have not always agreed with my mentors. Furthermore, in all my mentoring relationships, I knew they would not last forever. They all had to end at some point in time, and I felt good about it because I needed to move on. For those reasons, and also from my own experience of having been mentored, I am drawn to study the lived experience of Latino mentees. Having been a mentee and being a Latino, I would assert that our voices have not been heard yet, nor our lived experiences in college understood.

I do sense there is something that can be identified as mentoring, but it remains unclear, however, what that experience is really like for a mentee. And as Roberts indicates, “Mentoring is a complex, social and psychological activity... however... the mentoring definition may be located via a presuppositionless *revisiting* of the phenomenon, via exploration of essential and contingent attributes” (2000, p. 162). So in order to have a starting point for the concept of mentoring, I abide by Roberts’ definition of mentoring, as “a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that person’s career and personal development” (p. 162).

The Finding

In his book *Finding Yourself And Finding Others*, Moustakas, a humanistic counselor and phenomenologist, says that the self of the individual grows only when there is freedom and nurturance. Human beings are in process, and only when they choose to be authentic can they find themselves (Moustakas, 1974, 1995). But I wonder if we always are given choice, freedom and space to *do* and *be* who we are. Can we always be true to our-selves? Are we “us” when we talk to others? Do we ever hide our-selves because of who others want us to be? Who talks for “us” most of the time, our-self or the self that others want us to be?

I regress back to my childhood. Back in Chile, during a recess in the eighth grade, I recall my-self talking to my homeroom teacher. He and I would have long talks all the time. Gadamer says that we live through language, and in language, “Hence language is the real medium of human being... the realm of human being-together, the realm of

common understanding, of ever-replenishing common agreement --a realm as indispensable to human life as the air we breathe” (Gadamer, 1976/1977, p. 68). As my teacher and I talked, we used language to know each other as we discussed my future. Knowledge is language, Heidegger says (1959/1982). Gadamer also says, “Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the worlds” (1976/1977, p. 3), and adds, “Being that can be understood is language” (p. 31). Every conversation we had led me to feel understood and known by him; this was a landmark for me between my teacher and mentor at that time, and me his student and mentee.

In a couple of months, I would graduate and attend middle school. My mother had decided that I should attend a polytechnic high school. On the contrary, I wanted to attend a humanities and liberal arts high school in order to prepare for college. But my decision was made for me. Although my teacher, Mr. Aravena, did agree with me, my mother’s choice became a command that I had to obey. Another, my mother, made my choice.

Can others really get to know us? Do we ever get to know our-selves completely? How do others get to know me? Is it through action or re-action, or through just by ‘being’ my-self? Do we know others by action, or do we know others when others know us? My homeroom teacher came to know me well. Through long conversations, and a real interest in me, we developed a special friendship. His trust and confidence in me and in my skills made me dream of a better future. But his trust also is puzzling.

Is being true to one-self harder when others expect another being of us to be? Do we always comply with what is expected of us? Are we true to ourselves when we do not

know who we are? Can others help to shape our self? Can others inhibit our self? The *true* self is a permanent contrast of who we are and who we want to be (Moustakas, 1974). Moustakas says, “The confronting person is often the ‘good’ person whose primary mode of existence is rooted in others; the ‘other’ becomes the center of the world” (p. 45). As Moustakas concludes, To Be one-self, then, is to be sometimes against others’ wishes, but to have the support of others in order to *be* subsequently is a healthy decision, what the inner *self* sooner or later strives to become.

For many years, I developed a sense of gratitude for the friendship and support I received from my elementary school homeroom teacher. In particular, of the many, many conversations we had, one remains very special, the one about my future in high school. Still today, as I write, I remember those moments that I treasure, as well as his words. How did he come to be my mentor? It is the meaning of that first mentor relationship that converges into my phenomenon of interest: mentoring, and consequently peer mentoring in which I am engaged with now during my graduate studies.

A mentor is defined as “a person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, especially one who is younger and less experienced. Later, more generally: a person who offers support and guidance to another; an experienced and trusted counselor or friend; a patron, a sponsor” (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 900). It is through this definition that I can bring my earliest memory of mentoring, to my pre-reflective awareness. I did not see the relationship with my homeroom teacher in those terms then; I just lived it. Many years later I would learn to call this experience mentoring. At that time, when I talked with my homeroom teacher during recess I was 13, and he was around 15 years older. He was working on his law degree, and I was in need of guidance. It was many years later,

however, in a conference during my master's program, that I heard about mentoring. It was only then, that I really came to name this experience, and the special friendship I had with my homeroom teacher, as well as with a few other people later on in my life.

What brings me into the peer-mentoring phenomenon? What contribution might be found in researching this topic? How can I bring the phenomenon of peer mentoring to light in a way that has not been written about before? Is there anything to be said about mentoring after so many books and articles have been written on it? I turn to phenomenology to understand the phenomenon of peer mentoring in a different way.

Van Manen (1997) says that hermeneutic phenomenology does not aim at prediction or control of behavior; rather, phenomenological questions can bring us closer to the phenomenon that we want to research. Husserl refers to the meaning of a phenomenon as a showing what is there for what it is (van Manen, 1997). I want to show, through hermeneutic phenomenological description, the phenomenon of peer mentoring, drawing upon my personal experience with it, as well as those I invite to my conversations, who have lived this phenomenon.

Since the root derivation of the word mentoring comes from Greek mythology, I uncover, in this first chapter, the phenomenon of mentoring using three elements of the Creation according to Greek mythology: *Chaos*, *Tartarus*, and *Erebus*. They help me to describe my "finding" of the phenomenon and introduce the phenomenon of peer mentoring for Latina/o students. There is romanticism in myth, but also through myth interpretation we can find truths that help us understand life better (Boys-Stones, 2003; May, 1992). This is what I seek: a better understanding of peer mentoring for Latina/o students in college.

In The Realm Of *Chaos*: A Prelude To Creation

Chaos may not be a well-ordered place, but it is nonetheless a place both differentiated and differentiating. Chaos signifies chasm or gap, and thus a certain primal shape. (Casey, 1993, pp. 18-19)

The *Webster's New College Dictionary* defines the word realm as "a particular state or stated area, range, or domain" (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1118). And *Chaos*, according to the same source, is in Greek Mythology, "the void at the beginning of creation," and it means "utter confusion" (p. 234). This was my metaphorical condition at the beginning of my Master's program. Having recently arrived in the United States, I experienced many new things--elements of creation--but they were in an order totally new to me, chaos. The elements were there, but not the creation, my creation. I was about to create, to create my life in the United States through the pursuit of a Master's program. But all the elements were in *utter confusion* compared to the life I previously knew.

Even days before I started my first class, I longed for *someone* to talk to, *someone* to ask questions of, *someone* to guide me as many of my prior teachers, professors or upper classmates always had. I was not in need of a romantic relationship --I knew that well-- but of a supporting relationship with an experienced *other*, *an-other* being who had lived this experience before and could share that experience with me. Those friends and teachers I counted on in the past--always there--to help me, to advise me, to listen to me, and to teach me were not present now. The truth is, I was looking for a mentor, especially a peer mentor. But no one was there this time, and here I was on my way to my first class.

There is compelling research that indicates Latina/o students, like me, consider peer support as one of the most influential factors in higher education (Castellanos &

Jones, 2003; Garcia, 2001). For many first generation Latina/o students in college, being one of the few Latina/os in their classes and programs is very difficult. Not having someone to guide them makes their adjustment harder than it is for other students whose parents and relatives have attended college. Many authors describe the Latina/o students' experience in college as frustrating and full of failures (Frierson, 1997, 1998; León, 2003). Also, the statistics indicate that Latinas/os are poorly represented in college in reference to the population at large (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997; Trueba, 1999; Schoem, Frankel, Zuñiga, & Lewis, 1995). Consciousness of being Latina/o is a difficult realization as Padilla suggests:

My Latino ethnic consciousness argument recognizes how these individual national groups become absorbed into U.S. society as subordinates; how they are treated as second-class citizens on the premise that as one people they share characteristics of inferiority; and how they then begin to create, mobilize, and organize in a common purpose against these conditions of oppression. So, Latino ethnic consciousness is one excellent example of today's extremely popular and oversimplified phrases, "unity in diversity," or "oneness in difference." Latino ethnic consciousness is a historical creation founded on respect for differences, founded on political struggles for the common good. (1997, p. 133)

The memories of previous people who had helped me haunted me now as I walked to my first class alone. Many of the lived experiences with people who had helped to shape my character and supported me in times of distress flashed through my mind. Van Manen says, "Lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them" (1997, p. 37). Memories are what we are left with as we age, and memories are the little treasures we gather as we live (Casey, 2000). Those previous mentors were more meaningful to me then, since I had no such company at this time. By living this new educational experience, I was collecting a

memory of a similar past with one missing factor: someone to-be-with, as connected-with, hyphenated-with, but each one with his/her own life.

Most of my life can be defined or described through education, but most of my learning experiences had been connected/to or with-someone up to this point. Little did I know that the individualism of American society would taste so bitter. I was looking for the sense of learning in community that I treasured so much while growing up in Chile.

Me, Me, Me, It's All About Me

Me

Me, me, me.
It's all about me.

Me, me, me.
The tune of the dance;
the lyrics of the song.

Me, me, me.
It's all about me.

It's my money and
my time.
I pay my own bills.

Me, me, me.
It's all about me.

You pay your bills.
It is fair.
It is right.

Me, me, me.
It's all about me.

You do,
I do.
Why should I not do?

Me, me, me.
It's all about me.

You are not me.
 I am not you.
 Together we make two.

Me, me, me.
 It's all about me.

I'm independent and self-sufficient.
 I am responsible.
 I'm on my own.

It's me, me, me.
 It's all about me.

Me, me, me.
 It's my right.
 It's my choice.

Me, me, me.
 It's all about me.

My car and my house.
 My job.
 My money.

Me, me, me.
 It's all about me.

Regressing back to another memory of my first days in the United States, I enter the dining area of the Union at the university. It is my first day in college, and everyone seems to be in a hurry; orders are received at food counters, and the cleaning staff bus tables as soon as someone is done, even if they are still sitting! Their trays are taken away. For someone like me, used to seeing maids work in South America, this seems similar, but the intention of the workers is to make more room for the next person, not to serve others. Everyone is in a hurry. No one seems to stay around to chat or meet others. For someone like me, a new international graduate student, seeing people come and go in such a rush, all seems so surreal, as in a dream --half asleep and half awake. There are no

tables in the open area or patios, no people watching, no one to hang around for the sake of hanging around; all conversations seem so fast --quick greets, fast good-byes, passing nods, no stops, no answers to “*How are you doing?*”... only quick and automatic “*fines.*” Everyone seems to be doing “great” or “*fine,*” the answer to “the question” at all times. I am strange, I guess. I am *not fine*; I am cold, and I have no idea with whom to have lunch. I am not *fine*. Could I dare to say no, not *fine* and *you*? Are you *fine*? What would anyone say in response to such an answer? Would I dare to say it? Will I be penalized if I do so? Can anyone say not *fine*, perhaps “so so”? It is all about me, here. You must be *fine*, because I am too busy for you, but free just for me. Any other answer will disturb my day.

I mention this because for Latinas/os the question, “How are you doing?” demands responsibility. It is magic, if you wish. There will be an answer, and most likely it will never be fine. And there you will be standing, no matter what, listening why the other person is not fine. You are not responsible to solve the problem, but you are responsible to listen. This is a cultural expectation, a norm.

Some of the values most common in American society are the capacity of the individual for self-reliance, and “the pursuit of happiness.” The Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [sic] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (The Constitution of the United States, 1776). Being created equal means all beings are “fine.” How can it be that everyone, but me, is fine? Are we all fine or in pursuit of being fine?

Everyone seems to be doing something that pertains to their sole interest, being me, just me. Later on in the semester, I do not see that. I also am fine, all-the- time, but sorry, I also am in a hurry. So much to do, so much to do *for* me, and *by* me. Others are others, but me is me; and there are things *I* need to do and only ‘me’ can do those things. Just me. Thanks! And there is so much to do... travel, movies, homework, reading, laundry, my life. My own life. Me, me, and me; it is all about me. Most persons not brought up here in the United States, will resonate with this. Heidegger reminds us how contrary this is to *Dasein*:

When entities are encountered, Dasein’s world frees them for totality of involvements with which the “they” is familiar, and within the limits which have been established with the “theys” averageness. *Proximally*, facial Dasein is in the with-world, which is discovered in an average way. *Proximally*, it is not “I”, in the sense of my own Self, that ‘am’, but rather Others, whose ways is that of the “they”. In terms of the “they”, and as the “they”, I am ‘given’ proximally to ‘myself’ [mir “selbst”]. Dasein discovers the world in its own way [eigens] and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this is discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein is always accomplished as clearing away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (1927/2004, p. 167)

Those who have lived elsewhere will see this, and remember what it is not to be in a hurry, when “all is *not* about me, me, me.” Latina/o student do see this in college and long for their families (Espinoza-Herold, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Perhaps, joining a mentoring program called *La Familia* is an attempt to gain what Latina/o students feel they have lost--something which I inquired during conversations.

The Place

According to the *Webster’s’ New College Dictionary* the word place comes from the Greek word *plateia* which means street, and that word is related to the Greek word *plat*, meaning broad or flat, and plain (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1031). The place where I

arrived to pursue my Master's degree in the United States is a state in the Midwest. This area, in particular, is the flattest part of the region. And that is the reason why it is called Bowling Green, a flat region covered in grass; no trees, creeks, or valleys, just flat land as far as the eye can see, or straight roads can take you. This area is both a place to breathe in peace, but also a place that brings some feelings of isolation and anxiety. Small towns, such as Bowling Green seem to be suspended in air, above the ground, with no connection to the land since there is no hill to hide behind or creek to water the land. Only water towers tend to break the endless flat line of the horizon.

This area of empty land, although it came to grow in me, rejected me at the beginning. It is hard to be enchanted by such a place when you come from a country of hills, lakes, oceans, and mountains all within a day's trip. When I arrived in this area I felt desolation, due to the lack of construction and buildings. Casey says:

The word desolation signifies an intensified solitariness. To be desolated is not only to be without hope --dis-consolate-- but to feel that one is entirely alone, without the resources normally offered by friends and family in a familiar dwelling place. (The Latin root, *desolare*, means to abandon.) Desolation is a special form of despair, but a form that has everything to do with displacement from one's usual habitat. We say with equal facility that a landscape or person is 'desolate,' an ambiguity of reference shared by only a few other words in English (e.g., "beautiful," "gorgeous," "handsome," and their common converse, "ugly"). This transferability of sense between human beings and landscapes is heightened by as well as mirrored in the physiognomic character of a given stretch of wilderness. It was not accidental that I found myself feeling forsaken in an arid and brittle landscape. That landscape embodied my own existential desolation, reflecting it back to me with augmented force: the land was a solitary under the unrelenting summer sun as I was solitary in the midst. (1993, p. 192)

When I moved to the Midwest I felt the desolation that Casey describes, away from family, friends, and loved ones. I was in a new habitat. Many Latina/o students feel a similar desolation when on a college campus that differs from their previous environment (Tinto, 1993). León says that "Higher education clings to its *White* middle

class roots and its ‘sink or swim’ culture” (2003, p. 48, italics added), and this is contrary to most Latina/o students’ culture.

Although many Latina/o students are born or raised here in the United States, they live in areas highly populated by Latinas/os or ethnic minorities (Espinoza-Herold, 2003). Those few who come to college find themselves in a new habitat. College, contrary to their previous environment, is a habitat that is mostly populated by White students, and in many ways, it is the high point of White culture (Padilla, 1997; Trueba, 1999; Ybarra & López, 2004). The lack of physical presence of Latinas/os at faculty and administrative levels, as well as the student body, causes isolation and anxiety (see Castellanos & Jones, 2003), in Casey’s words (1993), *desolation*.

The college environment results in a lonely place for many Latina/o students as it was for me. Martínez and Aguirre say, “Despite numerous initiatives by the federal and state governments... educational institutions remain White and Eurocentric in their institutional culture. The organizational culture in educational institutions is shaped by forces of social and cultural resistance that are fueled by conservative nativistic sentiment in society” (2003, p. 51). Moustakas says:

Many factors enter into the absence of meaning and genuine warmth in communication. These include social and institutional climate that encourages and supports anonymity, intellectualization, and role playing. Fear often prevents the person from overcoming and transcending the consequences of conditioning. Of all forms of fear--fear of being misunderstood, of being diminished, of becoming vulnerable-- none is more thwarting than the fear of rejection. (Moustakas, 1974, p. 43)

Many Latina/o students fear college. They dream of it, but fear it, as I feared everyone in my first day of classes. For most Latina/o students, a partial relationship with the college campus seemingly provides some security at least. Moustakas adds that because of fear,

“For most people partial communication and relationship are preferred to the risks of honesty and openness of self-expression and self-disclosure” (1974, p. 43). The resulting effect on Latina/o students is obtaining an incomplete college experience, as described in the report written by Fry titled, “Latinos in Higher Education: Many Enrolled, Too Few Graduate” (Fry, 2002).

Jalomo, talking about Latina/o students, as nontraditional students, adds:

For nontraditional students [such as Latino students], college attendance is a new experience that warrants assistance from high school counselors, relatives, friends, or neighbors who have previously attended college (*or are attending*) and can provide valuable information on college participation. For nontraditional students, choosing to attend college may have been a delayed decision made late in high school or sometime after secondary school completion. The process of enrolling in college is a major disjunction in their life course, because the precedent of attending college has not been previously established in their family. (2003, p. 89, brackets added)

As a counselor, I resonate with this thought and I wonder what we can do to change this condition and what we have done to perpetuate it. Counselors have the opportunity to help students at the individual level, within the family circle, and in society at large (Lee & Waltz, 1998; Lee & Ramsey, 2006).

Latina/o students can benefit from other Latina/o students who are currently attending college, and even better, pursuing a similar course of study. Those students can be more than tutors and guides; they can be peer mentors. For this reason, many universities and colleges are using peers for academic support (León, 2003). Therefore, what many scholars, such as Jalomo, suggest is the use of others who have experienced college.

My First Class

Submission and telling people what they want to hear are rewarded with attention, recognition, approval, privilege, and status, but there is a price to pay in loss of self-esteem, personal integrity, and in meaning in living. (Moustakas, 1974, p. 42)

When I entered the classroom of my first class, there were only a couple of students engaged in a lively conversation, but soon the classroom filled. Their laugh echoed in my ears. When I came in--as coming into my new being, my being as a graduate student--I opted for sitting on the other side of the room, as entrenchment against potential enemies, and in guard of a possible attack. It was out of fear that I decided to find a more strategic and isolated location, one where I could see the instructor and at the same time monitor the rest of the class. Even though I dared not to make eye contact with anyone, I could *feel* their looks of doubt and surprise. I wondered if someone else would be there, someone to share my feelings of oddness, other international students or students of color, but there was and would be no one. No one like that came through the door; no one came into that moment in my life. But rather than finding out what others expected me to be, I wanted to be myself and show others who I was.

Surely, I felt out of place during my first class, and I came to find out that I would feel that way the rest of the first semester. What makes us feel at ease in one place? Is place people, or are people places? Do we connect with places, or do people connect us to places through memories and “lived experiences”? I was in the right place (room), at the right time (schedule), my first graduate class in the United States, but it did not feel familiar or the *right* place to be. All I felt then was a burning desire to attend graduate school and obtain a Master’s degree since that is what brought me there--to that moment and place, to be a graduate student studying abroad.

I bring these memories forward in a reflective manner to describe my circumstances then. The kind of research that I want to pursue calls for such reflection, and through a descriptive approach, I seek to understand the mentoring relationship through the eyes of the mentees. As Merleau-Ponty explains, “Phenomenology is that kind of human science research that must seize this life and give a reflective expression to it” (as cited in van Manen, 1997, p. 38).

Casey, referring to Kant says, “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience... the bodily experience of being-in-place” (1993, p. 46). By not feeling in place I did not know my role and *place* at the beginning of my Master’s program. The recognition of a place comes as we can recall being there before, thanks to the prior experiences we have had. I had no prior experiences of such a place; everything I saw and found was new to me. The role as a student was not new to me, but the panic-place I was invaded by was taking over.

Starting a new graduate program was like being at war, at war with myself, at war with those I did not know yet, at war with the new body of knowledge I was about to start learning and that I was expected to master. Casey adds, in reference to place-panic:

Prospect of no place is dismaying not only when pulling stakes or in wartime (part of the horror of nuclear war is its annihilation of places as well as persons), but at many other times: indeed, every time we are out of place, whether we are lost in a snowstorm, or our house has burned down, or we are simply without lodging for the night. In such situations, we find ourselves entering into a special form of panic: place-panic. (Casey, 1993, p. ix)

Having supportive friends in the past, such as special classmates and teachers, I felt quite alone now without such people. I would call them mentors, people who supported my development and professional growth. In this new educational experience in America at the graduate level, I missed having classmates who could help interpret the

actions of others. A peer tends to have insight into particular places and people. I was assigned a peer later on who helped me to cope with my very first weeks of stress, who led me through my first part of the journey of graduate school. My faith in a peer helper brings me to my present interest in the peer mentoring experience and my beginning questioning.

What is the peer mentoring relationship like? Are we less inhibited with those close to us in age? Does gender make a difference in how we relate? What makes one a peer? What special sort of response-ability does mentoring call for?

The Being: To Be, The Ser And Estar Duality

To be or not to be, that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them. To die: to sleep;
 (from Hamlet, Shakespeare, p. 53, 1604, in Dover Edition 1992)

In Spanish, we have two verbs for the English verb "To Be." One refers to our physical position or location where we are, *estar*, and the other meaning of the verb to be, *ser*, refers to our existence and what we do, as in a profession, work, a job or an activity. During my first graduate class in the United States I *was*, *estuve*, because I was located in the right room and place, but I 'was not,' *no fui*, since I *was* not validated or identified with the person I previously was. My *was* and *wasn't* were together, both mutually inclusive and exclusive of each other.

It is in the acceptance by others of who we are and what we do that allows us to define ourselves. We *are*, as we want others to see us. Today human beings are defined more by what they do, what they have, and what they know, than by who *they are*. Those

around us will describe or perceive us depending on what and how much they know about those three aspects previously mentioned: our doing, our having, and our knowing.

Moustakas says that “Whatever the means, whatever the cost, however complete the capitulation, the desire to be and being itself can never be eradicated. An inner light will always exist and will **find** its way to clearing in some moment of crisis or sudden self-insight; perhaps facilitated and supported by another human being” (1974, p. 116). I recall the help I received from many others, mentors and peer mentors. I was and am thankful to those who let me *be*, thankful to those who allowed me to be-come. And I came to be at that place and time, a graduate student in the United States, thanks to those who prepared me for that.

Latino señores: The naming of my identity!

The labels we attach to people, the names and all the other things that identify the individual by distinguishing him from the masses, are just what prevent genuine knowing. For labels and classifications make it appear that we know the other, when actually we have caught the outline and not the substance. (Moustakas, 1974, p. 42)

It is hard to accept names, in particular those we have not chosen for ourselves. Names that are categorizing and restricting are even less desired and avoided. The names we hold, we carry with us as chains around our neck. At times they give us a self, while at other times they slow us down with their weight. A Spanish singer named Raphael sings a song about names, wherein the lyrics are as follows: “Names are worn around our necks and we carry them throughout our lives, names given to us by our parents, names given to us, but not by God” (my translation). In my case, I now have a generic name given by the society where I currently live, *Latino*.

Names define, and definitions restrict. Twisted descriptions may turn into definitions, and definitions are concepts made up of words with frontiers. They limit! They fence! The difference between a definition and a description is that the latter can be more flexible as the context changes through construction and evolution. Even a simple description is a possible interpretation (Gadamer, 1960/1994). Descriptions give us chances to hear other voices; they do not claim total control, but rather, bring about understanding (van Manen, 1997).

The dominant culture has provided me with a tag, a name tag; therefore, my naming of being Latino stratifies me; it situates me, not at the top, but below, beneath, under ‘others.’ Above all, I must comply to the measure of what the meaning of this name implies. But it is not always easy. Many Latina/o students have written theses and dissertations on the experience of discrimination, for example Valenzuela, in her master’s thesis, just like me, she relates her experience in college as a Latina and writes:

In college, Latino students are faced with a new culture that sometimes does not work in their favor. “Underrepresented groups (of students) on campus often experience segregation, discrimination, and cultural congruence in predominantly White colleges” (Nevarez, 2001). It is also obvious that students in these kinds of climates are often “perplexed by the feelings they must choose between their cultural community and their campuses community” (Nevarez). (Valenzuela, 2002, p. 15)

Nevarez, in the same article referred to by Valenzuela, says “As a result of noninclusive academic climates, Mexican American and other Latina/o students are often perplexed by the feeling they must choose between their cultural community and the campus community” (Nevarez, 2001, p. 3).

Also, there is great discrepancy whether to use the term Latina/o, popularly used in the East coast of the United States, or Hispanic, used by the US Census to classify any

person who has an origin in any of the Spanish speaking countries of the Americas (Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Hunter, & Torres, 2008; Gracia & DeGreif, 2000). Both terms are considered a label, though, bestowed by one group on another. About either one of them, and their artificiality, Giménez says:

Regardless of their differences about the relative merits of Latino versus Hispanic as umbrella terms, critics and defenders agree about the need to have, in addition to standardized terminology, as much information as possible about the populations under study, to identify needs, factors affecting health, access to health services, and so forth. In spite of arguments advanced in its support, however, the label does not help either social scientists and policy makers because it only creates an *artificial* population; i.e., statistical constructs formed by aggregates of people who differ greatly in terms of national origin, language, race, time of arrival in the United States, culture, minority status..., social class and socioeconomic status... Succinctly stated: What can this, or any other ‘umbrella term, identify? Is it a minority group? Is it an ‘ethnic’ group? What is the meaning of the data gathered about this population? (1997, pp. 226-227, italics added)

According to *Webster’s New College Dictionary* (Neufeldt, 1997), the word *name* comes from the Greek words *onoma*, and *onyma*, and they mean to name or call. From the same source, name is defined as “a word or phrase that constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing” but also it adds “a word or symbol used in logic to designate an entity” (p. 900). Being named, then, is being designated. My entity, my being, is classified by the word/name **Latino**. This dictionary also adds a third definition about the word name: “a descriptive often disparaging epithet” (p. 900). Is being named Latina/o an epithet? Can Latina/o be a name, an epithet in disguise? Am I being assaulted, or am I being granted a gift? Who calls me Latino as a name in search of an identity? Who calls me Latino as an epithet?

The name Latina/o provides free assumptions about who we are or perhaps what we should be like, according to that name. As I entered my first class in the United States,

I realized that there were assumptions about me: who I was and what I should be like. I am Latino and I instantly am perceived by expectations and pre-understandings of others.

Moustakas, in reference to labels, says:

We continue to use labels to stereotype ourselves and others, and these labels have replaced human meanings, unique feelings, and growing life within and between persons. (1974, p. 42)

The time. Again, I share another memory from the past. Now I am in my fifth week of classes; winter comes early in the Midwest. I am standing near a window looking outside and watching the clouds pass by and the drizzling rain steadily falling. We, some classmates and I, chat while waiting for the instructor to arrive in order to start the class. As we look through the window, from the fourth floor of the Education building, one of my classmates asks me if I have ever seen snow fall. She is shocked when I answer that I have, and that I also am familiar with it. She asks me if I have lived long in the States. The fact that I know snow from my home country is shocking news to her. How could I know about snow if I come from Latin America? Isn't it supposed to be hot and humid all year round? Doesn't the sun shine all the time and people get dark because of that? Aren't there mass beaches and hurricanes down there? The learning of this piece of breaking news is taken with caution and certain disbelief. I can see that in her face. Her definition of Latina/o has been challenged, perhaps even voided, and this will take her quite some time to accept. It is quite some time later that we talk again. Whether it is because of that or some other reason, I do not know.

During my first class in the United States, I was overwhelmed with information and intimidated by the knowledge my classmates held. They talked with a familiarity and confidence, and I envied their knowing. They sounded abreast of their fields and flaunted

their experiences. On the contrary, I was a newcomer, attending a class in counseling having majored in TESOL (Teaching English as a second language). I had been a teacher for the past four years. I was taking a big leap in my career and I could feel the gap now. As I went home after that first class, one thought overtook my mind: I was in need of help and I intended to ask my advisor for it early the next morning. I was in need of someone, although I was not sure of what help I needed to regain my confidence once again. I knew I needed someone.

Above all else though, as I met other Latina/o or Hispanic students I felt I related to them. Not because we were so similar, but because we live similar experiences. Our reactions were alike, but our feelings of how we accepted the term Latina/o differed. What I have learned, though, is that the Latina/o experience needs a more detailed and interpretative analysis to understand what the college experience is like for Latina/o students. Peer mentoring is my way of pursuing this interest, and through this study I intend to bring some light upon to this phenomenon.

The Claim Of *Tartarus*

The word *claim* according to the *Webster's New College Dictionary* (Neufeldt, 1997) means "to call upon," and *Tartarus* is "the infernal abyss in Greek mythology below Hades, also the place where Zeus hurls the rebels Titans, also later on it became the place for punishment" (p. 1337). I was in the Midwest at the beginning of my Master's program, in a small town with a similar number of inhabitants, as the neighborhood where I grew up in my hometown in Chile. The vastness of the place, as well as the pale flat scenery gave me a sense of isolation, *desolation*, and forgetting. I felt forgotten by others, disconnected from the world. I was not coping well, in this place that

for me, was no place. I felt frustrated because people were nice to me, and many gave me opportunities and were eager to provide me with chances to grow and study. I felt punished and yet at the same time rewarded. I was a graduate student from a prominent university in South America, and after graduation I felt like Titan, the word used by one of the speakers in our commencement. But being in a small town in the Midwest, I felt punished for something, destiny perhaps as Zeus punished the Titans for opposing him as supreme God. Was I being punished in order to be humble, and learn more? But learn what specifically? Learn about whom? Learn about me? Learn about others? Learn and suffer? But I was also offered a gift of being able to study here. Similarly, Latina/o students express the joy of coming to college but also they struggle with feelings of loneliness that they frequently experience (Padilla, 1997).

Allen and Axiotis say, “To the Greeks... *paideuein* had a double meaning--‘to teach’ and ‘to torment’--whose echo still resonates in our modern term *discipline*. Realizing that *pathein mathein*, learning is suffering, they understood the profoundly tragic aspect of education, its intrinsic *passion*, and captured it in the image of the initiatory ordeal, which at once loosens to bind, wounds to heal, so that only through death are we born” (as cited in Peters, Marshall, & Smeyers, 2001, p. 30). So as the saying goes “to learn is to suffer” or *mathein pathein*; therefore, in order to truly learn, we have to change, and change implies a decision to get out of the comfort zone, with the intention of experiencing transformation as we create a new comfort zone. My suffering during this time of change, when I came to the United States and started my graduate program, would not be over until I found a guide, a mentor, to help me to move on and develop. This is a common case for many Latina/o students as well (Trueba, 1999). This

was a time where my old *self* had to die so my new *self* in the United States could be born.

The Nature Of Claiming

To claim or to call upon is to name with authority (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 257). The authority of life, as the result of my decision to come the United States provided me with grounds to stay. Staying kept me living, willing to learn, and even to suffer in order to grow. As the characters, and the ancient Greeks as audience, in Aeschylus' tragedies (Greene & Lattimore, 1953) found catharsis in their lives through pain, I found my catharsis when I found a guide to help me live this new life, in a new cultural system. The word catharsis comes from the Greek word *katharsis*, from another Greek word *kathairein*, and it means to cleanse, purge, from the Greek word *katharos*, that is a container used to clean (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 222).

The *claiming*, then, came with authority, and power. I was being claimed in order to receive what I was expected to go through in order to be there, to live up to what I needed to as in a re-birth. The word *nature* comes from Latin (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 904) and it means to birth. The call I was receiving was a call to be born again. I was in a new country, starting a new career, beginning school again, forming a new self, and a cultural self. But as in all births, pain must come along. Mothers bear children with pain, as do we when we are born in spirit through learning experiences that make us change. A new birth or being came about in the States, and not without pain. For Christians, the baptism of fire is what cleans and confirms one in the Christian faith. Fire is the metaphor for the pain that implies the change that we take upon us.

But for me, it was not a baptism of fire what I needed, as most children who have parents or parental figures to look after them, I was in need of a parental figure or an older brother to look up to, perhaps in this case a mentor. I had a mother before, and I could remember well what she taught me. As an adult, I was not in need of such figures, parental figures, as most adults are not. I was in need of and willing to accept a guide, a friend and peer support, and I was waiting for that person.

Latina/o students on a university campus also look for such a guide. When approached, most Latina/o students are willing to be reached by others. Tinto (1990, 1991, 1993) says that student retention in college is directly correlated with students' involvement on campus. Getting involved is a challenge for those who do not know how the 'system' works (Ybarra & López, 2004). Latinas/os, being a racial and ethnic minority, do not know how the educational system in the US works, because it was not created for them or by them (Garcia, 2001).

Tartarus As A Place And A State Or Moment

Place and moment both are part of places. As in a landscape, a moment is a place in time, with time being the landscape of our life, and a moment a piece of that landscape. Depending on the moment, this can be a tree, a forest or a rainy day. Casey says, "Indeed, time is a place --its own kind of place" (1993, p. 19).

In South America, where I come from, indigenous people dance for the motherland once a year. Earth is female in Spanish and in many Native American languages. They celebrate *Pacha-mama*, the name of the creating land, as *Gea* in Greek mythology. They have a very special connection with their creator, a female figure from where we all come and where we all are meant to go back. *Tartarus*, the dark path we

take, according to Greek mythology, leads us to *Hades*, in our journey. Certainly, we are not always heading to a *good* place, but we are always heading somewhere. But although I was heading for a *living hell*, one thing was clear; I also was heading for a place. In my case since I already had decided to go, I had two choices: to turn back or move along, and find solace. The choice of being, and whether being or not being, then, is being other than what we chose not to be (Shakespeare, 1604, p. 53 in Dover Edition 1992).

Life, many times, is not meant to be nice and joyous. At times, we need harsh moments to grow and learn (see Frankl, 1946/1984). Those tough moments can help us grow or deplete us. But we have to choose how we react to and act on life's events. Van Manen says, "Human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena (such as in literary or historical studies of texts) and at *understanding* the lived structures of meanings (such as in phenomenological studies of lifeworld" (1997, p. 4). Again, my pursuit of such lived structures lies within the realm of peer mentoring of Latina/o students.

Claimed By My Identity

The experience of being Latina/o is an unavoidable one; like many other social constructs it carries its blessings and curses. Being Latina/o is also a racial construct that affects and names those who "look like that." The brown skin and the use or knowledge of Spanish, most often the presence of an accent, do separate as well as group people together as Latinas/os. Due to my looks and accent, the Latina/o logo is fast given to me. Being Latina/o represents both a social as well as a cultural construction. Perhaps it is a classification that the American society imposes (forcefully or accidentally) on those who share this heritage. A classification is imposed as all of our racial and ethnic

constructions are. Being Latina/o is a lived experience; it hits you before you are prepared to be, as the Other reminds you of your Latina/o identity.

Another memory comes to mind. Now I am in my second semester, and winter is deep in our bones already. I am tired of snow and cold days. I am tired of being cold all the time. This time I am with my classmates waiting for our classroom to be open and the same classmate, who asked me about snow, asks me if it is as cold in Chile as it is in Ohio. I say only in the mountains; near the coast it is always cooler, although it never gets hot, even in summer! She then tells me that for a long time, she thought about the idea that I had seen snow before and was familiar with it. But over Christmas one of her brothers had been to Chile and told her that from the window of his hotel he could see snow even though it was in the middle of summer! Only then, she said, could she “believe” me. It was only when someone close to her who lived the experience and shared it with her, that she was able to accept it.

I am a Latino, and I am in college; I have been mentored and mentored others, but I now wonder what this experience is for others like me. It is, then, the lived experience of being Latina/o that intrigues me. Specifically, the question that calls me most is: **What is the lived experience of being a Latina/o peer mentee in a public research institution of higher education?**

Rising From *Erebus*

Rising as being befallen, rising as out of grace, rising as in below, might be a way to describe my connection with a mentor. As a phoenix rises from the ashes, I come back up again through the joy of finding, finding me through an-other, one-other through the peer mentoring experience.

It is in the beginning that we start anew, and then it all seems logical and familiar. One memory comes to mind. Now I am back to my first year in my Master's, study, and I am walking away from the office of my advisor. I wonder what will happen to me. After meeting with my advisor, I was assigned a second year student as my tutor, as my advisor said, to "catch up with school, and get used to the system." He also commented that my feelings of inadequacy and stress were common among first year students, particularly when they are international students. But I felt I needed more than a tutor, more than just reading. I was in need of more; I just could not express the inadequacy I felt.

What happened to me with my peer tutor was not a magic clash or an instantaneous enchantment, rather the beginning of a process. The first time we decided to meet was in the School of Business located across from the School of Education. The building was new and with plenty of room and a nice facility in which to talk and feel comfortable. Since the weather was nice, we met in one of the quiet corners of the building outside the main entrance.

As I reflect on that first encounter, I remember talking to him not about school, but how difficult it had been to adjust. The readings and the people all seemed so different, but not that different. They were different enough to make me feel uneasy, but similar enough so that it was difficult to pinpoint what made me hesitate. What makes us feel comfortable with others? Are we comfortable as we know people or as people know us? Does being comfortable mean to be authentic or to know what is expected from us? What is it to be comfortable in a place? Is being comfortable with people the same as feeling comfortable in a place?

My conversation with my peer classmate went smoothly, as the many others we had throughout the semester. I cannot remember exactly what my questions were about regarding school. But what I remember most is that he listened to me extensively. He was there and he wanted to help; he wanted to help me succeed. What I remember well, from that time, is that he shared a common frustration with the place and the people. One of the reasons he could move closer to a bigger city was that he had a car, so he could escape. Three years later, I would escape from that place as well, in the same route that he had taken.

Three years later, I would begin a doctoral program, move to Washington, D.C. as well, and as he did, change my career option from rehabilitation to school counseling. He changed his to Human Resources. His example led me to choose and pursue my new career path. Moving to the same city was not intended; my choice of pursuing a doctoral degree put me in the same city. But although we were here, now we would have different lives and our communication would not be the same. Our time as peer mentor and mentee had ended. Later on, I will discuss the nature of the peer mentee relationship, both its duration and process.

What is vivid in my mind today is the openness of his listening, the willingness to make me feel comfortable, and the readiness he had to guide me through the moment. There must have been some frustration for him too. I did not focus too much on academics while with him, but on the social skills needed to cope with people, and in particular, my classmates.

The Midwest can be a strange place. The people have a long tradition of tracing their ancestors up to a hundred years, if not more. Some areas are dominated by a few last

names, and everyone seems to be related to each other in one way or another. One's foreignness is even more foreign when one is not part of the "people." Nothing can be done about that, since physical appearance is something that no one can change, such as race. But joining others who are "different" can be a source of support.

My peer student helper was a student from the East coast. He also felt like a foreigner in the area. Later on, I also found out that he was openly gay, and the small town in the Midwest did not make him feel welcome at all. I felt odd about that place. Although the faculty and many classmates welcomed me, very few of them truly understood me. Oddly enough, despite the loneliness throughout the first semester, I felt I liked the place. Something cozy grew in me that made me like the atmosphere and the geography of the place.

My peer helper whom I will call Skavok, was a student from Pennsylvania and liked to travel and meet people. He had survived the cultural shock of a small town and was a great student. Also, he was respected and very active among student organizations. He worked in addition to his full load of classes at a part time job on campus as a graduate assistant. His parents were, as he once called them, hippies from the era of Woodstock and free love. They gave him a common name for "those years," and he grew up in a very unconventional environment. He had so much difference with the pace where he was that this resulted in a great connection with me because I was quite different in that place too. To share similar conditions not only opened up my willingness to accept him, but also it allowed me to feel understood. Whether that was a true condition of our relationship or a perceived state, the truth is that I felt comfortable. His listening to me was, above all, the key that opened my spirit.

One As The Other

To identify something is to be able to make apparent to others, amid a range of particular things of the same type, of which we intend to speak. (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 27)

Paul Ricoeur, in his book *Oneself as Another*, says, “Language... is constituted in such a way that it does not condemn us to choice, as Bergson long maintained, between the conceptual or the ineffable. Language contains specific connecting units that allow us to designate individuals” (1990/1992, p. 27). What Ricoeur says, is that by using language we classify. This classification may vary from language to language, but the conceptualization we make leaves us with a point of reference. The word Latina/o is not new to me, but what is new is to be *called* Latino.

When I arrived in the United States *I* lived the first eight months in a small town called Bluffton. Rather than a usual town it was the realization of a Thomas Kinkadee’s painting, but with a Midwest scenario. While I lived there, I applied to many colleges. In the first application package from Kent State University, I encountered the most puzzling question about ethnicity. What troubled me the most was the limiting choices. Certainly, I was aware of the racial profiling in the United States, but what perhaps shocked me was this time *I* was being profiled. The options were White, African American, Black, Asian, and Latino. It was my understanding that I was racially mixed, Spanish White with Native American ancestry, just as many people in Chile are. In Chile there was not much discussion about race, but rather about socio-economic status. The fact is that I never declared my race. And there I was, confused. What made me doubt? Was it OK to say Latino? Was I going to stop being Chilean? Who is Latina/o? What is Latina/o? What

about my dual condition of being White, Spanish with some native ancestry? What am I more? White? Moreno? Mestizo? How do I feel stronger?

This question made me ponder on a new concept, that until then, I had not considered: Race. Although I had no choice, due to my looks, I was in doubt. I was being named by others --it was not my choice. Now, after marking Latina/o, I was no more Angelo; something changed in me right there and then. I became one more Latino. Who is Latina/o? What is Latina/o? What others mean by Latina/o is not necessarily what I mean by Latina/o. Marking for the first time Latina/o in the ethnic/race box, I became one more, one more in the list of Latinas/os, one more as the other Latina/o in the crowds. Something was gained; something was lost, through a generic name, a generic title, a loss of individuality, and membership in a subjugated group.

The Other, And Me As An-other

Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided before hand by what is sought.
(Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 25)

Heidegger, above all philosophers, is the one who studies and analyzes the question of being to the deepest degree. Being Latina/o has much to do with being, being and accepting being Latina/o. Who is Latina/o? What does being Latina/o mean? Do Latina/o students feel Latina/o? What makes students feel Latina/o? Do Latina/o students feel more Latina/o at different times? When do Latina/o students search for a Latina/o identity? Is being Latina/o different when being in a mentoring relationship? In what way does the Latina/o identity affect that peer mentoring relationship? Is Latina/o a name or an epithet?

When entering my first class in the United States, I heard a student call me “the Latino student.” I was not a new student, a graduate student, a short, tall, intelligent, poor,

rich, fat, slim, bright, etc. student. I was the **Latino** student. Latino was a given name, and it was with me to stay. I was the other now: other student, not an-other student, but Latino student. Does it bother me to be Latino? Can I be other than Latino? Where or when am I Latino? Is it my hair? Is it my skin color? Could I ever stop being Latino? How much does my language connect me with being Latino? Do I ever want to stop being Latino?

The Latina/o component in peer mentoring is an aspect in which I am interested. I feel that something changes, something is modified due to the racial/ethnic component. The where and when are not clear to me. I sense them to be present though. Heidegger says, “Every inquiry is a seeking (*Suchen*). Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought. Inquiry is a cognizant seeking for an identity both with regard to the fact that it is and with regard to its Being as it is” (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 24).

My search to understand the peer mentoring phenomenon for Latina/o students leads me into the realm of ethnic racial identity. What is peer mentoring like for Latina/o students? What are their special circumstances they bring to this relationship? Heidegger adds:

This cognizant *referring to the inquiry* can take the form of investigating (*Untersuchen*), in which one lays bare that which the question is about and ascertains its character. Any inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has *that which is asked about* (*sein Gefragtes*). But all inquiry about something is somehow a questioning of something (*Anfragen bei...*). So in addition to what is asked about, an inquiry has *that which is interrogated* (*ein Befragtes*). (1927/2004, p. 24)

By finding myself defined or identified as an-other, an-other Latina/o, an-other of a group, I feel I lose a sense of individuality and am connected to a community that I find diverse. This grouping also leaves me out of a possible main group. Those who call me

Latino, in a class, also push me away from the possibility to ever join. Will I want to join in? Will others called Latina/o want to join? Being a Latino student, as an-other, I am given away, not part of a group. I am an-other, another of a group that is not them. I have been estranged from the start. A choice has been denied to me. Will I ever want to come back to that choice? Do other Latina/o students miss the choice to join in?

The Encounter

My first semester in my Master's program was one full of new experiences. Above all, in my desire to belong, I became involved in every program and activity that came across my path. Among those I signed up for was a mentoring program called Spring Board. The first session of the Spring Board program was a curious one. Enthusiastic professors told us the origin of the program. Spring Board was a program to respond to the needs present in recently graduated college students. The group of people who joined me in the program represented every racial group available, a rare case in a Midwestern university. People ranged in age from the early 20s to likely mid 80s. The people ranged in age, color, nationality, and educational level as the program extended to the college town community and life style as well. Certainly, the group was diverse in every way possible.

I sat in the middle of the room. To my left a Black woman talked incessantly. To my right a middle age White man took notes and attentively listened to every word uttered. I felt confused. Everyone seemed so enthusiastic and happy. Almost everyone had been part of the program previously. This was my first time. The palms of my hands were sweaty, and my voice shook, as it came time to introduce myself. My confidence at mentoring seemed to fade; I was not sure what I would teach, share or do. Do mentors

know what they will do? Is knowing in advance what to do a limitation? Are mentors always confident of their potential? What do mentors feel when compared or contrasted in the presence of other mentors?

After the second meeting with my mentee, I got *hooked up* with the program. I used the same expression that some of the members of the program used several times, in our first meeting. I worked in the program for the next two years, as I was a full time student on campus. My experience was mixed with great moments of joy and moments of doubt about my work. One question puzzled me later on and stayed with me: do we, mentors, always do what is best for the mentee?

After graduating from my Master's program, I went back to a university, but this time to pursue a doctoral degree. This time, almost by accident, I accepted an assistantship, and my first major assignment was the development of a peer mentoring program. I encountered mentoring again. This time I felt more mature, and at the same time more careful, and perhaps reluctant to use the word mentoring. But my experience in this peer mentoring program, called STARS, was different.

The word encounter comes from the Vulgar Latin words *in* and *contra* meaning *in* and *against*. I am "in against" the mentoring experience again. This time, I am not a mentor, but a supervisor of mentors. This is a mentoring program for first year multi-ethnic students, likely to be first generation college students. Race is a primary factor in the selection of mentees, as they have to be first year minority students.

My first meeting in the STARS Peer Mentoring Program (STARS PMP) was marked by a particular experience. I was assigned to supervise two out of the five White peer mentor students. Their willingness to help was clear. What I found difficult to accept

was their lack of understanding of minority students. They rejected failures and seemed overly confident in personal capacity. Robinson reminds us that some of the dominant discourses of oppression in the US imply that we need to be self-sufficient, independent, individualistic, self-reliant and aim at our own immediate progress and development, in disregard of others (Robinson, 1999).

John, one of my White peer mentors, is a tall and nice guy. He has good looks, and some of the girls in the group let him know this. He is distant to them, more concerned about taking notes, and listening to all instructions. Later on, I find out that he is a double major in business and finance, and that he has a GPA of 3.8. Also, he is an intern in a non-profit organization in Washington, DC.

One day, John calls and says he needs to meet me to talk as soon as possible. I ask him to come to my office right away. When John arrives, he looks worried, and as he gives me a handshake, I can sense his hand is sweating. As he sits he tells me that he feels really bad about Pablo, his Latino mentee. John tells me with a broken heart that Pablo has failed three of his five classes and now he is on probation, which is equal to being expelled from the university. Pablo has lost his scholarships, and John feels guilty. And although my intention is to say, "It's OK," I cannot. Something makes me feel that John could have done something else. At that moment I wonder what went wrong in the mentoring relationship, what John could have done or said to prevent this. Good was not good, and fine was not fine for Pablo; the result is that he has failed three classes.

John is a successful and articulate senior student, and Pablo is a first generation Latino college student. We both feel that something should have happened between the two of them, but it did not. From that moment, I start to become interested in the

mentee's experience within the peer mentoring phenomenon. Looking into the research on peer mentoring, I see there is not much written and less researched on the peer mentee's experience. I also begin to search for the best approach to study the questions that are beginning to emerge for me regarding the peer mentoring phenomenon and understand what happens within the peer mentoring relationship. Later on, I arrive at hermeneutic phenomenology for my path of inquiry.

Exploring The Experience Through Phenomenology

The "So What" Factor

The Questioning for the Research

So what? they ask me.

Is peer mentoring the new way to be?

Is it the new trend?

Is it the new bend?

They ask me, "so you want to study the mentee?"

"Is there anything yet that we do not see?"

Of course, Don't we ever have anything to lament?

Is it not ignoring the source for some people to resent?

Do we really know what mentees receive?

Have we asked mentees what they perceive?

How can we learn if we don't ask what an experience is like?

Are our assumptions not a dike?

The Questioning of Peer Mentoring

Is it fashion or

action?

Is it regression or

aggression?

Is it a factor or

an actor?

Is it action or

reaction?

Is it critical or

empirical?

So what is the "so what" factor?

The Critique

Am I entrenched or
on the bench?
Frameworks or
Non-end-works?

They ask me if I can count.
I say I do, but I would rather describe
as a way to transcribe.

They ask me, if I can multiply.
I say I do, but I would rather uncover
as a way to empower.

What is the theory?
I want to know
rather than to owe.

Where is the money?
I say, well taste the honey.
Truth is sweet.

So what is the “so what” factor?

The Others

Who are they?
What are they?
Where do they come from?
What do they want?

What is the frame?
I reply I want others to tell,
rather than to sell.

So what is the “so what” factor?

I have to stand,
where I demand.
I have a plea,
where I decree.

So what is the “so what” factor?

The Answer

The factor is where my act(or)s
become fact(or)s.

The Reflective Purpose And Intentionality Of My Research

Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection. (van Manen, 1997, p. 15)

As explained by Roberts, “There is no single animal called mentoring” (2000, p. 162). Although most people have an idea of mentoring, many people involved in some type of mentoring cannot explain the meaning of mentoring, nor how it is manifested in so many ways. So, the purpose of my research is to provide an in depth description and interpretation of the Latina/o peer-mentoring phenomenon using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. In reference to phenomenology, van Manen says:

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching --questioning-- theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world. (van Manen, 1997, p. 5)

In my research, I seek to enter the world of Latina/o students in order to describe the essence of the peer mentoring experience of these Latina/o students at a public four year institution. My research attempts to uncover what this experience is like (psychologically and socially) for students in order to provide ways to help make their college experience a better one for them. The insights gained from such phenomenological rendering, can serve to understand Latina/o students better, and how the peer mentoring experience for them and other minority students might be enhanced.

As van Manen indicates, “Human life needs knowledge, reflection, and thought to make itself knowable to itself, including its complex and ultimately mysterious nature... *but...* it is a naïve rationalism that believes that the phenomena of life can be made intellectually crystal clear or theoretically perfectly transparent” (van Manen, 1997, p.

17). I choose Latinas/os students because they are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Census, 2010), but at the same time they lag farthest behind in the attainment of higher education in comparison to all other ethnic groups in the US population. Their small presence in higher education makes them worthy of further research, and using a human science approach as described by van Manen allows for the illumination of their experience. Also, I choose Latina/o students because I am Latino and my experience serves as a point of entry to the phenomenon.

As a counselor educator and researcher, I believe that the insights gained through a human science research approach regarding the peer-mentoring phenomenon can provide a better understanding of Latina/o ethnic racial identity in college. It also can serve to increase the numbers of Latina/o students on campus, through a better understanding of the retention and outreach programs based on peer mentoring that are culturally sensitive. In my research project, I attempt to answer questions such as the following: Do Latina/o students feel Latina/o in college or higher education? What is their experience of peer mentoring? Can Latina/o students truly understand Latina/o students? What is it like to be mentored by a Latina/o, a non-Latina/o? Lastly, my phenomenological question, which above all guides all my questions and leads my research inquiry, is: **What is the lived experience of being a Latina/o peer mentee in a public research institution of higher education?**

The Phenomenological Lens For My Inquiry

Dwelling on these parts of... life reveals richer meanings and themes than I had realized. These small moments express many large matters of... life and can even teach me about such lofty matters as time, space, freedom, and love. (Becker, 1992, p. 7)

Van Manen, the main methodologist for my research project, indicates that “The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence--in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 36). The result will be the production of a reflective text, as such. No summary can be produced, because as van Manen adds, the whole text is the finding and its whole is the result. Asking for a summary is like asking a poet for the summary of his poem (van Manen, 1997).

Becker says, “Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, of things or events, in the everyday world. Phenomenologists study situations in the everyday world from the viewpoint of the experiencing person. This experiential view helps phenomenologists understand people and human life so that they can work effectively with them” (Becker, 1992, p. 7). I use phenomenology to study the everyday experiences of Latina/o students who are in a peer mentoring relationship as mentees. Those lived experiences are analyzed and interpreted using a hermeneutic approach guided by Gadamer (1960/1994).

The structure of my research project is guided by van Manen’s six research activities:

1. Turning to the phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (1997, pp. 30-31)

Above all, as van Manen says, “Phenomenological research aims at establishing a renewed contact with original experience” (1997, p. 31). Through conversations with Latina/o students who have lived the peer mentoring experience as mentees I talk to them, “not as a problem to be solved,” but to inquire about the meaning of the experience (van Manen, 1997, p. 24).

Hermeneutics is an interpretative and reflective act as referred by Gadamer (1976/1977), one of the main philosophers I choose for the analysis and description of the lived experience in peer mentoring of Latina/o students. “The lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them” (van Manen, 1997, p. 37). An important part of this type of research is reflection. Becker, referring to Husserl, reminds us that reflection is “Thinking about self, other, and world” (1992, p. 14). According to Becker, a psychological phenomenologist, this is important but also as she explains, agreeing with Heidegger:

Reflection...is another attribute of human nature... Human nature is an openness that illuminates the world; each person is a clearing within which the world presents itself. Not only are people aware of themselves and the world, they are aware of their awareness; they are self-reflective. Being self-reflective, people can think about experience, about the interpersonal world. People are naturally reflective and self-reflective. (1992, p. 14)

Hermeneutic phenomenology, according to van Manen, is a human science that studies persons and is essentially a writing activity, where both hermeneutics and phenomenology are human science research approaches based on philosophy, as reflective disciplines (van Manen, 1997). To understand a phenomenological project from the inside, we must actively do it. On this van Manen adds that “Phenomenology does not

offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that brings us in more direct contact with the world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). Above all, hermeneutic phenomenological research is a search for fullness of living, for the ways persons can possibly experience the world, as in my case, how Latina/o peer-mentees experience this relationship. It is here where the phenomenological description carries with it a moral force that entails the promotion of a change in practices, for the benefit of a group or groups. Social justice becomes an end of the mentoring process for Latina/o students among other forces of change for a more just society, as Freire (1970/2002) describes it. But as van Manen warns:

To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretative description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that the lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. The phenomenological reduction teaches us that complete reduction is impossible, that full or final descriptions are unattainable. But rather than therefore giving up on human science altogether, we need to pursue its project with extra vigor. (van Manen, 1997, p. 18)

In this type of research there is no theory formulation to control behavior; rather, the focus is deep interpretation of an experience. Phenomenological human science does not conduct an empirical analytical analysis, where the focus is on theory formation through problem solving and generalization. What hermeneutic phenomenological research does is to search for the fullness of living, for ways a human being experiences the world as a man or woman, father or mother, White or Black, Latina/o or Asian, son and father, daughter or mother, etc. (van Manen, 1997). Through the rendering of such experiences, insights can be gained for pedagogical possibilities.

The Coherent Path Of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Human science is rationalistic in that it operates on the assumption that human life may be made intelligible, accessible to human *logos* or reason, in a broad or full embodied sense. To be rationalistic is to believe in the power of thinking, insight and dialogue. (van Manen, 1997. p. 16)

The word coherent according to *Webster's New College Dictionary* (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 272) comes from the Latin words *com* and *haee*, where the first word means together and the second one means to stick. Therefore, the word *coherent* means to stick together. Hermeneutics and phenomenology stick together for a human science approach such as the one described by van Manen (1997) in *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. My phenomenon of Latina/o peer mentoring is in need of an interpretative understanding.

Becker (1992) provides us with two possible classifications of the phenomenological approach: one is for empirical phenomenology and the other is for hermeneutical phenomenology. Although there are many other divisions for it, I have chosen the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition to carry out this study, as formulated by van Manen (1997).

In reference to the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, Becker says,

It uses such things as literary texts and works of art to understand human life. In these studies, researchers read texts, for example, interpretatively. Scholarly and creative works, as well as life events, can be the subject of this kind of systematic, interpretative study. In this research tradition, the reader-interpreter of life texts enters a "hermeneutical circle" of witnessing, responding to, reframing, and relanguaging the object of exploration. This process can be dynamic, creative, and open-ended. (1992, p. 32)

Van Manen adds, "Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life, and semiotics is used here to

develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics” (van Manen, 1997, p. 4).

Riding Over *Acheron*

In old times, for the Greeks, the river the dead had to cross over was called *Acheron*, lead by *Charon* --a mythical figure depicted as an ancient man who carried in his boat all those who died. Most mortals only went over this river in one direction to never return. However, from time to time, some made it back to life; others attempted but failed. But the most beautiful of all goddesses, *Artemisia*, Goddess of beauty, traveled back and forth once a year into the upper world. *Acheron* divided Earth and life from Hades or death, the lowest part of the underworld, and with the arrival of *Artemisia* so did the season of spring. As I depict my subsequent journey, in Chapter Two, I seek to bring the experience of peer mentoring back from the previous *Chaos* I lived and talked about at the beginning of Chapter One. Many Latina/o students live this *Chaos* as well (Fry, 2000, 2005), and thanks to a good mentor, many find their way back.

In this first chapter, by referring to Greek mythology I have described how mentoring came to be in my life and how I became involved in mentoring myself. This reflection is what brings me to my interest in this phenomenon. In Chapter Two, I describe how Latina/o students have experienced mentoring, drawing upon research and other sources to bring this phenomenon to light. In Chapter Three, I describe in more detail the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology and how the use of art as well as language, and in particular, writing are crucial to this type of research. In Chapter Four, I uncover the meanings and essences of this phenomenon by analyzing the conversations I had with Latina/o students who have experienced peer mentoring and what it was like to

be in peer mentoring relationship as peer mentees. I end with a final chapter, where I provide pedagogical recommendations for ways to help make the college experience better for Latina/o students and all those who share layers of similarities with this group of ethnic minorities. Suggestions are made for how members of peer mentoring programs, counselors, educators, and policy makers can make use of these insights gained.

Many more questions might arise as the result of this study; many more doubts will be instilled in those in favor of mentoring. However, as previously stated, the purpose of this research is not to give the final or last word on the topic, but rather as van Manen says:

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a search for the fullness of living, for ways a woman possibly can experience the world as a woman, for what it is to be a woman. The same is true for men. In phenomenological research description carries a moral force... So phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are. (van Manen, 1997, p. 12)

Similarly, as member of the counseling profession, I am a counselor who helps people to live in the fullness of their humanity. As Gladding explains,

Counseling is a dynamic, ever-evolving, and exciting profession that deals with human tragedy and possibility in an intense, personal, and caring way. It is a profession dedicated to prevention, development, exploration, empowerment, change, and remediation in an increasingly complex and chaotic world. (2004, p. iii)

Moreover, I am a counselor, studying to become a counselor educator with a curriculum and policy interest in the development of my profession. Above all, I try to give a voice to those who have been silenced and overlooked when looking at the phenomenon of peer mentoring.

Pablo Neruda, in his poem *We Are the Clumsy Passersby*, says about human

beings the following:

We are the clumsy passersby, we push
past each other with elbows,
with feet, with trousers, with suitcases,
we get off the train, the jet plane, the
ship, we step down
in our wrinkled suits and sinister hats.
We are all guilty, we are all sinners,
we come from dead-end hotels or
industrial peace,
this might be our last clean shirt,
we have misplaced our tie,
yet even so, on the edge of panic,
pompous,
sons of bitches who move in the highest
circles
or quiet types who don't owe anything to
anybody,
we are one and the same, the same in
time's eyes,
or in solitude's: we are the poor devils
who earn a living and a death working
bureautragically or in the usual ways,
sitting down or packed together in
subway stations,
boats, mines, research centers, jails,
universities, breweries,

(under our clothes the same thirsty skin),
(the hair, the same hair, only in different
colors).

Somos torpes los transeúntes, nos
atropellamos de codos,
de pies, de pantalones, de maletas,
bajamos del tren, del jet,
de la nave, bajamos
con arrugados trajes y sombreros funestos.
Somos culpables, somos pecadores,
llegamos de hoteles estancados o
de la paz industrial,
ésta es tal vez la última camisa limpia,
perdimos la corbata,
pero aun así, desquiciados,
solemnes,
hijos de puta considerados en los mejores
ambientes,
o simples taciturnos que no debemos nada a
nadie,
somos los mismos y lo mismo frente al
tiempo,
o frente a la soledad: los pobres hombres
que se ganaron la vida y la muerte
trabajando de manera normal o burotrágica,
sentados o hacinados en las estaciones del
metro,
en los barcos, las minas, los centros de
estudio, las cárceles, las universidades, las
fábricas de cerveza
(debajo de la ropa la misma piel sedienta)
(el pelo, el mismo pelo, repartido en
colores). (1973/1985, pp. 22-23)

But it is in this passerby role that we can make a difference in people's lives; we can
make life a bit better for us and for others. As we walk and pass by, clumsily, we still can
make a path for others, in this case Latina/o peer mentees coming after us.

CHAPTER TWO: BEGINNING TO QUESTION THE EXPERIENCE OF LATINA/O PEER STUDENT MENTEES IN COLLEGE

Opening Up To The Possibilities

The essence of the question is to open up to possibilities and keep them open.
(Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 299)

This chapter questions the phenomenon of peer mentoring through the eyes of the mentee. By means of a variety of questions, I attempt to reveal the mentee experience of Latina/o students for what it is rather than the outcomes of how we want it to be. Thus, phenomenology becomes suitable for this study because this research methodology examines a social phenomenon with questions (Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1997).

My interest in human actions as a counselor propels me to do qualitative research on the human experience. Some scholars have called qualitative research the fifth force in psychology (Ponterotto, 2002). As van Manen reminds us, “A human being is not just something you automatically *are*, it is something you must try to be” (1997, p. 5). Peer mentoring involves essential aspects of humanity such as care and the desire to help; where there is a mentor there must be a mentee (Rhodes, 2002), although the second member of the mentoring dyad, the mentee, is rarely talked about (e.g., Cohen, 1999; Shea, 1999; Wunsch, 1994; Zachary & Fisher, 2009).

Mentoring is a common approach in institutions of higher education, and has become popular among Latina/o students (e.g., Hall, 2006). What calls me to research the peer mentee experience is not a desire to develop a theory on peer mentoring, but a need for a deeper and more profound understanding of the mentoring experience. For this reason, I focus on mentees.

For some mentoring supporters, such as Freedman (1999), mentoring presents itself as an opportunity to serve others. Mentoring is about giving of oneself to others, and serving others. However, being mentored may also be about learning, and it is possible that being mentored is more than giving mentors the opportunities to serve and to share what they have learned. In truth, within a peer mentoring experience, there could be an exchange of roles at times. After all, peers are close in age, experiences, and personal characteristics. Maybe, Latina/o students experience more than what we are aware of when they engage in peer mentoring. Conceivably, mentees who are Latinas/os may experience much more than being “helped” through peer mentoring when this experience happens in college. They may also develop their ethnic and racial identities in the process of being helped, if those who mentor them are also Latina/o.

The multiple unknown aspects about mentoring appear from the moment we begin to ponder this practice (Colley, 2003, 2003b; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Mentoring has reached far and wide, including Latina/o students of many colleges and universities. How can we say that Latina/o students are helped when being peer mentored if we do not ask them to describe their experience? How can we expose first year Latina/o students to a practice of which we know very little about? If mentoring does help, how does it help mentees? Are we not responsible to know something about what we promote? How certain are we that mentoring and the Latina/o identity are compatible in the process of being peer mentored? Is it advisable to promote a practice that comes from a foreign culture? Can we say that we truly liberate Latina/o students when we invite them to join peer mentoring programs (see Martín-Baró, 1994)? Could we be promoting the *status quo* of domination and oppression of minorities by perpetuating practices as peer

mentoring among ethnic groups (see Colley, 2002), and sometimes racial minorities, like certain Latina/o groups?

Gadamer (1960/1994) provides the foundation for my inquiry. It is with questions that I open to the phenomenon of mentoring, and inquire about the common type of mentoring that it is manifested among Latina/o students. This form of mentoring is usually called peer mentoring because peers act as mentors rather than adults, as it is in the case of classical mentoring (Levinson, 1978). However, I am concerned about those who become mentees of their peers in a peer mentoring relationship. The epiphany of a negative mentoring experience that I narrated in the previous chapter called me to my interest in how mentees are helped through peer mentoring. Peer mentoring is a practice, that while popular and common among Latina/o students, is far from being understood. Whereas many mentees talk about the gratitude they have for the help their mentors gave them, I expose the possibility in this chapter that we are not sure know how mentoring helps. The mentoring scholar, Colley, states the following:

Since mentoring has recently become one of the most popular means of trying to achieve social inclusion, huge numbers of both professionals and volunteers are being drawn into this work. Sometimes they are designated as mentors... tens of thousands of students are volunteering as mentors, on top of their demanding degree courses and part-time employment to support themselves and pay their university fees. Yet, as I began to study mentoring, I was shocked to realize how little evidence there is for this practice, and how flimsy its theoretical base. My own professional training in guidance [counseling] allowed me to develop my practice through understanding of a range of theoretical models, and through insights into the social context of career work... Mentoring seemed to lack such anchors; the more so since many volunteer mentors have almost no education or training in preparation for the role. Yet everywhere, the stories told about mentoring were always happy ones. It was an intervention, which, apparently, could not go wrong. (2003, p. xiv, brackets added)

Like Colley, I am also a counselor, shocked at the lack of “theoretical models and insights” for a better understanding of the mentee experience. Other than the anecdotes

that in limited words attribute many benefits to the mentoring process, we rarely hear the mentees' perspectives or voices. Often, we hear about mentors' experiences throughout the mentoring process (Matthews, 2003), we read about how to train mentors in the literature (Johnson & Ridley, 2004), and we can find some benefits associated with the use of mentoring or being a mentor (Ragins & Scandura, 1999; Scandura, 1992). Some scholars have even shown that undergraduate Latina/o students' success may be related to mentoring (Zalaquett, 2006; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Nonetheless, those who need to be helped through mentoring--the mentees--in all these studies and written accounts appear hidden behind the grandiose rhetoric of mentoring (Colley, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2003, 2003b).

For some scholars, mentoring has become like the Alchemist's stone, turning all into gold (Gulam & Zulfiqar, 1998). In other words, all those who are touched by mentoring will be helped, as Collins and Scott state in a famous article, "Everyone who Makes it has a Mentor" (1978). Because of this biased leaning towards mentoring, Colley (2001b) proposes to "re-right" the rhetoric of mentoring. She wants to right the wrongs of this practice and to reveal it for what it is; she calls this the demystification of mentoring (Coley, 2001a). In Colley's words,

I argue that we need to unravel the romantic myths that surround mentoring, see beyond its rhetoric and question its taken-for-granted assumptions if we are to make the most of mentoring relationships. (2003, p. 1)

I follow her suggestion and I look at this phenomenon through the lens of phenomenology, beginning with a poem as a summary of the journey that I have taken that leads me to this point.

Gadamer (1960/1994) tells us that we need to open up the phenomenon that interests us through questions. Once we do this we discover the assumptions we have. For this, van Manen (1997) reminds us that one of the biggest problems when doing human science research is not that we “know” too little, rather that we “know” too much. We tend to assume much more than we really “know.” The use of questions can lead us to delve deeply into an experience, thereby bringing us back to the lived experience. Again, as van Manen (1997) suggests, we must begin with the human experience, usually our own, before we explore other people’s human experiences. Through this back and forth cycle, we can understand and relate to the experience in question. Phenomenology reminds us that we can only understand that which we care for, whether we live it personally or not. Nonetheless, the experience must be something that we are interested in exposing and understanding as long as it falls in the realm of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997).

Hence, in the tradition of many phenomenologists (e.g., Buber, Gadamer, Heidegger, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Ricour, and van Manen), in Chapter Two, I begin with an explanation of the need to question the assumptions about mentoring--what I call my point of departure. Next, I continue with the “opening up” of what peer mentoring may be rather than what we want it to be. Then, I expose the need to “uncover” the experience of mentees to mentor them more effectively. I continue with the “moral” obligation to help others as the driving force of this research project. Finally, I conclude with a possible interpretation of the context in which peer mentoring appears in higher education. Throughout this chapter, I show how phenomenology can help us to unveil the experience of Latina/o students when they are peer mentees.

The Point Of Departure: The Questioning Of The Phenomenon

In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know. (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 363)

The proposition of asking questions to understand a phenomenon that interests us comes from Gadamer. In *Truth And Method* (1960/1994), Gadamer suggests that when we ask questions, we open up to a line of inquiry that can help us review our own assumptions. Assumptions are what we think we know and what we take for granted (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 83). As I present in this chapter, it appears that peer mentoring has been built more on assumptions rather than on verified knowledge. Thus, in the tradition of Gadamer's questioning of the phenomenon that calls our interest, I review my own assumptions and the assumptions that other mentoring scholars have made about this practice.

In a highly regarded and frequently quoted meta-analysis on mentoring, Jacobi (1991) asks, "Simply put, does mentoring help students succeed in college? If so, how? Both theoretical and empirical answers to these questions are lacking" (p. 505). These lingering questions are puzzling, and they add to my own set of questions as one who encourages peer mentoring in college because I care for those who become mentees. Mentees are first-year students who tend to have the highest attrition rate in higher education (Fry, 2002). While the common consensus is that mentoring helps, reviewing the literature on mentoring and reflecting upon my experiences in search of learning how peer mentoring helped former mentees I know, it has become clear to me that we do not know how peer mentoring helps. Thus, I am concerned about the heavy reliance on the peer mentoring practice to help ethnic minority students, like Latina/o students in higher

education. More importantly, I am concerned about the lack of understanding of how mentoring helps.

In the previous quote by Gadamer (1960/1994, p. 299), he suggests that we need to ask questions, not out of distrust, but to discover what the meaning of an experience is. As a supporter of mentoring, I recognize that there is much that needs to be known about mentoring. But it is not easy to question what many people already think they understand and fully embrace. As Merriam states, “The literature on mentoring is biased in favor of the phenomenon” (1983, p. 169). Partly, this is the result of the good name that mentoring has and the auras of goodness around those who support this practice or engage in it in any way (see Freedman, 1999).

Mentoring is a popular activity today; it is “the subject of talk shows, business seminars, journal and magazine articles” (Merriam, 1983, p. 161). Accordingly, if so much has been written on mentoring, how can mentoring scholars like Jacobi (1983), in addition to Merriam (1983), also conclude with questions, instead of answers? Is the result of analyzing mentoring to end with even more questions than the ones we had before?

Strangely, nonetheless, despite the questions that some scholars present, which continue to be corroborated in present massive volumes of mentoring (e.g., Allen & Eby, 2007; DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Ragins & Kram, 2007), we still continue to promote mentoring, which by now is an international phenomenon (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002; Miller, 2002). What appears clear in the research on mentoring is that we know more about the history of mentoring rather than what it means to be mentored (Merriam, Thomas, & Zeph, 1987; Roberts, 1999). Nonetheless, Heidegger (1927/2004) reminds us,

that the essence of an experience resides in its meaning; this is what he calls “historicity.” This term does not refer to the chronological order of events, or history, but the meaning of an experience. Thus, if we want to understand mentoring, following Heidegger’s suggestion, it is not in the sequential series of events that lead us to mentoring that we find the answers to our present questions about this practice, but rather in the meaning of the experience of what it is like to be mentored. This is how we can understand this social phenomenon and why it happens, when it happens, and what it does to those who are “mentored.” Hence, Gadamer’s proposal also appears suitable. By questioning what interests us, we can confirm what we know, and what we might still have to look for; in phenomenological terms, this would be the meaning of an experience or its essences (essential components). Consequently, in this chapter after questioning the underlying assumptions of the mentoring process, I explore the research on mentoring in a phenomenological manner, mixing experiences, reflection and asking questions. Nonetheless, before I move further into this study, and in the phenomenological tradition, I begin with a metaphor.

The Meta-for My Study

By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor toward the original region where language speaks through silence. This path of the metaphor is the speaking of thinking, of poetizing. Virginia Woolf once described how words not only find their semantic limit in metaphor; metaphor is also language’s way of making possible for the poet to transcend this limit. (van Manen, 1997, p. 49)

The word metaphor comes from the Greek word *metapherein*, which means “to transfer.” Etymologically, it is made up of the roots *meta*, which means “to bear,” and *pherein*, which means “more” (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 852). Hence, a metaphor is a linguistic device that carries more meaning than it appears to upon initial review (Kovecses, 2002).

As Gestalt's counseling theory describes, the whole is more than the sum of its parts; the whole in union with all its parts may also become a different being from each one of its components (Gladding, 2004). Sometimes, as pieces come together a whole new being begins to appear, one that may even differ from its individual elements and from the original self. Likewise, a metaphor can be described as being comprised of pieces that, once joined together, may create a new thing. Heidegger (1927/2004) says that a thing is a thing for what is in it; he calls this the essence of a phenomenon. A thing for Heidegger is a phenomenon, whether it is real or a psychological concept, as long as it falls in the realm of consciousness (Becker, 1992); furthermore, a thing is the subject of study for phenomenology (van Manen, 1997). Through a metaphor, in phenomenology, we can unveil the essences of a phenomenon.

The metaphor I choose for this study is the concept of "taming" as it is found in a children's story titled, *The Little Prince*, in chapter 21. The French writer, Antoine Saint Exupéry, wrote this book in 1943, right after WWII. At that time, people were making sense of life in the middle of the widespread destruction and death of war. After this event, most of the Western world was destroyed, and some aspects of civilization had collapsed. As a result, the world called for reconstruction. Social constructivism states that we make sense of our experiences through the interaction we have with others, usually by means of oral communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Crotty, 2005; Searle, 1995). It is within the social context of the turmoil of WW II that the story of *The Little Prince* emerged.

The meaning of my metaphor is found in the story when the Little Prince asks a fox, "What does that mean -- 'tame'?" The fox replies, "It means to establish ties" (1944,

p. 80). Then the fox adds, “It is an act too often neglected” (p. 80). This suggestion of “ties” by “taming” one another lends a different view than what usually is associated with the word. Perhaps the “ties” we make with one another, the ties that may limit or strengthen us as Latina/o students, afford a new understanding. For example, social customs are “ties” that bind us together--in counseling we call this culture (Robinson-Wood, 2009). However, what brings us together at the same time can separate us from those who do not share those bonds with us (Robinson-Wood, 2009).

Phenomenology allows us to tease the language we use (van Manen, 1997); consequently, I also tease the word metaphor by resorting to my native language, Spanish. The word metaphor is *metáfora* in Spanish. The word *meta*, in Spanish, means “goal”. One initial goal of this study is to explain how I understand the peer mentee experience now; thus, I expose my assumptions about mentoring. Gadamer (1960/1994) suggests that we cannot rid ourselves of our assumptions, but we can make them apparent. We can distinguish them from what we discover when we question the phenomenon that interests us.

To me, the origin of this story is similar to the lives of many Latinas/os students, who share recent immigration histories. Many Latinas/os have moved to the US due to war; others come from the destruction imposed upon them due to poverty; and others come in search of what they could not find in their home countries, such as social upward mobility and further education. Latinas/os are a complex and diverse group of people (Robinson-Wood, 2009). Moreover, even the naming of this group, whether it is Latina/o or Hispanic, is up for debate. The word we choose to use, Latina/o or Hispanic, is also a metaphor because it means different things to different people. My preference is Latina/o

to honor the gender, the racial, and the linguistic differences that exist among Latina/o students and affect the mentoring experience (see Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). Latinas/os are not a monolithic group. Some have called Latinas/os “the cosmic race” due to being racially mixed to the point of having members who make up all possible racial combinations and representatives of all racial groups (see Vasconcelos, 1997). Furthermore, not every Latina/o is a Spanish speaker (see Falicov, 2000; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). All this richness in variety also makes the naming of this group Latina/o complex and arbitrary.

I propose to make sense of Latina/o students’ experiences in their own worldviews, and establish an insightful connection for unraveling their experiences, and for this purpose a metaphor can help to open up new meanings to interpret the peer mentee experience of Latina/o students in college. To tame as the fox explains to the Little Prince is to get closer to that which needs to be tamed; thus, I hope to get closer and closer to my phenomenon of interest by questioning it. However, while the fox suggests the formation of ties, ties that can bind him together with the Little Prince, I recognize that not all ties bind; some of them can also entrap us. When does taming mean to create ties? When does taming one another turn into a trap? This remains to be seen. I hope to find out when I ask former peer mentees what their experiences were like as peers and mentees of their own peer Latina/o students.

Bonds And Links Through *La Familia*

La Familia is the peer mentoring program that I use in this study and the source of my current curiosity about the Latina/o student mentees’ experiences. A Jewish Caucasian undergraduate student from Mexico founded this group over 10 years ago. I

pause on the idea of him being White, because as a Mexican, he was integrated to the degree that he could date White girls. We could hardly notice any foreign accent when he spoke English, and his upper class background gave him social benefits that were not common among his Latina/o peers. Nonetheless, something “tied” him together with other Latina/o students. Something brought him closer to Latina/o students. And although he is Jewish, in a school that according to the Hillel Foundation for Jewish Life reports that one quarter of its undergraduate student population is Jewish, he was “tied” to another ethnic group, Latinas/os.

While ties can bring us together, they can also set us apart from others. Also, the ties we have with other people are not always visible. The fox entrusted the Little Prince with a secret, which the Little Prince repeats so as to not forget “what is essential is invisible to the eye.” Phenomenology looks for the essences of an experience (van Manen, 1997), something that perhaps may seem invisible, but is possible to see if we look at the heart, the heart of what a human experience is like. As van Manen writes, “In doing research we question the world’s very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being” (1997, p. 5). To care for an-other human being is to want to know his/her essences as he or she is rather than how we want them to be. For this reason phenomenology helps us to get closer and “tame” (develop ties) with the mentee who is someone’s peer and also called a Latina/o like me, but who may also differ much from me.

The encountering of *La Familia* occurred to me when I met this Jewish Caucasian and also Latino student, who I will call Jared, when I arrived on campus for the first time.

I met him at a student meeting where he described the need many undergraduate students have for mentors. He was recruiting peer mentors. Listening to him, I was impressed by his outgoing personality, his eloquence, and his contagious enthusiasm for this group. It reminded me of my previous experiences in programs like the one in which I participated back in Ohio. Some scholars have suggested that students who enroll in peer mentoring programs or look for mentoring opportunities share similar personality characteristics (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Perhaps this student, Jared, has this type of “mentoring personality.” Maybe what we have not realized yet is that mentoring is a type of program for certain personalities. Reflecting back on the failed peer mentoring experience I discussed in the previous chapter, could it be that the mentee (or mentor) did not have a mentoring personality?

Despite the generalized enthusiasm about this group among the students who I observed, I realized that there were also contradictions with the good name and respect that they claim this program had. It contradicted what we traditionally associated with a good program in higher education. One was that the group was rather informal; the hierarchy of mentors and mentees was hardly noticeable and barely distinguishable in their testimonies. Along with Jared, there were former mentors and mentees also recruiting mentors. There was barely an age difference between them! Also, there was no documentation about the program and no calendar of events. They only talked about how to “join them in upcoming events.” Nonetheless, an academic affairs office supported this group, and they were granted the opportunity to apply for financial assistance whenever they needed it. I knew this because I was hired through this office and I was previously debriefed about this group. This was surprising to me, as it has been for mentoring

scholars as Colley (2003), because we live in an era of evidence-based practices and budget cuts in all educational programs. The counseling profession now has mandates to produce evidence-based programs (see Lee & Ramsey, 2006).

Another surprising aspect about *La Familia* is that as Latina/o students continue their work as team leaders, they have not always met with each other nor have they been former peer mentors or mentees. The program has proved to be like the mythical bird Phoenix. As if it were rising from the ashes, it appears each year. Despite the lack of evaluation, written reports, and follow-ups, Latina/o students come together and form the group. Somehow, there are always one or two willing Latina/o students who carry on with the program, which eventually has become a tradition. This is not unique to *La Familia*; peer mentoring seems to be characterized with this format of informality and spontaneity (McManus & Russell, 2007).

Is *La Familia* an approach connected to the Latina/o culture? Is peer mentoring a natural fit for Latina/o students? How do mentees receive the mentoring from their peers? What are we missing about programs like *La Familia* has remained invisible?

La Familia, as in some Latina/o families (see Falicov, 2000), is made up members of no blood connection. Some people come together and stay together out of necessity; friendship, immigration history, etc. (see Falicov, 2000; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). Many Latina/o people have been both forced and stimulated to be together through war, poverty, loneliness, etc. Nonetheless, what keep mentees together with their mentors in *La Familia* or their “family” peer mentoring program, remains a mystery. Moreover, the secret of what makes a successful peer mentoring experience for mentees hides under the good name of mentoring and those who say they

perform this practice. It is somehow a secret, because some mentees have successful experiences and others do not. As supporters and promoters of mentoring, we know that peer mentoring can help, but not what makes an experience successful. Some scholars like Simon and Eby (2003) have identified some of the possible typologies that can result in a negative mentoring experience, but not what typologies make a successful mentoring experience (see Ragins & Scandura, 1999). Thus, we must acknowledge the negative to see the positive. Both are a side of the same coin. Interpretative inquiry, specifically like phenomenology, can help us in a liberatory way to see the world as do those who we want to seek help (see Freire, 1970/2002, 1992/2004; Martí-Baró, 1994).

What is also interesting about *La Familia* is that it is a peer mentoring program that uses a Spanish name, although its members only communicate in English. All my conversations with them have always been in English, even when we know we can speak Spanish. However, it seems that when we use Spanish words, we turn back to our cultural roots (Falicov, 2000). In a romanticized way, we evoke principles of caring, like family, which in Spanish is *familia*. Somehow, we seem to attempt to recreate a *familia* in college. Even among Latinas/os who do not speak Spanish, it has been my previous experience that the use of Spanish words to name places, stores, and things, usually evokes meanings that are not the same as the English words convey.

Reviewing Assumptions, Starting With Mine

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual Interpretation, one likes to appeal [beruft] to what 'stands', then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption [Vormeinung] of the person who does the interpreting. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, pp.191-192)

Gadamer (1960/1994), in addition to what Heidegger says above, also reminds us that revealing our assumptions does not rid us of them, but it allows us to make them present. With this, we become aware of what we assume and what we truly know. One of the first assumptions I held, when I became interested in the topic of mentoring, was that if mentoring is an approach that helps us, we should be able to find "how" by asking those who have been involved in this process. As Kvale and Brinkmann state, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them? Conversation is the basic mode of human interaction" (2008, p. xvii; also see Gadamer, 2001). However, although we do not always get answers to our questions, I dare to question a practice I support and promote. I hope to "tame," to find the "ties" that keep Latina/o students as mentees together with the mentors and that which transforms their peer mentoring experience into a successful mentoring relationship.

In this study, I use the verb *tame* to exemplify the peer mentoring relationship, but not with the meaning that is usually associated with this word: the drastic and brutal approach to control, to condition and to train animals (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1366). Rather, I use it as the fox teaches the Little Prince: to build ties little by little, and by getting closer and closer each day. This meaning resembles how I see the peer mentoring experiences unfold for many Latinas/os students. It seems that when Latina/o mentees are being peer mentored, they get closer to their mentors and also to their ethnic group. Nonetheless, the meaning of the process is an assumption. We tend to assume that students who share a common "ethnic tie" do connect because they are Latinas/os. However, this connection may not be such or perhaps is more complex than what we assume. This "tie" with one

another will be revealed and further discussed throughout this study by means of this metaphor.

When I ask mentors and mentees about their experiences, they cannot answer my questions with a concreteness of what it does. Neither have scholars in several meta-analyses of mentoring been able to answer their own questions in relation to mentoring. Moreover, the confusion about mentoring is not limited to their descriptions. What some studies and meta-analysis of mentoring have concluded is that defining mentoring is difficult (Fagan, 1988; Roberts, 2000). Nonetheless, instead of summarizing the phenomenon of mentoring, what these studies expose is our current lack of understanding of what we refer to as mentoring. Paradoxically, while I concur with these studies, students, faculty, and educational administrators still continue to promote mentoring for disadvantaged youth, at risk populations and ethnic minorities (Colley, 2003; Piper & Piper, 1998, 1999, 2000). All these studies use language that implies a deficiency of the group, rather than the strength they have for the possible overcoming of present social inequalities. Despite these and other limitations around the understanding of mentoring, peer mentoring is a social movement that has settled in our society and has achieved international influence and acceptance (Colley, 2003; Miller, 2002; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

How much are we willing to put mentees at risk, based on uncertain outcomes with a wishful hope of offering help? How much can we support what we do not really understand? Will the potential gains attributed to mentoring be enough for us to support this practice confidently? How much can mentors and mentees expect from a practice of

which we know very little? Above all, how much are we willing to risk those who are the most vulnerable, the mentees, for a hopeful outcome that we cannot guarantee?

I ask these questions at the beginning of this chapter, because I follow Gadamer's quest (1960/1994). He invites us to ask questions as a means to understand what interests us, and also because Jacobi's questions (1991) summarize the state of mentoring: we hope much but we know very little about "how" mentoring helps. If it is mentoring that helps, how do mentees perceive the help they are given through peer mentoring?

I have been troubled since I read Jacobi's meta-analysis. Moreover, Jacobi's questions instill in me a new set of questions, like the ones I shared, as well as others about the practice of peer mentoring. I support this approach for my fellow Latina/o students, who are undergraduate students, although I am a graduate student. I focus on peer mentoring because this is the form of mentoring with which I am most familiar. But now I pause to ponder whether mentoring is what happens to Latina/o students, and what kind of "mentoring" that peer mentoring really is. Phenomenology is like hitting the brakes of a car; it makes us stop, and shakes us up to pause and see what we have in front of us. Heidegger writes that "Being is the most universal and emptiest of concepts" (1927/2004, p. 2). Most people know the word mentoring. It appears that most people have lived something they call mentoring. Nonetheless, if we look for one definition, or a consensus, we may face an uphill battle. Not only it is difficult to define mentoring (Fagan, 1988), but it is a phenomenon of multiple manifestations (Roberts, 2000), none of which is without its detractors (e.g., Baugh & Fageson-Eland, 2007).

Jacobi's questions have stayed with me despite the uncertainty that a question can provoke in us. I dwell in Jacobi's questions because they can help us clear the path for

greater understanding of the mentoring process. That is, if we dare to look for the answers to her questions, as well as our own about mentoring, perhaps, we can end up in a better position to help those who are mentored, the mentees. Gadamer writes, “Knowledge is dialectical from the ground up. Only a person who has questions can have knowledge, but questions include the antithesis of yes or no, of being like this and like that” (1960/1994, p. 365).

Thus, in this chapter, armed with Jacobi’s questions along with my own, and as in the previous poem I rendered, I look at the peer mentee experience in search of answers. Moreover, as the philosopher Levinas (1961/1969) reminds us, “The other” is a moral responsibility. Mentees have not been given an opportunity to express, in their own voices, how peer mentoring helps them. This is a debt that as supporters of mentoring we have with them. As a supporter and promoter of peer mentoring for Latina/o students, and as a Latino student myself, I believe we have a moral responsibility toward the mentees; this is what I hope this study may accomplish. Therefore, conducting this research project can provide an avenue for mentees to describe their experience of how they are helped within a peer mentoring experience. I approach this duty through social justice principles. Social justice mandates call for listening to all voices as a moral call (Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006). Brinkmann calls that a qualitative research stance (Brinkmann, 2008). Moreover, further research on mentoring is necessary to minimize the possible negative effects of the mentoring practice (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999; Simon & Eby, 2003). I discuss the idea of a moral call more later; now I continue with my revision of the assumptions on mentoring.

What We Look For Not Always Appears At First Glance

Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others.
(Heidegger, 1927/2004, p.155)

Heidegger (1927/2004) reminds us in his philosophy of *Dasein* that we are always somewhere, and wherever we are, we are with others. The word *Dasein* is made up of two German words, *Das*, which means there, and *sein* which means to be. Similarly, mentors are mentors of mentees, and for a person to be a mentee he or she must have a mentor; otherwise, the relationship cannot exist. However, as I show in this chapter, we seem to hear more about mentors and mentoring than the experiences of mentees. This is limiting.

We are in the world with others, but how we interact is not always as clear as we tend to think. Mentoring is an example of a human interaction to which we attribute goodness, but of which much remains to be explained and understood (Colley, 2003; Jacobi, 1991; Merriam, 1983; Merriam, Thomas, & Zeph, 1987). I connect with Jacobi's words as a counselor. In *Social Action: A Mandate for Counselors* (1998), Courtland Lee indicates that we always have the social responsibility to act and work in favor of other people beyond the comfort and intimacy of the counseling relationship. As a counselor who abides by social justice principles, and as a member of the Association of Counselors for Social Justice, I support the mission of this group, which says:

Counselors for Social Justice is a community of counselors, counselor educators, graduate students, and school and community leaders who seek equity and an end to oppression and injustice affecting clients, students, counselors, families, communities, schools, workplaces, governments, and other social and institutional systems. (<http://counselorsforsocialjustice.com/mission.html>, retrieved on August 2, 2010)

Therefore, from the start of this research project I ground myself in a moral call for doing research in an interpretative mode (see Hultgren, 1991; Hultgren & Coomer, 1989; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). I accept this responsibility when I promote peer mentoring as many other people do in higher education. Therefore, I must also ask how this approach, which I support and promote, helps. I should not simply accept that because peer mentoring appears to help some of my peers, that all mentees are so “helped.” This is quite contrary to social justice principles.

Questioning What Is Given

The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 270)

Despite all the uncertainty surrounding the mentoring practice, there are peer mentees who claim to have been helped through mentoring (Haro, 2004), even though we know little of what their experience really is (see Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, & Ballou, 2002). At end of the year peer mentoring celebrations, it is common to see and hear joyful, tear shedding testimonies, and moving expressions of gratitude for the help that mentors and peer mentoring programs have provided for mentees. Colley describes this phenomenon as “the fervor that has carried mentoring in terms of a practice for celebration” (2003, p. 13). She calls this phenomenon the “feel good factor” of mentoring (p. 13).

Colley, and other supporters of mentoring, question mentoring. In a critical Marxist feminist study of mentoring in the UK, Colley asserts that, “There is irony in such a practice being sponsored so heavily by a government overtly committed to evidence-based performance and to the pursuit of ‘what works’” (2003, p. 13). Her criticisms come out of the realization that “Reviews of research indicate that despite its

popularity [mentoring], there is little evidence to support the use of mentoring in such a vast scale” (p. 13, brackets added).

As Heidegger (1927/2004) states, we are in the world with others, *Dasein*; nonetheless, it is not always the way we want to be with others or how we are with them. Mentees should not be taken for granted. Mentors should not assume that because they want to mentor they actually can mentor their mentees. It should not be assumed that mentoring is what happens to all mentees. No human experience should ever be assumed as one’s own, no matter how similar to our own it may be (Lee & Ramsey, 2006; Moustakas, 1974, 1995).

Echoes From The Past Still Present Now

What we seek when we inquire into Being is not something entirely unfamiliar, even if proximally we cannot grasp it at all. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 25)

To hear an echo is not just to hear something repeated for a second time. Sometimes, it is to hear something over and over again as if it came from different places. Initially, Jacobi’s questions echoed with me, particularly because I promote mentoring in my work as a counselor and academic advisor in higher education. Her questions seem like a concern we must take into account. We must question this experience. Like many other Latina/o students, I learned through an epiphany--the failure of a peer mentoring experience, that not all students are helped through this approach. Therefore, I came to fear that the possible criticisms about peer mentoring might take away our faith in this practice.

Merriam asserts that “The extent to which mentoring fosters learning, psycho-social development or career advancement is not clear, however. Studies scattered across

several disciplines have yet to be brought together and systematically examined for common findings, trends, or generalizations” (1983, p. 161).

Latina/o students both support mentoring and praise it publicly. This happens at this mid-Atlantic university, as it is the case at other universities around the country. However, studies that analyze the experience of the mentoring process do not seem present at this time (Gibson, 2004). Many administrators support peer mentoring, and many students engage in peer mentoring, but we continue to ignore “what it is like to be mentored.” Looking at Internet sites on peer mentoring programs, we find brief comments of students, perhaps a brochure, forms to enroll as a mentor or mentee, but never a cited study regarding the effects of peer mentoring.

Again, as Merriam concluded over three decades ago, “The extent to which mentoring fosters ... is not clear... Studies scattered across several disciplines have yet to be brought together” (1983, p. 161). More recently, Ragins and Kram recognize that much remains to be known about mentoring, what they call “the unattended areas of the garden of mentoring” (2007, p. 8). Although there have been some studies that connect mentoring with such gains as higher salaries, faster promotions, more publications, etc. (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2006), it is not clear whether these gains are due solely to mentoring or something else as well (Lockwood, Evans, & Eby, 2007).

The Need To Ask Questions

When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 43)

Promoting mentoring, in various forms, has led us to the creation of a tradition. Relying on outcomes connected to mentoring, and believing blindly in a practice that

makes us feel good has resulted in the tradition that mentoring helps; therefore, we must promote it among our peers, friends, and those who we believe need help. Mentoring programs continue to emerge in public institutions of higher education across the country, but troubling this practice rarely occurs.

How does peer mentoring transform into a successful experience? What is there in a peer mentoring experience that leads us to claim it has helped? What do peer mentees receive that helps them in college? Is peer mentoring a way that Latina/o students are helped, or is peer mentoring a social interaction that facilitates the outreach of resources that help Latina/o students and other ethnic minority students? What are we doing to students when we turn them into mentees of their peers so they can be helped for what *we* wish happens to them?

We need to question what we assume, even if it is to confirm what we know, or to know at a deeper more experiential level. As Colley suggests, “If we are to make the most of mentoring relationships” (2003, p. 1), we need to learn how mentoring is perceived by those who claim to be helped through practice. We need to unveil the meaning of mentoring for mentees. This is exactly what phenomenology does: it reveals a human experience for the person who lives the experience we are interested in uncovering (van Manen, 1997).

Opening Up To The Questioning of Peer Mentoring

What is the “hot issue” in mentoring? What is so new about mentoring? Is mentoring a subject worth studying? However, the first question to be answered is: What is mentoring? (Appelbaum, Ritchie, & Shapiro, 1994, p. 3)

The word “open” comes from the Old English *ūp*, *which* means up, to face up (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 485). We can face that which we can be open about. To open up is to

face, *tête-à-tête*, with the other (Levinas, 1961/1969). To understand an experience, we must see it in the context of the lives of those who live the experience we are interested in unraveling. Moreover, as Heidegger (1927/2004) tells us, the other is always present because we are always in the world with other people, never alone; although from a counseling point of view we must admit we can still feel lonely, even when surrounded by people (Moustakas, 1989). The existential anxiety of being can be alienating and traumatic (Solomon, 1974). Mentoring appears as an experience that requires us to be in the company of someone. Thus, to open up to mentoring is to ask questions with an honest desire to face “the other,” which is a phenomenological term that refers to other people, other human beings (Heidegger, 1927/2004), and the other I refer to here is the mentee. Levinas (1961/1969) calls this the “face-to-face encounter of the other” (p.13). Because it is in the face of the other where we truly “face” or see other people, instead of objectifying them. The objectification of the other, unfortunately, is what we tend to make of others; this is what Buber (1923/1996) calls the “I and It” relationship, and he suggests that we must try the “I and Thou” relationship to understand people, where the other is an-other “I,” a human being like oneself.

The other, nonetheless, can be accessed best through personal stories. Van Manen reminds us that hermeneutic phenomenology is about persons and not objects (1997, p. 6). However, one of the most challenging aspects of mentoring that I have found is getting access to the stories of the mentees. The experience of being mentored appears wrapped around the mask of the gains attributed to mentoring. Even when we hear about the personal mentoring experiences of mentees, they appear to lie hidden behind “stock” phrases, statements, comments, etc. Mentees share their mentoring experiences very

briefly when they are invited to talk about mentor recruitment sessions or the end of year mentoring programs.

I have found myself doing the same as mentees. I also wrap my experience behind stock phrases that summarize the core of what I lived when I was mentored. Is my experience of being peer mentored similar to other Latina/o students? What elements do Latina/o students seem to be at play for? What are the particulars that may be universals in the Latina/o mentee experience?

Former mentees mimic what they have seen. I state in a few sentences what I have gained as a student when being mentored, but not how mentoring may have unfolded in my life. Mentees seem to assume they talk about the same experience because they all talk about mentoring. Colley says:

There is no clarity or consensus about its practice [mentoring]. We know little about the dyadic (one-on-one) mentor relationships or how they work. Existing research evidence scarcely justifies its use on such massive scale. Furthermore, the movement [of mentoring] has not developed a sound theoretical base to underpin policy or practice. (2003, p. 1, brackets added)

And she goes on to say:

The vast majority of research on mentoring has adopted a quantitative approach, using large scale questionnaires to diagnose processes and to measure outcomes... However, the large scale of these surveys, the limited responses they allow, and their analysis of data into highly simplified and generalized categories, all make it impossible to understand how mentor relationships actually develop. Complexities and idiosyncrasies disappear amid averaged trends, and a limited view of what *tends* to happen substitutes for the rich possibilities of what *can* happen. (Colley, 2003, p. 3)

Nonetheless, even when the focus is on our own mentoring experiences, other major social factors may be overlooked. As Colley also reminds us:

Typical accounts of mentoring are focused at an individual level, and tend to erase the broader social, economic and political context in which mentor relationships are located. They obscure our view of power relations--associated with class,

gender, race, disability, sexuality and other factors--and the role that mentoring may play in either reducing or reproducing inequalities. (2003, p. 3)

While Colley brings to our attention gender and class, in this study, I also consider race and ethnicity because I question the mentee experience in a program for Latina/o students called *La Familia*. Race is not an empty concept; rather, it is a negatively loaded term. Race is the most divisive, prejudicial source of inequality in the US today (D'Andrea, 1999, 2005a; D'Andrea & Daniels 1999a, 1999b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Moreover, race and ethnicity are the two aspects that make *La Familia* most distinguishable from all other characteristics of other peer mentoring programs. Both race and ethnicity are the basis for how this program selects and recruits its members, as well the reasons why educational administrators support this initiative as a resource for minority students (Darder, 1997).

Not All Appears Good In Mentoring

In The Majority In The Minority: Expanding The Representation Of Latina/o Faculty, Administrators And Students In Higher Education, a Latina graduate student suggests:

It would be helpful to introduce incoming Latina students to those Latinas who are currently attending the university, either through a formal or informal peer-mentoring program. Doing so would allow them to ask questions, see someone who is "succeeding," have a reference group, and have someone to "show the ropes." Additionally, meeting Latina students would allow incoming students to inquire about more personal matters including balance between traditional family expectations and the pursuit of higher education. (Orozco, 2003, p. 135)

However, despite this invitation, I still wonder whether peer mentoring suits all Latina/o students. There are some Latina/o students who do not continue in peer mentoring programs like *La Familia*, and it is those experiences that need to be understood. The good of mentoring seems very close to the negative of mentoring. The outcome of a

mentoring experience or attempt to mentor does not always result in a good experience, while it may be a successful experience for some. Those good experiences need to be understood as well.

What is a successful peer mentoring experience like? What does a successful peer mentoring experience look like to Latina/o students? What is there in a peer mentoring experience that is successful so Latina/o students recommend it?

Students attribute to their peer mentoring experience such things as staying in college, receiving help with their class selection and other college decisions, finding help in their daily life decisions, and their transition from high school to college among other things. These are usually the comments we hear at the end of mentoring program ceremonies (Colley, 2003). Moreover, in these ceremonies, despite the differences in the interpretations of what mentoring is, we hear that both mentors and mentees validate the power of peer mentoring. Peer mentees usually express that peer mentoring is a valid form of mentoring, although there are critics of this form of mentoring (see Baugh & Fagerson-Eland, 2007). The attraction of mentoring and its benefits is so contagious that even those Latina/o students who have not even been part of a peer mentoring program tend to utter the same statements of praise as those who have been mentored.

The first time I met a Latino student from the peer mentoring program called *La Familia*, he said to me: “No se que habría hecho si no hubiese estado en este programa” (I have no idea what I would have done, had I not been in this program). It is rare not to see smiling faces in peer mentoring gatherings. They all seem to enjoy being together. They are young, they have dreams, and they hope to live many things; however, as time goes by many of the Latina/o students we meet during their first year begin to fail classes.

They are unable to enter the major of their choice, and they fall behind in the classes, etc. Consequently, many of them take much longer to graduate and many never even graduate. So Fry's words (2002), almost a decade old, still resonate: "Many enroll, few graduate." Peer mentoring appears to make a difference because most Latina/o students who I have met who are members of groups, like *La Familia*, do graduate, even when they take longer on average than their non-Latina/o peers. There seems to be something in peer mentoring that works. What is this "something" and "how" does peer mentoring work?

The relationships we develop in college are most important for Latina/o students to stay in college and to eventually graduate. Tinto has concluded that those students who develop meaningful relationships in college will both stay and graduate from higher education (Tinto, 1990, 1991, 1993, 2000, 2002). However, how these relationships are developed is still not clear. Although mentoring is usually suggested and recommended, how mentoring seems to help hides behind the benefits attributed to this practice (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). In *Stand By Me*, Rhodes reminds us:

This dramatic expansion in youth mentoring speaks volumes about the faith our society places in one-to-one relationships between vulnerable young people and non-related caring adults. To help mentors bring about positive changes in the lives of their protégés (or mentees, as they are sometimes called), scores of organizations offer brochures, and online advisors brimming with tips and detailed recommendations. The authority with which this information is presented often leads readers to conclude that most of the questions in the field have been answered... Unfortunately, that is often not the case. These recommendations are rarely based on scientific research that has undergone peer review not out of any intent to ignore findings or deceive readers but simply because such rigorous studies are in short supply. And it's not surprising, given how rapidly the youth mentoring phenomenon has grown, that few researchers have had a chance to step back and ask how or, indeed, whether these interventions help boys and girls. (2002, pp. 1-2)

Some scholars believe that mentoring has become a mystified practice (Colley, 2003; Murray, 2001). The word mystification means to involve in mystery or obscurity and to make hard to understand (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 898). In an article, “Much Ado About Mentors,” Roche (1979) suggests that we have attributed mentors and mentoring with super powers, powers that appear almost magical, as a mystification, if you will. Latina/o students seem to be attracted to mentoring because mentoring seems to act like magic (Colley, 2003).

What is it like to be mentored through a peer? How do mentees apply the help that their peer mentors try to give to them? What is a peer mentoring relationship like when a peer mentee has a successful peer mentoring experience? If not all mentees experience successful peer mentoring, what is different between the two groups (successful versus unsuccessful experience)?

Despite being involved in peer mentoring programs for over 10 years now, I may have avoided these questions and only looked at the positive outcomes of mentoring. Even though there is literature that shows the possibility of a negative mentoring experience (Eby, McManus, Simon, Simon, & Russell, 2000), our leaning toward the goodness of mentoring has led to the assumption that a positive mentoring experience is the only possible outcome of mentoring. But even when it concludes as a positive experience, there is no certainty that it is because of mentoring.

Demystifying Mentoring

Colley reminds us that mentoring, like any other practice where human beings interact with others, needs to be understood rather than measured; otherwise, it remains a

mystical practice. Mentoring scholars like Colley make a social call, which I am also called by:

I argue that we need to unravel the romantic myths that surround mentoring, see beyond its rhetoric and question its take-for-granted assumptions if we are to make the most of mentor relationships. (Colley, 2002, p. 1)

Colley argues that mentoring has become a social myth in our society (Colley, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). Myths were the stories Greeks used to describe, explain, respond and teach people. Through myths embellished with magic, Ancient Greeks used stories with gods and goddesses to explain the world around them, as they taught moral lessons through myths (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 898). With myths, Ancient Greeks eased human curiosity, but somehow they also repressed the desire to learn and uncover the answers to the questions that many human beings had. Thus, by questioning we can return to our natural state of curiosity and own our real desire to learn (Gadamer, 1960/994).

Van Manen (1997) reminds us that questioning a phenomenon that interests us is mandatory if we want to truly learn and know what something is really like.

Phenomenology can help, because it questions a phenomenon, but also invites us to look at a phenomenon from the inside, through the mere experience itself (Moustakas, 1994).

The experiences we live and discover through contact with others allow us to later propose a possible interpretation from the multiple interpretations that are posited (van Manen, 1997). By using phenomenology, a series of questions result out of my experiences, and the experiences of those with whom I have talked with before. These conversations are some of the concrete examples that I share here in order to explore the phenomenon of the Latina/o peer mentee experience in college.

Uncovering The Experience Of Being Mentored

I have many memories of good mentoring experiences. Due to these experiences, I believe in mentoring. This seems to be the assumption that many supporters hold. And because of these assumptions--the good memories about mentoring--, I have neglected to question how mentoring helps through a peer mentoring relationship. In his bestseller book, *The Kindness of Strangers: Adult Mentors, Urban Youth, and The New Voluntarism*, Freedman writes, "The magic of mentors, like their wisdom, is applied particularly to aid their protégés' 'journey'" (1999, p. 34). Many Latinas/os who are supporters of mentoring agree with this statement. However, despite such faith in mentoring, the mystery of the mentee's experience warrants further inquiry.

However, while it appears that it is the mentees whose experience matters, as Freedman (1999) asserts, because they are close to them in age, grades, etc., their voices are what we hear the least. In most meetings on mentoring, mentees appear as secondary participants of the mentoring experience. In *The Mentee's Guide: Making Mentoring Work For You*, Zachary and Fisher criticize mentees for not exercising their voice:

My experience is not unique. Some mentees engage in formal and informal mentoring relationships--personal and professional--just so they can "sit at the foot of the master." As a result, they don't find their own voice to ask for what they need from a mentoring relationship but settle on what they get instead. (2009, p. xii)

Mentees who are helped through mentoring usually become mentors (Freedman, 1999; Rhodes, 2002), but those who leave college we never hear about again. Without the voices of those who claim to have received help through mentoring, and the awareness and acknowledgement of the experiences of those who were not helped through peer mentoring, we are left vulnerable to criticism. We promote the assumptions of what we

want peer mentoring to be, rather than how peer mentoring is for mentees. This is contrary to what phenomenology proposes: “Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a search for the fullness of living, for the ways a woman possibly can experience the world as a woman, for what it is to be a woman. The same is true, of course, for men” (van Manen, 1997, p. 12). The same can be said for the Latina/o peer mentee students.

Phenomenology exposes a phenomenon for what it is and as it appears to our consciousness (van Manen, 1997). Moreover, van Manen reminds us, “The ‘data’ of human science research are human experiences” (1997, p. 63). Consequently, in this study, I first resort to my memories of peer mentoring, and then to the memories of those I will invite to join me in conversation. First, I recount my experiences with former mentees before I engage in conversations with the mentees themselves.

Memories can reveal the meaning of a phenomenon (Becker, 1992; Casey, 1993; van Manen, 1997). For example, I share the stories of two former peer mentees who helped me to uncover troubling realizations about the peer mentee experience. As van Manen (1997) reminds us, our anecdotes are close to us and as such are readily accessible to us; consequently, we tend to start with them. Not because we have a selfish desire to share all and only about us, but because our experiences can also be the experiences of others. Therefore, I begin with personal memories.

Looking Beyond The Goodness Of Peer Mentoring

I became motivated to carry out this research project because of a failed peer mentoring experience. Moreover, after exploring the mentoring literature, I learned that I am not the only one who has committed to research mentoring due to a failed mentoring experience. Even those who are supporters of mentoring question it. For example, in her

book, *Mentoring for Social Inclusion: A Critical Approach To Nurturing Mentor Relationships* (2003), Helen Colley enlightens us with an eye-opening story about

mentoring that challenges Freedman's assertion that we mentor because of the mentee:

I first became interested in mentoring when I was working as a career adviser in a comprehensive school at the centre of a very deprived housing estate in Salford... one relationship in particular fascinated me. School staff were concerned that the mentor --a wealthy, middle-aged businessman-- was bullying the boy with whom he had been matched, and I grew anxious too. They often met in the careers library where I worked, and I could hear the old man badgering his mentee, criticizing in a negative way, and setting unreasonable targets for the boy's work. However, when I approached the lad to discuss these concerns, he was adamant that he wanted to keep this mentor, and refused to consider any replacement. When I asked how he coped with the demanding timetable his mentor set for him, he replied: "Oh, I don't *do* that, I just *tell* him I do it. We get on fine. I don't want a new mentor." (2003, p. 1)

For Colley, an oppressive relationship sparked her interest in mentoring. I first became interested in researching mentoring when a peer mentor that I supervised told me that his Latino peer mentee had ended up on academic probation, just after a semester into the program. This was a "failed" peer mentoring experience because the main purpose of the program was, above all, to provide academic support. Also, I was surprised to hear such a case because I used to trust mentoring to always be "good." I thought of it as the kind of help most students needed. Now, I still have faith and believe in the power of peer mentoring, but I am also cognizant that a mentoring relationship can also end up in a failed experience.

In this experience, which I described in Chapter One, both students were undergraduates and pursued the same major. To me, this almost guaranteed suitable help and connection between them. However, they did not have a successful peer mentoring experience. The peer mentee was Latino and the peer mentor was Caucasian.

Nevertheless, I never expected that their racial differences, along with a possible

difference in social class, would have implications that could lead to the failure of their peer mentoring relationship. I did not expect peer mentoring to ever “fail.” And I say “fail” because the main objective of this peer mentoring program was to provide academic support to first-year ethnic minority students.

This failure made me worry about those who are Latino peer mentees. I have seen many “happy” Latina/o mentees, and also have heard many of them talk enthusiastically about being in a peer mentoring relationship. However, now I know one for whom peer mentoring did not work. This peer mentee did not enjoy any of the benefits we expect from a peer mentoring experience. None of the assumptions I had for those who became peer mentees applied to him. This peer mentee’s experience showed to me that we could not assume that a peer mentoring relationship will be successful. Because of that, we have to learn how a successful peer mentoring relationship happens for a mentee. After all, regardless of the outcome of a peer mentoring experience, most mentors will not be adversely affected academically. But, first-year Latina/o students who are not properly oriented to college and/or do not have a college tradition, are the ones who can be most affected by a bad peer mentoring experience. A failed peer mentoring experience could result in the end of a college career, while for mentors a failed experience may simply be an upsetting situation.

Phenomenology is always retrospective (van Manen, 1997), and it is always about looking back at an experience. Now, in retrospect, I realize that I did not know what made mentees “happy,” or how peer mentoring becomes a successful experience from the inside, from the mentee’s worldview. Like most people, I assumed that being in a peer

mentoring relationship would always result in being “happy.” Furthermore, I always assumed that peer mentoring was good for all Latina/o students.

Perhaps, as many of those who support peer mentoring, I also assumed more than I really knew about the nature of mentoring relationships. Besides, most Latina/o students that I ever met seemed to enjoy being a mentee. Not surprisingly, they usually testified that being a mentee helped them. This was consistent with my personal experience with mentoring. Therefore, having consistently good peer mentoring experiences motivated me to join with those who support peer mentoring.

As a result of that experience, and others, which I share later, I identified several questions. What is the meaning of being a peer mentee as a Latina/o? How do mentees build rapport with their mentors when they have a “successful” peer mentoring relationship? What happens in a peer mentoring relationship from a mentee’s perspective when the pair remains together until the end of a program? How does being a mentee affect their Latina/o identity? What effects do race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities have in a peer mentoring relationship for the mentee? What does it mean for the mentee to share similar characteristics such as gender, race, and ethnicity with one’s mentor? What is it like for a Latina/o student to be a mentee with another Latina/o peer as a mentor? What is the type of help that peer mentees receive as ethnic *minority* beings in a peer mentoring program with the same ethnic peers? These questions, and others, have fed my curiosity about what is lived, experienced, thought, perceived, etc., when one is being mentored, as a racial and an ethnic minority.

In comparing the *Dasein* of my experience as a former mentee, something is different about me now. I view the peer mentoring experience with trust, but also I ask

questions about the nature of the Latina/o peer mentee. Mentoring can do much good, especially to soothe the soul of many students. In *Lanterns: A Memoir Of Mentors*,

Edelman reminds us:

Minority students are often so wounded by the time they reach college campuses that they need to prepare with the tools of self-understanding and combat needed to fight their battles to achieve in society just as my generation was prepared to fight these same battles. (2000, p. 23)

The struggles for Civil Rights in the 1960s and 70s in the U.S. did not end desegregation; they continue today with the achievement gap and lack of access to the same opportunities for all.

Revealing Our Neglect

Peer mentoring programs promote mentoring by senior students, and in this case, Latina/o students, as a way to help their junior peers. While peer mentoring appears as a grassroots movement among students and is acknowledged as a source of help for Latina/o students, it also highlights the needs of this underserved group. Why do Latina/o students connect with Latina/o students to guide them, support them, and help them? How do mentees perceive the mentoring they receive from their peers? What are the possible reasons for the emergence of peer mentoring in higher education? Furthermore, have we given mentoring, and peer mentoring too much credit and responsibility and thereby displaced the responsibility from those who have the ethical obligation to invite, integrate, and empower Latina/o students?

Articulating how Latina/o students are helped through peer mentoring reveals their needs. Also, it reveals what higher education institutions are not doing, such that student peers have to come to the assistance of their peers through what they call peer mentoring. The social responsibility of institutions of higher education appears to be

abdicated and put on the shoulders of senior students who are charged with helping their peer students succeed in college. Although this may be an unfair additional responsibility, this type of mutual support may be more suitable for Latina/o students.

Despite the best of intentions, as I shared in the previous chapter, peer mentoring relationships can end in failure and this may damage mentees' trust and self-esteem, and ultimately their retention in higher education. Thus, we must question what calls our attention; we must question what we take for granted; and above all, we must question what we still ignore. As Freire suggests, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful, inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (1970/2002, p. 72). As a consequence, if knowledge emerges through the restless inquiry humans pursue in the world, we are invited to ask more and more questions.

Setting Aside Assumptions

To expose the nature of a good peer mentoring experience, I set aside my assumptions and leave myself open to chronicle the phenomenon of peer mentoring. Recalling a personal experience helps me to illustrate the source of my curiosity. As van Manen says, "It is to the extent that *my* experiences could be *our* experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings" (1997, p. 57). Every fall, as part of my job I encounter peer mentees of a peer mentoring program. My initial contact is my last contact with the mentees unless they remain in the program until it ends. Similarly, in the group called *La Familia*, we meet peer mentors and mentees for a training session at the beginning of every year, but then we never see them gain.

The remainder of the program consists of training sessions for mentors, whole group gatherings, and the end of the year program. There is never a program for peer mentees only. The student leaders believe that they can teach and train individuals as to how to be a peer mentor, but no one believes that the peer mentees need training on how to be a mentee, or whether they have something to say other than “all is good.” And so, back to the idea of a moral call, I return to the several lived accounts of the mentees’ experiences that I have gathered.

Searching The Mentee’s Lived Experience As A Moral Call

A corollary is that phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real persona, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence. (van Manen, 1997, p. 31)

As a supporter of mentoring who invites Latina/o students each year to join peer mentoring programs such as *La Familia* and other such peer mentoring programs, I feel morally responsible for what these students may go through as mentees. Thus, it is a moral responsibility that underlies this study and influences the choice of my research methodology, hermeneutic phenomenology. Levinas (1961/1969), reminds us that the Other--as we meet face to face--are those for whom we are ethically responsible. Although sometimes we may want to reject or turn away from the social responsibility we have for those around us, we are responsible for each other.

Gadamer states, “Knowledge is dialectical from the ground up. Only a person who has questions can have knowledge, but questions include the antithesis of yes and no, of being like this and being like that” (1960/1994, p. 365). Similarly, as the Little Prince tames the fox little by little, I, too, have to tame my questions. I do this by getting

closer and closer to them so that they become clear. In order to support peer mentoring, we need to know how peer mentoring helps, and how mentees think they are helped when being peer mentored.

Some time ago, I met with a Latino student who I will call Eduardo. Because he was a former mentee of the *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program, and I knew this undergraduate student for a couple of years, I thought it would be a good idea to ask him a few “quick” questions about his lived experience as a mentee. As Kvale writes, “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” (1996, p. 1). Accordingly, I thought it would be useful for mentors to learn what mentees report as most important to them when they are peer mentored. The interview with Eduardo did not evolve as I expected. After over an hour of questions with no clear answers, Eduardo was not able to go beyond what I would call the “clichés” of mentoring. This happened despite Eduardo’s vast experience in peer mentoring. He was a former peer mentee, then a peer mentor, and later on, an enthusiastic recruiter and promoter of peer mentoring on campus for the very same program where he was a mentee.

Looking back on our conversation, I recognize that perhaps it was more of an interview than a conversation. Here I expose the first mistake I made as a result of my assumptions. I asked all the questions, and Eduardo only tried to answer my questions. This is contrary to what phenomenology asks us to do: “Before embarking on a busy interview schedule one needs to be oriented to one’s question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (van Manen, 1997, p. 67). During Eduardo’s attempts to reply to my inquiries,

he uttered phrases like, “mentoring helps,” “mentoring is good,” “more Latinas/os should receive mentoring,” and many other similar statements. Disappointingly, he said nothing that I had not heard before, which was frustrating for me and for Eduardo, as well.

I could not obtain from Eduardo a deeper explanation of how he came to these conclusions and feelings. His responses did not answer my questions, and none of them explained what mentees experience when they gain a successful peer mentoring relationship. I failed to let him share his stories and ended up with a superficial listing of benefits.

While none of Eduardo’s comments went beyond what we are used to hearing, they confirmed what I fear admitting: mentoring is a practice that many of us support, but struggle to explain. We have not been able to say how mentoring helps. As a result of this frustrating interview experience with Eduardo, I began to ask new questions and felt compelled to keep searching for the meaning of the peer mentee experience.

What has moved us to promote peer mentoring for Latina/o students? What is there in the peer mentoring relationship that helps some of our peers when they become mentees? Have we fallen under a spell like Odysseus did in his journey that has prevented us from really seeing the true nature of peer mentoring? Does the spell of mentoring move us to like this practice without really knowing how it happens? Are our needs as racial and ethnic minorities so strong that we acquiesce to whatever helps? Is peer mentoring suitable, or in counseling terms, “culturally sensitive” to help Latinas/os students? What hides inside a peer mentee experience? What are the essences of a successful peer mentoring experience for Latina/o students?

Lessons Learned From Eduardo

It is a matter of describing, not explaining or analyzing. Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a 'descriptive psychology', or to return to the 'things themselves', is from the start a forswearing of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2004, p. ix)

Merleau-Ponty opens up the notion of understanding the world as we live in the world. Whereas most current research avoids or fears human experience as deceiving, phenomenology proposes it as valid and the source of our knowledge. Through this stand I return to my experience with Eduardo because he allowed me to become aware of my pre-conceived notions.

Eduardo could not answer my questions. He was nervous, tense, and we both felt our mutual frustration. I reached the conclusion that I could not have done anything better than he did if I had been in his position. I asked him to talk with me because I could not find the words to describe the experience of being a mentee myself, particularly a successful one, and wanted his first-hand perspective. Perhaps, once we are mentored we forget the needs that we had when we started, needs which peer mentoring appears to fulfill for us. Since peer mentoring seems to be capable of erasing our special needs as Latinas/os, when we have a successful peer mentoring experience we may forget them because our needs have been met. Eduardo helped me to see my own assumptions. They became present and showed themselves to me. As van Manen reminds us, "The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one dimensional. Meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered" (1997, p. 78).

As Eduardo looked to me to find prompts and hints on what to say, I realized that in the scholarship on mentoring the nature of the mentoring experience needs to be addressed more thoroughly. In our enthusiasm for peer mentoring, Eduardo helped me realize that we have ignored the mentee experience. I also realized I needed to ask open-ended questions. I do not want Eduardo or any other mentee to lose faith in peer mentoring, nor to distrust the value of their own peer mentee experiences, nor all the goodness that mentoring may have given them or to other mentees. In another meta-analysis on mentoring Ehrlich, Hansford, and Tennet conclude:

An important finding to emerge from our structured analysis of more than 300 research-based articles on mentoring across the areas of education, business, and medicine was that mentoring has enormous potential to bring about learning, personal growth, and development for professionals. Although the majority of reviewed studies revealed that mentoring does provide a range of positive outcomes for mentors, mentees, and the organization, it is not, however, without its dark side. In some cases, poor mentoring can be worse than no mentoring at all. Our belief is that the potential problems of mentoring are not insurmountable. With careful and sensitive planning and skillful leadership, most problems can be minimized. (2004, p. 536)

By not understanding the essences of a successful peer mentee experience, we are vulnerable to critics and detractors (e.g., McGuire & Reger, 2003). This demonstrates the need to conduct further research on mentoring, and to recognize our moral responsibility as those who act based on social justice principles and advocacy (see Lee & Walz, 1998).

Looking for answers. Since my conversation with Eduardo, I have continued to ponder his mentoring experience. The “clichés” he uttered hid a deeper understanding that could benefit future mentees and mentors. The features of a successful peer mentoring experience remain under a veil of mysticism and romanticism, as Colley (2003) tells us. Therefore, as Gadamer (1960/1994) invites us to do, we need to look for

answers to our questions. However, to ask questions is to remain open, open to what we ask and not what we want to find or how we want it to be.

As with many ethnic and racial minorities, Eduardo lived through difficult experiences in college. When he found peer mentoring, he shared that he had a good experience. He attributed the help he received and his good experience as a college student to his peer mentoring experience. Eduardo stated in various presentations that peer mentoring helped him, and we naturally believed him. Why would we doubt him? He was an active Latino student, led programs and events, and developed leadership skills as a leader in many Latino organizations. And he was a known advocate for his Latina/o peers. Strangely and surprisingly, he never graduated from this university, but he went on to complete his degree at another institution of higher education. Nonetheless, his enthusiasm for peer mentoring never faded. Years later, I came across him in Facebook, and his first question for me was, “How is *La Familia* doing?”

What is it about peer mentoring that can go so deep into the hearts of Latina/o students and motivate them to succeed? How does peer mentoring help? How do peer mentees define “help” through peer mentoring? Why is that so difficult to express? Is peer mentoring the best way to help Latina/o students? Which Latina/o student mentees benefit most from peer mentoring?

The Little Prince searches for a friend, but it is not until he stops to meet a fox and listen to that fox that he makes a friend. Then, he learns that taming is establishing ties. Perhaps our rushed lives, disconnected from love, patience, and authenticity (Fromm, 1994, 2006), have made us oblivious of processes in favor of preferred outcomes. Leaning toward the positivistic paradigm appears to make sense. According to Creswell

(2007), however, we have rediscovered that the world in which we live needs meaning and interpretation. Heidegger also reminds us that we are in the world, a world with other people. As such, we must interpret our own lived experiences, or as Heidegger (1927/2004) calls it *Dasein*. Consequently, the answers to my questions are phenomenological because they follow a retrospective experience, and the call for research bears a moral component (Levinas, 1961/1969).

Finding the missing pieces. After our conversation, Eduardo and I realized that something about his experience was missing; perhaps something changed after his experience. We could not say that the good feelings toward peer mentoring, however they evolved, were not real. I have them, he has them, and most people have good feelings about mentoring. But somehow his memories were buried. Eduardo appeared to relegate his memories to the back of his mind. This is what Eduardo showed to me through our conversation, because somehow I have done the same. While this conversation was frustrating in one aspect, it was also revealing in another way. We both learned that much needs to be learned about what being mentored is like for those who live it. Nonetheless, despite this conundrum, I became more determined than ever to ask more questions.

I concluded that how we live a peer mentoring experience as mentees appears to be connected to the assumptions and hopes that we have on mentoring. However, these remain buried and must be exposed. The words that can describe a successful peer mentoring experience are useful and most needed if we want to show how peer mentoring helps Latina/o students. And the words that describe a human experience are best when they come from those who live the experience. Rightly, Moustakas writes, “When words come of themselves, they are alive, they flow easily. When they are forced or questioned,

they cease to be spontaneous, real expressions. Words that stem from the inner life flow like the rhythms and seasons, like the river, like the song of the Eskimo in the deep breath he takes” (1974, p. 3).

There is nothing quick or easy in revealing the meaning of a human experience, as Eduardo taught me. There is much work to do to fully appreciate the mentee’s experience. The lack of literature on mentees confirms this as well, as I have explored this topic for almost ten years now. The meaning of a lived experience lies deep inside of us, and many times, it is buried under the assumptions we make to cover it after we live an experience (Giorgi, 1985; van Manen, 1997).

My experience with Eduardo taught me what Merriam concluded over two decades ago: “The extent to which mentoring fosters learning, psychosocial development or career advancement is not clear” (1983, p. 161). The seminal work of Kram (1983, 1985, 1986) on the possible benefits of mentoring and peer mentoring started a social revolution in the 1980s, but much remains to be done and explored on mentoring, as Ragins and Kram (2007) conclude over twenty years later. As Eduardo struggled to explain what being peer mentored meant for him, many other people have had the very same experience. Many Latina/o students struggle in college in many ways (Padilla, 1997). Eduardo is not alone. I am not the only one struggling to understand Latina/o mentoring. Scholars like Murrell, Crosby and Ely (1998) have also collected multiple voices to express the dilemmas and incognitos of mentoring. Mentoring is buried under assumptions and cliché phrases that prevent us from understanding it. For this reason alone, phenomenology can be of most help; “A good phenomenological description is an

adequate elucidation of some aspect of the lifeworld--it resonates with our sense of lived life” (van Manen, 1997, p. 27).

This gap in our understanding of the mentoring experience seems to remain as a pending debt of the mentoring scholarship. This is in part the debt that this research project hopes to begin to pay for our current Latina/o college students’ sake. Students who come after us can benefit even more if we unveil the meaning of a peer mentoring experience because this approach may be employed to reach and help them. If we do not conduct and communicate this research, it may not be there for them. This could be even more tragic than simply not knowing how peer mentoring assists mentees.

Few Latinas/os go to college, and even fewer graduate from college, and those who do suffer great pain and sacrifice (See Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Padilla, 1997). These sacrifices must be mentioned because they are a testament to how we have paved the way for others to obtain a college degree. In order to accomplish this mission, we must continue to promote peer mentoring equipped with a deeper understanding of it.

Lessons Learned From The Literature On Mentoring

My restless interest in the mentee led me to search the literature on mentoring and education (e.g., hooks, 1994) for what Eduardo could not tell me. I began with a simple search using Google. Here, I found that “mentor” has approximately 41,700,000 entries, whereas “mentee” only has approximately 419,000. In comparison, “protégée” has 31,000,000 but still lags far behind “mentor.” In all searches, when it refers to the recipient of the mentoring process, “mentees” have a much lower reference and treatment than “mentor” and “mentoring.”

Why is the mentee referred to so sparingly in the literature on mentoring? Is mentoring an oppressive system that quiets the mentee as a lesser component of the mentoring relationship? Is it that we are taking the mentees' experience for granted, where we assume that all is good with them and that our interest is in recruiting and listening to mentors' experiences? What voices are we missing about mentoring? What are we ignoring by not asking mentees about their lived experience in mentoring relationships? What can we uncover when we focus on the mentee's experience?

Lessons Learned From Lauren

My experience with Eduardo was not the only one where I emerged more confused than before. I had a similar experience in conversation with another former peer mentee from *La Familia* a couple of years ago. I will call her Lauren. She was an advocate of many Latina/o causes on campus, and an active member of *La Familia* as well as several other peer mentoring programs. When I met her I could not tell that she was Latina. My assumptions of what being Latina/o entails had already permeated my mind. Her features and her complexion appeared to be Caucasian. She even had an Anglo Saxon name. Nonetheless, she felt comfortable as a Latina. Moreover, she had no accent in her spoken English. I always wondered why she "chose" to be Latina.

In preparation for a peer mentor training session, and after my frustrating experience with Eduardo before a similar training, I invited her to have a conversation with me. Because Eduardo's conversation really left me puzzled and the subsequent findings in the mentoring literature were even more troubling for me, I expected that the conversation with a Latina student might be different and perhaps more rewarding. I assumed that she would abide by the gender roles of many Latinas, something that

Arredondo (2004) calls *Marianismo* (willing to please, communicative, and more in touch with her feelings). I perceived that I was fighting for peer mentoring, and I wanted to find evidence that peer mentoring truly helps, so I was determined to find answers to my questions. The conversation with Lauren led me to conclude that there is more to the Latina/o peer mentoring experience than we know. In sum, there is much more that we need to find out about peer mentoring if we want to continue to support Latina/o students through this approach.

While Lauren made a sincere effort to talk candidly about her experience as a mentee, and articulate her ideas, we did not make much progress. There was little difference between my conversations with Eduardo and Lauren. Both students agreed that their peer mentoring experience would have not been the same if they had a peer mentor of a different gender than theirs. What they appeared to have in common is that both students fell under the spell of mentoring. They were mesmerized with peer mentoring and their own personal peer mentoring experience as mentees. In almost two hours of conversation with Lauren I did not make much more progress than I made with Eduardo.

Lauren was the second student with whom I had an awkward and unproductive conversation. I was not open as Gadamer (1960/1994) and Heidegger (1927/2004) suggest. I did not ask open-ended questions. I wanted to “prove” the collective assumption that mentoring helps. These conversations showed to me that I need to remain open. When we use phenomenology, we do not enter a research project with a theory or a thesis or the need to prove something. Instead, we enter with questions and we allow the phenomenon to reveal itself through inquiry (van Manen, 1997).

For many of us, simply seeing these mentees continue into their second year is refreshing, encouraging, and offers enough justification to support continuing peer mentoring programs. Given that most Latina/o students have one of the highest attrition rates, if they say that peer mentoring helped them, it becomes a belief and a consensus that we must continue with such programs. While I agree with this assertion, I also feel the responsibility to reveal the secret of what makes such experiences successful and joyful for those who have lived them.

Back to the experience. Van Manen referring to Husserl writes, “Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld--the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize it, categorize, or reflect on it” (1997, p. 9). And then he adds:

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. (p. 9)

The frustrations I lived with Eduardo and Lauren, and I am sure they also lived with me, made us all aware that there is more to mentoring and to the mentee experience than they could articulate and that I could ascertain through my questions. Thus, the important contribution of this research is returning to the lived experience, that experience we once lived and upon which we build meanings for future experiences. A lived experience does not always remain intact and untouched in our memories. For example, it is common that once tragic and harsh experiences are over, we turn them into sources of strength and power. While we lived them, however, they might not have been perceived as empowering. Frankl illustrates this in his book *Man In Search Of Meaning*

(1946/1984). Another example of humans reframing their memories occurs when people that we once despised later turn into our heroes. In the Latino culture we have Che Guevara, José Martí, San Martín, and other heroes who were men that once were hated mainly during right wing governments, are cultural icons today.

I believe that Eduardo knows how he was helped as does any other mentee. I believe that they know, I trust in their words, but I sense their experiences are buried in the struggle as they search for a place that is not our place, but where they need to be in order to succeed. The place I refer to is Predominantly White Intuitions (PWIs), places where the unearned privilege of a race oppresses those who are not identified as members of the White race (see McIntosh, 1990). So while my phenomenon of interest is focused on a person, the mentee, it is also a phenomenon tied to a place, which is a place of non-belonging. Also, the role of being a mentee is a function of being in a relationship with another person, the mentor, who attempts to effect change in the mentee. Heidegger (1927/2004) and his interpretation of Dasein, being in the world with another, helped me to reveal the meaning made by a person who is in a world, but not one of his/her making.

Phenomenology as the path not taken yet. The fox says to the Little Prince that “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (p. 87). And then the fox adds “It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important” (p. 87). But the heart is not only the metaphorical area we use to reflect upon our feelings; it has also been the area for the thinking. In many ancient cultures, people thought with their “hearts” rather than their heads. Moreover, the invisibility that the fox refers to also refers to the invisibility of the essence of an experience. Fagan (1988) indicates that mentoring is hard to define, but we can identify

it, the essences of what make a peer mentee experience successful. Despite my previous failures, I cannot say that it is completely hidden to all former Latina/o mentee students.

Van Manen says, “Thus, phenomenological reflection is not *introspective* but *retrospective*. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through” (1997, p. 10). Remembering the past is bringing up memories that echo in our mind, move our hearts, and freeze in time what has been stamped in our minds as memories, the feelings we save in our hearts. Some recollections are happy ones; while others stay with us in anguish, and despite our will to forget them. Mentoring and the lived experience of being mentored seem to linger in the hearts and minds of those who have enjoyed the experience. The effusive use of good feelings to promote this practice is widely found in the mentoring literature (e.g., Colley, 2003; Freedman, 1999). This appears to be the source that former mentees use to allude to the benefits of mentoring when they are asked about their experiences. But what are those experiences really like? What makes peer mentoring so important to them? What do mentees learn, thanks to peer mentoring? What could we uncover if we dared to ask about what it means to be peer mentored? What mysteries could we reveal of what that experience is like for Latina/o students?

These are the questions I may have failed to ask. These are the phenomenological questions which I did not ask in my previous conversations with peer mentees, which may be the reason I could not access their experiences. Latina/o students are ethnic or racial minorities, who have experienced discrimination, isolation, and have had high levels of attrition. Thus, they require, if we want to understand their experience, a tactful approach. Being tactful according to van Manen (1997) means to be caring, to be

sensitive, to ask with an interest in learning about someone. Phenomenology cares about the person, the human being in a tactful way. This does not mean that other forms of research do not care about its participants; it means that phenomenology approaches persons as persons and accepts their interpretation. Phenomenology digs for meaning in a personable way through conversations, and is humble in recognizing that its outcome is one possible interpretation. Moreover, phenomenology, perhaps similarly to Person-centered Counseling, enters the lifeworld, the mere life of the person in its uniqueness, and as a phenomenological conversation is also cathartic as counseling (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Therefore, despite being a counselor with a Person-Centered and a Humanistic Counseling approach, along with a Psychology of Liberation interest (see Watkins & Shulman, 2008), it was not until I was trained in phenomenology that I could articulate how to approach the Latina/o peer mentee experience. Research is a personal matter when those who we research are people we care about, and even more, when those we care about are people like us. Hence, phenomenology is the approach that I find fitting for this research project.

I am not the first one to choose this avenue for research on the mentoring experience. Gibson, in “Mentoring in Business and Industry: The Need for a Phenomenological Perspective” argues:

Much of the literature in business and industry [and education as well] embraces a positivistic paradigm, which attempts to reduce the study of a phenomenon to something that can be measured. A majority of the research on the dimensions of mentoring, such as prevalence, outcomes, gender and the structure of the relationship, has been done in an attempt to describe various components of a mentoring relationship so as to understand a particular aspect of this construct. In contrast, phenomenology, as an interpretive research methodology, is focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of human

experience. In this case, the experience of being mentored. Instead of attempting to reduce a phenomenon into its component parts, phenomenological methodology embraces the ambiguity and complexity of the world of human beings, focusing on generating findings that capture the vital meaning of lived experience. This is of considerable value when one is attempting to gain an understanding of the wholeness of a phenomenon that is integral to the human experience. (2004, p. 267, brackets added)

Later, in the same article she adds,

Perhaps, then, it is understanding the meaning of the experience of being mentored in the business and industry [and education] context that will allow us to make sense of what seems to be a confusing set of disparate findings on mentoring in this context. A methodology such as phenomenology, which allows us to look at the construct in a holistic manner, can provide insights into the nature of this phenomenon that have been missing due to the predominant reliance on more positivistic approaches in the business and industry context. (p. 268, brackets added)

Perhaps, my lack of earlier training in phenomenology, the strong influence I have from the positivistic paradigm, and the lack of understanding of the human nature of the mentoring experience contributed to my failure to reveal what peer mentoring meant for Latina/o students. Also, the lack of literature on the essence of the mentoring experience also contributed to my previous lack of insights. Now on the contrary, I have questions that can illuminate the path, questions that can pave the way for me to reach a deeper and more profound understanding, even if it is just the beginning of my journey to understand the peer mentoring experience of Latina/o students in higher education. Thus, my last stop before the beginning of my research project is the discussion of the college environment, the place where the peer mentoring experience occurs.

The Context Of Peer Mentoring Programs In College

Large public universities may promote anonymity, isolation and disconnection among students and faculty (Tinto, 1990, 1991, 1993, 2000, 2002). This context is more severe for students of color because of their relatively low numbers among both students

and faculty. Castellanos and Jones (2003) suggest that students of color, including Latinas/os, look for those who are similar to them for understanding and help in navigating a system that they may find completely foreign. The alienating environment of universities and colleges creates the need for support and guidance, and peer mentoring appears as a favorable alternative to fulfill the needs among minority student groups. Roberts (2000) alludes to the notion that mentoring is an animal of multiple manifestations, among which peer mentoring is one of them. Consequently, when seeking guidance, support and advice Latina/o students resort to peer mentoring as a way to alleviate these feelings of isolation and disconnection in this foreign environment (see Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

College and universities are social settings with high attrition rates, low enrollment, and poorly evaluated experiences for students of color. Scholars, such as Tinto (1990, 1991, 1993, 2002), also a Latino, conclude that students who fully engage in their education experience in college will graduate. Because peer mentoring is a form of engagement, this conclusion provides optimism for Latina/o students who enter a mentoring relationship (Jowett & Stead, 1994). DuBois and Karcher (2005) remind us that youth and adults recognize the need for guidance, support, and friendship. Both youth and adults see mentoring as an avenue to meet those needs without fully understanding how the mentoring process accomplishes these goals. While adults embrace programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, youth develop their own version of help in the form of peer mentoring (Freedman, 1999).

As the fox teaches the Little Prince that his rose is unique to him, and while he might be able to find other roses elsewhere, his planet is the place where his rose is.

Likewise, through the peer mentoring process Latina/o students might teach each other that despite being in a foreign environment, they can find a family, in *La Familia*, by evoking the relationships they create with each other (see Falicov, 2000). The ties they may develop and form with one another do not guarantee they will succeed in college, but they may increase their opportunity to have a good college experience. Perhaps it is the “ties” that provide mentees the foundation for the “good feelings” they experience in college.

Both mentees and their mentors seem to believe that peer mentoring is a true form of mentoring. However, some scholars criticize this form of mentoring, and they call it the “poor cousin of mentoring” (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007). This leads me to a new line of questioning. What if the mentoring that mentees experience through their peers is not mentoring? What if the “mentoring” experience of Latina/o students in “peer mentoring” is different than what we think it is? These questions expose the need we still have to understand mentoring from the Latina/o students’ perspectives. Also, it reveals what we utterly ignore: what kind of help do Latina/o peer mentees receive when in a peer mentoring relationship?

These questions call for answers. Gadamer writes, “The openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question” (1960/1994, p. 363). We should not assume that all mentees are helped, or if they are helped, we must question how they are helped. Unless we ask them and collect their explanations, we impose our assumptions on their experiences. In phenomenology, we question our assumptions in an attempt to understand the Hermeneutic Circle, and as Gadamer describes it, “The circle, then, is not formal in nature. It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes

understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of interpreter” (1960/1994, p. 293). The questioning of our assumptions lies in our social and moral responsibilities that call us to work for justice, and whether we answer the call or not is our decision.

Mentoring has gone through a great expansion in education (Colley, 2003; Miller, 2002), and this is the context in which Latina/o students have been developing their own peer mentoring programs. As Harding, among many other scholars, states:

Mentoring programs have been implemented at many colleges and universities to support and encourage members of minority groups to enter and achieve success within higher education... These mentoring programs also sought to close the demographic gap between the percentages of minorities in the general population and those with college degrees. (1999, p. 5)

La Familia is only one of the many peer mentoring programs at large universities. However, to talk about this program is to discuss a social phenomenon that appears ingrained in the context of higher education. There are some peer mentoring programs based on major, gender, schools, academic programs, and degree level. Regardless of the nature of the peer mentoring program, Holbeche (1996) suggests that all such programs try to assist their members with the challenges they have in achieving opportunities for success. Hence, I, like many other ethnic minority students, belong to a peer mentoring program for students of color. In our case, this peer mentoring program helps us to succeed in becoming professors. The program is called The PROMISE Program. Despite their differences, what all of these programs share in common, are the good intentions of supporters, stakeholders, and participants, but their failure is in their lack of understanding of the need for research and evaluation of such programs. According to Fagan (1988), mentoring means many things to many people. Thus, researching and

evaluating such an evasive topic might be one of the reasons why supporters fail to study the nature of the mentoring experience. Unfortunately, much of the continued support for peer mentoring programs does not rely on measurable outcomes, assessment or meaningful narrative accounts, but rather on impressions and hopes. The current educational policies that support mentoring rely on what Colley calls the “feel good factor” (2003, p. 6) rather than the understanding of how mentoring helps or how the gains related to mentoring occur.

In an evidence-based era of educational policies, to maintain the practice of mentoring when we remain uncertain about its processes and outcomes leaves us vulnerable to criticism. This vulnerability leaves supporters of mentoring and the mentees apprehensive about future support for the longevity of an approach that may help without knowing how. Furthermore, without completely understanding how to assess successful positive outcomes, the support for mentoring always remains in jeopardy of being eliminated altogether (Colley, 2003). Consequently, those who could have been helped might not be due to the absence of this approach or the reduction of mentoring programs.

Because most of what we know is outcome based, it is not surprising that most of what we read on mentoring has a business lens. Most mentoring scholars come from the business field (e.g., Allen, Clutterbuck, Eby, Kram, Ragins, Rhodes, also see Ragins & Kram, 2007). It is clear that this business lens has magnified the study of mentoring into a process of outcomes, gains, and benefits, while ignoring the process or the possible casualties. When we only look at the outcomes which may be attributed to mentoring in this manner, we leap over the entire process of what it means to be mentored. These possible gains, potential benefits, utility, etc., of mentoring are merely one aspect of a

mentoring process that has yet to be fully understood or explored. For example, the meaning of the lived mentoring experience of the mentee, or the psychosocial perception of the mentoring experience, remain untouched by the current literature on mentoring.

Do Latina/o students experience mentoring in the way that other students do? What is it to be a mentee when one is also a minority? Can non-Latina/o students mentor Latina/o students? How important is race in peer mentoring? What role does ethnicity play in the mentoring process?

Racial Beings

When I walk around campus, minority students tend to approach me, whether they know me or not, because my features make it easy to identify me as a “Latino” (see, Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Hunter, & Torres, 2008). My black hair, my olive skin, my brown eyes, short stature, and stocky build easily stand out as stereotypical characteristics of a Latino man. While on the one hand, associating these features with Latinas/os is discriminatory, not all Latinas/os have these features; nonetheless, these features provide an instant connection to other Latina/o students. In me, they see a reflection of themselves. This reflection helps to build an easy rapport with some Latina/o students. However, those who may want to avoid stereotypes may also want to avoid me (see Gracia, 2001, 2005, 2008).

When students are a minority, it seems that racial affinity causes bonding to occur faster; perhaps feelings of isolation brings out the need to bond with someone intensively as it appears in the case of Latina/o students (see Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Gloria, & Robinson Kurpius, 2001). Many Latina/o students open up to me easily; as a result, I get

invitations to attend other minority programs and activities. Among those programs, members of the peer mentoring program *La Familia* frequently invite me to participate in their events. My outward appearance of “looking Latino” serves as my open invitation to participate in the group’s activities year after year. Despite the physical proximity with members of the program, the mentoring process remains mysterious.

Race is a visible identity (Robison-Wood, 2009), which is emotionally loaded for the meaning we give to certain racial groups (D’Andrea, 1999, 2005a, 2005b; D’Andrea & Daniels, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e). The study of any other racial group, such the Latina/o students, is by default the study of a racial minority (Darder & Torres, 2004). As a minority group, any possible interpretation we can make of their experience is bound by the interpretation of what being a minority means (Robinson, 1999). The term minority suggests someone who has less power, influence, acceptance, and usually suffers from discrimination, isolation, and abandonment (Robinson, 1999; Robinson-Wood, 2009). Latinas/os in the US represent a racial minority, and within the social constraints of racism and discrimination, we find Latina/o students also represented as a racial minority on many college campuses. Latina/o students appear to seek out each other for mutual support through peer mentoring. When they navigate in a larger social context like large public universities which usually are Primary White Institutions, Latina/o students appear to rely on social groups that can give them a sense of community.

I always wonder what exactly students mean when they say they find mutual support in peer mentoring. Whatever this is, it helps them to persevere throughout the end of the year long program. It is a marvelous phenomenon when two people continue in a

relationship over time. Yet, some relationships while maybe long lasting are not empowering. Relationships of all kinds are hard to maintain, and are both a craft and a discipline (Fromm, 1994, 2006). Peer mentoring is one type of human relationship that warrants further inquiry.

Levinas (1961/1969) reminds us that “the other” who we want to know, or the phenomenon we want to reveal can be shown when we look at it face to face, *tête-à-tête*. Maybe the face that Latina/o students see in me is the face of those who they belong to, e.g., parents, grandparents, and uncles. Perhaps, similarly the face that mentees see in the mentors is the face of those who cared for them, such as their parents, relatives, ancestors. The racial connection in each other’s faces and features assumes a shared history, and current lived experiences.

Could mentees be mentored by those who do not look like them? Could mentees who share a common appearance with their mentors “untie” with their mentors? Is sharing a similar race necessary for a successful peer mentoring experience? What does a Latina/o peer mentee look for beyond race in the Latina/o peer mentor?

Looking at someone’s face and talking to them is the most direct form of communication. According to Levinas (1961/1969), this is where we can actually connect with each other and learn the most profound essences of an individual. Only when we engage in true dialogue, can we learn from each other and help each other (Gadamer, 1960/1994). As a professional counselor, I talk to people for a living. Also, I train students who counsel thus to *talk* with people to hopefully understand them and help them. As a member of a profession that hopes to help people by talking, I believe phenomenology offers me the opportunity to understand my work. Moreover,

phenomenology also allows me to enter into face to face conversations with former mentees to uncover the meaning of what it means to be peer mentored.

Coming together. As a Latino seen as a member of this ethnic minority group, I have my ticket to enter the Latino community. It is also my ticket to exit from the White community or other racial communities. In Tatum's book, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria?* (2003), we have a question that we can apply to Latina/o students: Why are all Latina/o students sitting together at the Union?

As I enter the Union, the center of social life at the University, it is visible to everyone that students are grouped according to race. We do not live in a post-racial era. Race can bring us together. Many reasons can be given for this separation/togetherness, and although I sense the answer, I fear to admit it. Could it be racism? Somehow, we still feel comfortable with those who look like us, and implicitly, we have to admit that the comfort experience is the result of the discomfort that we still have for those who are not like us. Heidegger (1927/2004) reminds us that *Dasein*, being-in-the-world, human beings also have a form; hence, Latina/o students have a form, which for them is racial and ethnic. Looking at the peer mentee experience of Latina/o students somehow appears as a racial experience, despite that being Latina/o is not a race but an ethnicity; being Latina/o is interpreted in racial terms. While it is assumed that there is commonality among Latina/o students that creates a shared form among them, there is diversity within this ethnic group. Despite distinct differences within this group, they often are pushed into the Latina/o category as a monolithic group (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Lauren, who for me looked Caucasian, may also be pushed into the Latina/o group, along with Eduardo who had a distinctive indigenous or Amerindian complexion.

When I invite Latina/o students to join Latina/o groups, usually they accept. *La Familia* is a Latino group with Latina/o students and with a Latina/o name. I wonder if their acceptance to join the program is their top priority or true desire, or is it the result of learning what “their place in society” is? I wonder if we have a choice, or if “the choice” was made for us as ethnic and racial minorities to seek help. Turning to Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002), we may be able to better understand what the experience is like for Latina/o peer mentees and how they come to rely on other Latina/o students to help them navigate and guide them during their college experience in order to “graduate” from college.

Critical race theory considers racism ubiquitous in American life and law, where dominant norms of color blindness and neutrality mask an ugly undercurrent of insistent inequality and unequal treatment. It emphasizes the voices, experiences, and perspectives of these at “the bottom of the well” over those whose daily life brings few, if any, experiences with hard-core prejudice. Critical race theory contains two strands. One is a discourse strand that focuses on the system of thoughts, categories, images, and language by which American society constructs racial reality. The other, older and more radical strand emphasizes the material side of race and the way our system of racial categorization serves the interest of the dominant group. For this group, even social rights law often subordinates the minorities it is supposedly designed to benefit. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 32)

We live in a society that bases racial identity on phenotype, even though phenotype might not represent our true self or who we want to become. However, as humans, we need to make a conscious effort to choose how we want to be and what we want to become, but first we must understand how we are perceived. Van Manen asserts, “A human being is not just something you automatically *are*, it is also something you must try to *be*” (1997, p. 5). In order to be, we have to exert a conscious effort.

What conscious efforts do Latina/o students exert when they are in a peer mentoring relationship as mentees? Do Latina/o peer mentees exert their will, or are they told what to do? Is peer mentoring an avenue to exert or subdue Latina/o students?

From loneliness to familiar faces. Much has been written about the loneliness that Latina/o students experience in formal mainstream education, including college (Darder, Torres, & Gutiérrez, 1997; Espinoza-Herold, 2003). Moustakas in his book *Loneliness* states:

Loneliness is a condition of human life, an experience of being human which enables the individual to sustain, extend, and deepen his humanity. Man is ultimately and forever lonely whether his loneliness is the exquisite pain of the individual living isolation or illness, the sense of absence caused by a loved one's death, or the piercing joy experienced in triumphant creation. (1989, p. xi)

Existentialists, such as Heidegger, Sartre, Moustakas, and others, have said that we are inconsolably lonely creatures, but the anguish of existence is not caused by our lonely condition. Rather, it is found in the responsibility of making decisions in our own life, and that means to live with the results of those decisions for each and every one of us. So it is in the search of meaning and a meaningful life where we find relief and purpose (Frankl, 1946/1984).

The Little Prince travels from planet to planet looking for a friend. He even accepts the invitation of the fox to tame him, so that he can have a friend. Being one of only a few creatures is what it is to be lonely. As an only child, I always longed for brothers and sisters. Although I got used to being the only one of my kind among my cousins, I learned to spend long periods of time alone. I always longed for another to be with me. Similarly, college is a setting that is foreign to most Latina/o students (Tinto, 1990, 1991, 1993, 2000, 2002) and can be a lonely experience. Latina/o students I see on

campus gravitate towards other Latina/o students and seem relieved when they meet one another. As I walk around this campus, I see only few faces of Latina/o students, although I know that there are quite a few of them. This campus, as it is advertised in the marketing materials, has a population of 5% declared Latina/o students. When I see Latina/o students, I change my language. I see in them familiar faces, even if I have never met them before. I do not change from English into Spanish because most Latina/o students talk to me in English, but the language we use, *how* we talk to each other, changes. What we talk about and how we talk to one another seems to cause the change in me, and I see it in them too. We remain the same behind the face we show to others, but we show a different face to one another.

The mask we use to relate to others is our character, a word that has its origin in the word *charassein* that means engraving (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 235). We engrave our emotions, thoughts, and feelings in our face that we share with others (Levinas, 1961/1969, 1947/200). The face we put on or change for each person is different. There is one face for those who are familiar to us; there is another for those who are unfamiliar, even though we are always the same person behind the faces we show to others.

Being a mentee is being the mentee of someone, and perhaps this means being somebody's "*Anam Cara*" (O'Donohue, 2004). *Anam Cara* in ancient times meant soul friend. Perhaps Latina/o students see in each other a soul friend. I asked a student I met some time ago what being a mentee meant to him, and he told me that he was "more" than a mentee. He framed his relationship with his peer mentor as that of being "brothers." I sensed a longing to belong and be with another, or what Heidegger (1927/2004) calls *Dasein*, being-with-others-in-the world. We need the other to define

who we are in relationship with others. But being a “brother” for Latina/o students is being part of an extended family. Latinas/os consider extended family part of the nuclear family. Family extends beyond blood ties for Latinas/os, and those who are part of this family community have social, emotional, and personal influence over the person (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). A mentor understood in the classical way is a “guide and counselor” (Murray, 2001).

Peer Mentoring And Its Practice

Peer mentoring is not like classical mentoring. Holbeche (1996) explains to us how peer mentoring differs from conventional or traditional mentoring:

Peer mentoring can distinguish itself from conventional mentoring in one simple respect; in conventional mentoring, the person being mentored has a developmental relationship with someone who is more senior in an organization or is more experienced in a particular area of interest to them. Often there is an expectation that career development, usually within the same organization, is part of the mentor’s role. In peer mentoring the relationship, as the title implies, is one of equality between members of the peer group. In some cases, this can mean peer mentoring relationships being established within an organization, sometimes even within the same department or function. More often, however, these relationships are established across functions or divisions within an organization and sometimes go beyond the organization. (1996, p. 25)

Holbeche makes us aware that mentoring is a culturally valued practice in the sense of passing down knowledge, experience, traditions, and culture. This may help, but at the same time, it may also transmit and repeat oppression by perpetuating practices that do not help those who are culturally different from the dominant culture in their context. If so, this may turn mentoring into the training and the transformation of those who are mentored into being who they are expected to be, rather than whom they truly are.

It appears that peer mentoring is the common form of mentoring in higher education (Budge, 2006). There are a considerable number of peer mentoring programs

across the US that target Latina/o students (e.g., University of Virginia, Penn State University, University of Utah, and the University of Maryland). Latina/o students are only one of the groups who have embraced this practice. Thus, ignoring how successful peer mentoring happens prevents us from improving this practice and defending it from those who critique this practice (Freedman, 1999).

To tame, as the fox explains it to the Little Prince, does not mean to conquer or dominate. Instead, “it is to establish ties.” As we get to know people, we create friendships as ties. We tie with one another in the world in which we live and those who we know are tied to us. We think of them and we care about them. However, we try to untie ourselves from those with whom we disagree. The ties mentees develop with their mentors are created when they spend time with each other, have lunch together, and talk to each other. However, the dynamics of the relationship remain uncertain. Who is being mentored? Who is the mentor? Who is the mentee? Could it be that the mentor and the mentee may mentor each other? In a peer mentoring relationship could the mentor become the mentee and vice versa? Are mentees tied to their mentors? In other words, who tames who? Whether these ties free them or tie them down is something I cannot yet conclude.

Even for those who have not found a failed mentoring experience as I did, the literature of mentoring does warn us of the assumptions we make about mentoring, and it reveals weaknesses at the core of this practice. Scholars, like Colley, rightly state that “There is much that we still need to find out about how mentor relationships work” (2003, p. xv). As I have explored, mentoring hides information that prevents us from strengthening the educational experiences of Latina/o students who are targeted with this

practice. This moves me to pose questions throughout this study to help open up possible directions in which to pursue the mentoring experience. These questions I hope to unfold in Chapter Four, as I engage with the experiences brought forth with the mentees in my study. Because as Freire, a Brazilian education scholar, suggests, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry of human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (1970/2002, p. 72). Consequently, this research study is a call to listen, a call to answer a question, a call that asks me to be with others and learn from others.

Colley, however, warns us that if we are to continue pushing this practice in colleges, universities, and other educational settings, we must ask questions that help us reveal the meaning of the experience of mentoring (Colley, 2003). I fear that Latina/o students, who have unconditionally embraced the practice of mentoring, have helped to make it popular. This has contributed to a conundrum in higher education. Conflicting findings about mentoring continue to appear (Haring, 1999). In Rags and Kram’s words, mentoring is like a garden that has many unattended areas. Some are completely unattended; others are hidden, and some still need nurturing. Like a garden, the combination of these unknowns in mentoring creates a space for questioning how this practice is actually carried out and the meaning it has in the lives of mentees. Therefore, to address one of the addressed areas of the mentoring garden, I attend to the needs of the mentee through this research question: **What is the lived experience of being a Latina/o peer mentee in a public research institution of higher education?**, as it is grounded in a phenomenological perspective. In Chapter Three, I provide the philosophical and methodological grounding of hermeneutic phenomenology that guides my investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDINGS OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH JOURNEY

Philosophical Grounding

The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence--in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is a powerful animated in his or her lived experience. (van Manen, 1997, p. 36)

In this chapter, I present an explanation of how a phenomenological text is generated in the hermeneutic tradition. This tradition extends beyond the phenomenological task of simply describing a phenomenon by interpreting the possible meaning of an experience. Hence, I present the philosophical grounding for a hermeneutic phenomenological study that underlies the methodological structure of human science research, which later becomes a textual interpretation of an experience. But a methodology is only a way to reveal the meaning of something as van Manen (1997) states:

One can distinguish a variety of approaches in the field of the human sciences. A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions themselves and the way one understands the question are the important starting points, not the method as such. (p. 1)

And then he adds,

But of course it is true as well that the way in which one articulates certain questions have something to do with the research method that one tends to identify with. Why then should one adopt one research approach over another? The choice should reflect more than mere whim, preference, taste, or fashion. Rather, the method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) [or a counselor] in the first place. (p. 2, brackets added)

As phenomenology begins with a question, this chapter also introduces the research process by answering some questions about what phenomenological research entails. For instance: Why do I research through a phenomenological lens? How do I use phenomenology in relation to the Latina/o peer mentee experience? Who will I invite to engage in conversation with me? What are the criteria for participants of this study to join me in conversations? How will I collect peer mentees' stories? What type of questions will I ask? How will I interpret the stories shared by the participants of this study? What is the philosophical grounding, otherwise called epistemology, of this study? These questions, among others, relate to the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenological research. This chapter answers these questions and how this study will be carried out. However, before embarking on this new segment of my study, a retrospective of the paths already traveled is presented.

Recapping The Journey

Chapter One presented a “biographical rendering.” This is a narrative that explains how the interest in researching a certain aspect of a human experience starts. The purpose of sharing some epiphanies about mentoring and peer mentoring gave me the background to explain my interest in the Latina/o peer mentee experience in a college setting. As van Manen (1997) explains, “Phenomenological human science begins in lived experience and eventually turns back to it” (1997, p. 35).

Chapter Two showed how I concurred with many mentoring scholars who state that while mentoring is a popular social phenomenon, much remains to be known about mentoring (Colley, 2003; Jacobi, 1991; Merriam, 1983; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Roberts, 2000). Mentoring scholars have suggested a phenomenological approach to study

mentoring such as Gibson (2004). I suggest that phenomenology is the path to look at the experience of being peer mentored, because phenomenology looks at something as it is, as it appears to consciousness.

Now, in Chapter Three, I explain the philosophical grounding of phenomenology and how a phenomenological and hermeneutical study is carried out. Although phenomenology began as a philosophy, it later developed into a methodological approach grounded in philosophy (Merriam, 2009).

In this chapter, then, I clarify how the philosophical principles of phenomenology apply to the research study of the mentee's experience for some Latina/o students. Thus, I begin with the explanation of what the phenomenological call is and how it gives rise to the phenomenological question.

The phenomenological call. "To the things themselves," is the clarion of phenomenology (Husserl, 1911/1980, as cited in van Manen, 1997, p. 31). This statement is perhaps the most quoted phrase about phenomenology and how this philosophy has become known (Moran, 2001). Phenomenology is interested in the daily experience of life and focuses on a phenomenon that calls for attention. In phenomenology, the call for a "To return to the things themselves," as Husserl initially proclaimed, is known as the "phenomenological call." Merleau-Ponty explains this statement:

To return to the things themselves is to return to the world which precedes knowledge of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivate sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is. (1945/2004, p. x)

The return to the things themselves, as phenomenology proposes, is to return to the human experience in the very world or existence where these experiences occur.

Rather than conceptualizing experiences, as is characteristic in the natural or positivistic paradigm, the purpose of phenomenology is to grasp something and show it for what it is.

As I did in Chapter One through my personal experiences or biographical rendering, I proposed a return to the experience of being mentored. Then, in Chapter Two I grounded the explanation of the current mentoring scholarship in the missing elements of the human experience of mentees. Now, in Chapter Three I explain what the “return to them things themselves” is as grounded in phenomenology as I explore the question:

What is the lived experience of being a Latina/o peer mentee in a public research institution of higher education?

The research question. In *The Poet as a Thinker* (1971/2001, p. 4), Heidegger invites us to remain still as a star in the sky. Therefore, it is the questioning of the meaning of what being a mentee is where I remain still and ponder what being a mentee is like for Latina/o students. The stillness that Heidegger refers to is a phenomenological principle initially called “bracketing” by Husserl (Solomon, 1974). But Heidegger suggests questioning whatever calls to be revealed. Thus, based on the philosophical principle of questioning, in Chapter Two, I questioned both my assumptions and the assumptions some mentoring scholars have made about mentoring. I questioned the phenomenon of mentoring, not out of distrust, but in light of exposing what mentoring really is. Furthermore, in the previous chapter, I exposed how peer mentoring has reached Latina/o students, despite that much still remains for us to know about this practice, e.g., how mentoring really is or how it helps (see Jacobi, 1991).

Methodological Considerations

“Methodology” refers to the philosophical framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective. It includes the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge, and the sense of what it means to be human which is associated with or implied by a certain research method...methodology is the theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why. The Greek *hodos* means “way.” And methodology means the logos (study) of the *method* (way). So methodology means “pursuit of knowledge.” And a certain *mode* of inquiry is implied in the notion of “method.” On the other hand, the word “techniques” refers to the virtually inexhaustible variety of theoretical and practical procedures that one can invent or adopt in order to work out certain research method... For example, to select a sample of subjects for a study, or to pilot a survey questionnaire one employs certain *procedures* that are standard across the social sciences. Interviewing may be considered to be a general research procedure when no special techniques are involved... *Techniques* sometimes are like procedures excepts that there is an element of expertise (*tekhne* meaning “art,” “craft”) associated with techniques connotation of expertise in a professional or technical sense, as in the development and the conducts of statistics design for interpretative quantitative data. (van Manen, 1997, p. 27-28)

This quote defines, and perhaps reshapes or alters, how one understands the concepts of methodology, method, procedures and techniques. Following the definitions provided in this quote I begin this section with how the methodology or the philosophical principles of phenomenology apply to this research study. Next, I discuss the method of phenomenology that van Manen describes as the six research activities, and finally, I move on to the procedures of how this study will be executed for the construction of the next stage of this study, the development of themes in Chapter Four.

Being congruent with phenomenology, I start this section with some of the questions that lie behind the textual body I present as Chapter Three. How is phenomenological research done? How does phenomenology move from being a philosophy to becoming a research methodology? How can someone do a

phenomenological study that is based on philosophy? How is phenomenological research done when it is also hermeneutic?

The Philosophical Principles Of Doing Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology requires that while a researcher does not need to be a philosopher, some knowledge of philosophy is needed to develop a research study (van Manen, 1997). As van Manen explains, the methodology of a research study, which is phenomenological in nature, “refers to the philosophical framework,” that is the philosophy of how knowledge is gained (1997, p. 27).

While philosophy has universal concepts or principles that may be difficult to understand, scholars from a more specific discipline of study can help make concrete interpretations of what phenomenology, as a philosophy, suggests. Thus, van Manen is one of the scholars chosen in this study to ground philosophical principles.

Van Manen uses a pedagogical approach to ground the philosophy of phenomenology. By means of that, he explains the concreteness of phenomenology through a pedagogical lens. However, despite that this study is not pedagogical; there is an educational gain in the use of van Manen’s interpretation of phenomenology.

Van Manen is a pedagogue and I am a counselor, who is also an educator, and while this study is not a pedagogical experience, the experiences of mentees occur in an educational institution. This invites me to adopt a pedagogical perspective because the learning that occurs in mentoring refers to the study of an experience that happens at a place of learning--a university or college. Furthermore, because this is an experience that happens with peers, who are also students, and a time intended for learning and education, phenomenology is grounded in a pedagogical sense. Mentees who are also

students relate to one another in an educational setting. However, more than a relation to one another, there is plurality in the identities of students; they are Latinas/os, sons and daughters, maybe bilingual speakers. They are Beings who have multiple identities that conjoin in their experiences and may influence what they live and how they live their experiences.

The Being of things.

It is said that 'Being' is the most universal and emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition. (Heidegger 1927/2004, p. 21)

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/2004) explains that there still exists a need for a return to the Being of things--Being is capitalized when used to refer to an entity to differentiate it from the act of being, the gerund of the verb To Be. This is not new to philosophy, as Heidegger (1927/2004) argues. But even when philosophers try to answer the call for the Being of things, the difficulty to determine what a Being is begins with the difficulty to define what a Being is. What challenges even more the answer of the call of the nature of Being is the multiple interpretations that exist of what a Being is. The meaning of a Being leads to an ontological question. Ontology is the study of Beings or things; "what is a Being?" Heidegger answers this question with the following:

Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in a way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is. (p. 26)

A Being to be studied, as phenomenology proposes, needs to be expressed as a human experience. Moreover, the Being of a phenomenon must be something that can become or can be made conscious. For phenomenology, a Being must always be something that falls in the realm of consciousness. But, if everything can be a Being, how can a Being be studied? For this question Heidegger responds:

If the question about Being is to be explicitly formulated and carried through in such a manner as to be completely transparent to itself, then any treatment of it in line with the elucidations we have given requires us to explain how Being is to be looked at, how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped; it requires us to prepare the way for choosing the right entity for our example, and to work out the genuine way to access to it. Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access it all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers are ourselves. (1927/2004, p. 27)

In this study, the inquiry is the Being of what it means to be a mentee, both as a peer and a Latina/o student among other possible identities that may emerge through this research study. As shown in the previous chapters, whereas the word mentoring appears as a universal concept in most modern languages, the meaning of what it is to be mentored is often hidden or overlooked. Therefore, because the task of phenomenology is to show something for what it is, this methodological approach to do research fulfills the need that remains present in relation to the experience of mentoring, the meaning of what being a mentee is.

As described in the previous chapters, the current accounts of mentoring conceal the experience of mentoring through phrases or statements that once repeated time and again, tend to lose contact with the initial experiences that created them. Phenomenology helps reconnect with experiences that created the phrases, statements and words that are usually associated with an experience, for instance mentoring. My role as a researcher, in the phenomenological tradition, is to reconnect the experiences of mentees once more, with what it was like to be mentored for them, with the plurality of their identities. This is done through the construction of a textual description that interprets a possible meaning of the peer mentoring experience for Latina/o peer mentees.

The phenomenon. Phenomenology is a methodological research approach grounded in philosophy, the philosophy of the “Being of things,” also called the phenomenon of interest. The word phenomenon, as Heidegger (1927/2004) explains, means to show something for what it is. From here another important question/concept arises. Why is there a need to reveal something?

The act of revealing as phenomenology proposes can lead to a deeper understanding. This understanding can shed light upon how those who are mentored live the experience that transforms them into mentees. However, an experience is not an isolated event, thus to reveal an experience, the context in which the experience occurs also needs to be considered. Heidegger states that to live is to live in-the-world. He calls this *Lebenswelt* or the *Dasein* of being-in the-world. The understanding of the world where Beings live requires us to look at the world with wonder and surprise.

The Awe Of The Human Experience

I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world... I cannot shut myself up within the realms of science. All my knowledge of the world, even scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by awakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order-expression. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2004, p. ix)

The awe of an experience is the surprise to see something for what it is, and not for what or how it is expected to be. To do a hermeneutic phenomenological study, there must be an interest in opening up to the possible meaning of a human experience.

Gadamer (1960/1994) warns that because no one can rid themselves of assumptions, assumptions should be made evident to distinguish them from what something really is.

If phenomenology is about showing a phenomenon for what it is, and for what it may mean to those who experience something, an experience acquires its meaning depending on who the person is that experiences something and how a Being is. Phenomenology proposes explanations in relation to what it means to be something, as a man, a woman, a peer, a mentee, a human, etc. Phenomenology that is also hermeneutic interprets how a Being is in the world, as to where it is and what this Being-in-the-world may mean to others with others.

Heidegger (1927/2004) says that human experience is “Being-in-the-world.” However, any experience usually appears complex and confusing because an experience is more than being-in-the-world. Unless there is an attempt to provide an interpretation of the meaning of an experience, the investigation of an experience will only leave isolated facts and events which may not make any sense to those who have not lived such an experience. Hermeneutics complements phenomenology because it is about interpreting the meaning of an experience, the meaning of facts and events, and the meaning of being-in-the-world. However, when an interpretation is attempted, there is always a form of assumption; thus, Gadamer suggests that the complexity to understand a human experience arises because it is covered with assumptions.

Gadamer writes, “A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light” (1960/1994, p. 360). Moreover, Gadamer (1960/1994) explains that “An experience is no longer just something that flows past quickly in the stream of conscious life; it is meant as a unit and thus attains a new mode of being *one*” (p. 66).

The solution that phenomenology proposes is to distinguish two forms of experiences. One type of experience is *Erlebnis*. This is something one has as the result of an experience, what a person gains out of an experience like a memory. The other type of experience is *Erfahrung*. This is something a person undergoes through an experience, as learning what mentoring does to mentees or how the possible gains are received through mentoring. Those who are not mentees usually learn the conceptualization, the moral of an experience or *Erlebnis*. *Erfahrung*, on the contrary, requires that a person becomes conscious of an experience; a person needs to become aware of what it is like to live something before it becomes a memory or a concept (Gadamer, 1960/1994).

Van Manen (1997) says that the only way to know phenomenology is from the inside and that is by doing phenomenology. Phenomenology, according to Heidegger and Gadamer, is not a set of rules to be applied, but rather a way to be in the world-with-others. In this being-in-the-world-with-others, the main tenets of phenomenology are learned not as a mechanical application of principles or techniques but as a personal experience.

Phenomenology allows entering into an experience as if it were the reliving of an experience in the company of those who experience something. This is done through conversations which then results in the creation of a phenomenological text that is both evocative and reflective of the experience that is studied (van Manen, 1997). The reflection produced by phenomenology leads to another philosophical concept, *Dasein*.

Being-in-the-world according to Heidegger is *Dasein*. When human beings are, they are and exist somewhere; human beings and objects are not without a place. Casey writes, "Human beings are among the most mobile of animals. We are always of the

between, always on the move between places” (1993, p. xiii). Although, as Casey (1993) argues, despite humans always move, they are always somewhere, even while in transit. Thus, *Dasein* is being-in the-world, even when it may not feel that being is to be in-the-world, because human experience happens always in or at a place.

A priori in-the-world. To question, as phenomenology invites us to ask, means to open up to see something for what it is, and how something appears to be or actually is. Consciousness is the realm of phenomenology (Becker, 1992). As Heidegger writes,

The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such type and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations. (1927/2004, p. 31)

Phenomenology attempts to create a contact with the experience *a priori*, before the conceptualization is made of it. Van Manen explains these ideas:

Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld--the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it...Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of or meaning of our every day experiences. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain an insightful description of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting. So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in a more direct contact with the world. (1997, p. 9)

If phenomenology looks at an experience, it is because phenomenology is reflective; it always looks at something already lived (van Manen, 1997). From the start of this research study, the inquiry of what mentees lived or experienced has been proposed as a reflection; not on the potential gains that mentoring can give or the various forms that mentoring can acquire, but what mentoring was for those who lived it. The

need for such reflection is the result of the present obliviousness that mentoring suffers. As Jacobi (1991) asks, “Simply put, does mentoring help students succeed in college? If so, how?” (p. 505). Relying on the praise that is repeated by many, “mentoring helps,” most supporters of this practice have prevented the understanding of what this experience is really like.

If mentees are expected to be helped, how are they helped within a peer mentoring relationship? How does the help attributed to mentoring happen? Does mentoring really help mentees? Does mentoring among peers hide other processes within what everyone calls peer mentoring? Phenomenology can help answer the question of what mentoring is and how it helps. Phenomenology is a return to the origin of an experience. It is an *a priori* methodology because phenomenology refers to the initial time of an experience. Paraphrasing Husserl, phenomenology is to return to the things themselves, rather than to the things of the things and how they are later on transformed.

Being-in-the-world and worldhood.

The compound expression “Being-in-the-world” indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unitary* phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole. But while Being-in-the-world cannot be broken up into contents which may be pieced together, this does not prevent it from having several constitutive items in its structure. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 78)

Heidegger further explains that the concept of being-in-the-world aims at the understanding of how a Being is. Being-in is being in the world. Heidegger suggests that a Being is part of a larger world, larger than itself. He calls this collection of worlds “worldhood.” Mentors and mentees exist within a mentoring relationship and while each one of them is an entity in itself, none of them is alone or disconnected from the larger world in which they live. For instance, a student inside of a mentoring relationship is a

mentee, but outside of it, he or she is just a student. A mentee is to be recognized as a mentee when he or she is part of a mentoring program or is in a mentoring relationship. The same is applicable for a mentor. Thus, the interpretation of the mentee experience must consider the identity inside a peer mentoring program as well as outside. The identity of a student as a mentee results from the negotiation and interaction, or perhaps exclusion, of being a mentee and a student.

Heidegger (1927/2004) says that the structure of the world, in which Beings are, is the way to define a Being. Being-in-the-world is being a human being in a place larger than itself. Persons are part of a universe of other beings, the worldhood. Students as mentees are inside a relationship that may transform them into something other than being just students. However, despite being part of a relationship their individuality always remains. Mentees always remain other than their identity as peer mentees and mentors. While mentees are part of a group called *La Familia*, this program also exists in a larger world called the university which exists inside others places like a city, a county, state, region, etc.

Phenomenology questions the meaning of being-in-the-world and what being in each world with other Beings means. The question that phenomenology poses is “what is it like?” This question invites to look at a Being in its own light, and in relationality with others Beings.

The Phenomenological Way Of Asking Questions

To ask a question means to bring into the open. (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 363)

The openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question. (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 363)

As the art of asking questions, dialectic proves its value because only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning even further--e.g., the art of thinking. It is called dialectic because it is the art of conducting a real dialogue. (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 367)

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is being said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is being said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 370)

Gadamer writes extensively about the importance and meaning of the question in hermeneutic phenomenology. A question is the admission of not knowing something. The requirement for a question to be phenomenological is the openness to admit not knowing. Gadamer calls this the horizon of the question; that is how far someone's understanding is. However, once delineated as the horizon of understanding, this horizon moves further away, because what was not seen before can now be seen. For an interpretation to be whole not only what is said needs to be heard but also what, as Gadamer suggests, what lies behind, that which is not said.

A phenomenological approach can help build understanding around a question. The question that phenomenology asks is an inquiry of a description: "what is it like...?" Through a phenomenological question there is a "turning back" (referring to Husserl) to the origin of things, to the experiences as once lived. Looking for the Being of things lends itself to show something of what it is. Heidegger explains, "Being is always the Being of an entity" (p. 29). He further adds, "The real 'movement' of the sciences takes place when their basic concepts undergo a more or less radical revision which is transparent to itself" (p. 29). But when asking what something is like, the relation that it

implies is that something is other than the one who asks the question. The Other appears, then as a philosophical question of a Being who is not the person who asks about the Being but an-Other. This I discuss next.

The Being of the Other.

Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of *Dasein* is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 155)

Throughout this study the use of the word Other has been capitalized. This other refers to other Beings, other people, and an-other something. This Other is the object of study in phenomenology. This philosophical concept has been widely studied in phenomenology. For instance, while Levinas refers to the Other as a moral responsibility, Buber states that the Other should not be objectified. Buber calls this objectification the I-it relation. Instead, he suggests to have an I-Thou relation, where the Other is considered a person that is cared for.

Phenomenology considers the Other not simply as different one from oneself. Rather, the Other is one for whom one has to care to know about. At the beginning of this study, I quoted Ricoeur, because he states that that the other, when becoming conscious of itself is an understanding that comes from the Other as a person, and not an object disjoined from the world in which people live.

This study calls back to awareness of the Other in the mentoring relationship, an-Other who has been neglected and must be considered: the mentee. The Other, as phenomenology proposes to see it is not an object disconnected or disengaged from the world or other people; rather, the Other is one from whom and with whom life makes sense.

As a Being exists in the world, Heidegger explains, it exists as a being-with. This implies that *Dasein-with* is *Dasein* with-Others too. Existence is not a vacuum, but involves a physical world in the company of Others. Thus, to study the Other is to want to know who the Other is, and how the Other lives in-the-world with others. The core principle of this study is to consider the Other of the mentoring relation, one who has remained hidden for a very long time and calls for our attention. The mentee is this Other for whom there is a social and personal responsibility. Phenomenology proposes to go from an I-it to an I-Thou relation (Buber, 1923/1996), where the Other is not objectified but seen as a person like oneself, but different despite all the possible similarities.

The ethical call of the Other. The knowledge phenomenology gives entails social responsibility. The other, according to Levinas, is a person for whom everyone must care. The other when, not an unknown any more, when acknowledged and considered as present, demands moral obligation to be cared for. The knowledge gained through phenomenology in a sense is revolutionary knowledge because it leads to being “tactful” with the one who becomes an acquaintance, that is the Other (van Manen, 1997).

Levinas is a phenomenologist who was concerned with the ethical dimension of the Being of the Other. Usually the word Other is capitalized because it refers to a Being. This is a philosophical concept that emphasizes the individuality of the Being, but conveys also the relationality that is always present among beings. Levinas highlights the importance of the relation that each person has with each other. As Levinas explains, “The relationship between me and the other does not have the structure of formal logic

found in all relations... The relation with the Other is the only relation where such an overturning of logic can occur” (1961/1969, p. 180-181).

The relation with the other becomes an ethical relation. The sameness, being like an-Other, makes people conscious that there is an ethical call to become responsible for each other. In phenomenology this awareness results in the responsibility to show the Other for who he or she is, accepting that while an-other can be like oneself, at the same time, it is different from others. This philosophical notion of the Other is the reason why a phenomenological study does not ask questions that are separated from the human experience. Instead, phenomenology wants to know how an experience is lived as a man, woman, a student, an ethnic being, as any Other than oneself. In this study the mentee is seen as a Latina/o student who is part of a mentoring program, but also as a Being who is unique and different from other peers, including mentors and mentees. This study answers the call for a moral responsibility to describe and interpret the Other of the mentoring experience, the mentee in his/her own way through conversations.

Levinas asks us to consider the Other. The interpretation of what mentees have lived and what they call mentoring may not be what it is thought to be, so phenomenology can reveal how mentees make sense of mentoring. This may be both revealing and disconcerting, if their description differs from the assumptions that have been made about their peer mentoring experience. However, despite these potential troubling differences, this research can help expand the understanding of what mentoring means to mentees. As Levinas states:

Our relation with him [the Other] certainly consists in wanting to understand him [or her], but this relation exceeds the confines of understanding. Not only because curiosity, knowledge of the other also demands sympathy, or love, ways of being

that to the other, the latter does not affect us by means of a concept. The other is being and counts as such. (1991/1998, p. 5, brackets added)

The Philosophy Of The Unique In The Human Experience

There is something unique about each human experience. No other human being can live an experience for another person. Only the person who lives an experience has a first-hand contact with it. Heidegger calls this the experience at-hand. Experiences belong to those who live them. Nonetheless, it is possible to access other people's experiences through the stories that an-Other can tell.

Through conversations with Others, the knowledge that an experience taught can be shared with those who have not lived that experience. Nonetheless, what remains unique to a human experience is what the person who lives an experience has, that is an intimate contact with it. Phenomenology and hermeneutics bind together to provide not only a description of an experience, but also a reflective account of the meaning of a human experience as initially lived. This union can bring a closer understanding to what something is really like, in other words, what an experience was really like for those who lived it, more than what was learned.

An experience is also unique because even when it can be generalized or applied to others, it is not the same anymore. The intimate contact and how an experience comes to be is only shared by those who lived it, and it is understood when it is made sense of in the context in which it was lived. As van Manen explains:

Phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy or *theory of the unique*; it is interested in what is essentially not replaceable. We need to be reminded that in our desire to find out what is effective systematic intervention (from an experimental research point of view), we tend to forget that the change we aim for may have different significance for different persons. (1997, p. 7)

There is something unique and essential to every human experience. Heidegger (1927/2004) defines an essence as something that makes up a phenomenon, and without it, it could not be what it is. However, there are many possible essences that make a phenomenon, or a Being be what it is. Most certainly, this appears true for Latina/o students. They are not from one single country, from one specific race, speak the same language, or come from the same historical moment, etc. However, somehow there are things that bind them together in groups that they name Latina/o, as Latina/o student groups, Latina/o clubs or Latina/o peer mentoring programs. There is something unique that brings them together and binds them, while they still maintain their individuality. The unique for each Latina/o student's experience may be tied to what they find as essential in being with Others like them.

As a pedagogical experience, the study of Latina/o students in their various activities can bring a closer understanding to what is unique to mentees, however difficult it may be to define mentoring. The structures of their experiences appear to be built in the uniqueness of the experience, the essences that make a mentee who they are. The unique to each person is what phenomenology studies, so through a textual interpretation, both the researcher and the reader can understand what makes an experience what it is. Also, phenomenology exposes that while an experience may belong to others, anyone can find the universal in it that can serve to educate others.

Pedagogical theory has to be *theory of the unique*, of the particular case. Theory of the unique starts with and from the single case, searches for the universal qualities, and returns to the single case. (van Manen, 1997, p. 150)

Philosophy Of Daily Living

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, of things or events, in the everyday world. Phenomenologists study situations in the everyday world from the viewpoint of the experiencing person. This experiential view helps phenomenologists understand people and human life so that they can work effectively with them. (Becker, 1992, p. 7)

Phenomenology is a philosophy of the everyday of persons, and of how a Being lives the experiences he or she encounters (Heidegger, 1927/2004). Although, sometimes, it could be said that experiences encounter Beings. Phenomenology proposes to look at the everyday life of people. As Heidegger explains:

“Everydayness” manifestly stands for that way of existing in which Dasein maintains itself ‘every day’ [“alle Tage”]. And yet this ‘everyday’ does not signify the sum of those ‘days’ which have been allotted to Dasein in its ‘lifetime’. Though this ‘every day’ is not to be understood calendrically, there is still an overtone of some such temporal character in the signification of the ‘everyday’ [“Alltag”]. But what we have primarily in mind in the expression “everydayness” is a definite “how” of existence by which Dasein is dominated through and through ‘for life’ [“zeitlebens”]. (1927/2004, p. 422)

In phenomenology, this interest in everydayness is called the lifeworld or the world where Beings live. Heidegger names this idea as *Lebenswelt*, which in German is made up of the words *Leben* which means to live and *Welt* which means world. *Lebenswelt* refers to the world where a Being lives and how a Being experiences the world, the world where these experiences happen.

Heidegger (1927/2004) explains that experiences are lived in the world and they acquire meaning in the relation to “how” Beings live with-others. This ‘how’ that Heidegger refers to must be considered in order to understand any experience. Furthermore, the notion of place is embedded in each lived experience of a Being. Moreover, Beings, in addition exist within the continuum of time, and also live in a body. This allows them to create relations with other Beings. Thus, to understand the meaning

of a Being, one has to consider how *Dasein* or being-in-the-world-with-others is. These notions help this study consider Latina/o students within the world they live and guides how the descriptions and interpretations of their experiences are formulated in Chapter Four.

The World Of *Dasein*

All our efforts in the existential analytic serve the one aim of finding a possibility of answering the question of *meaning of Being* in general. To work out this *question*, we need to delimit that very phenomenon in which something like Being becomes accessible to the phenomenon of the *understanding of Being*. But this phenomenon is one that belongs to *Dasein*'s state of being. Only after this entity has been Interpreted in a way which is sufficiently primordial, can we have a conception of understanding of Being, which is included in its very state of Being; only on this basis can we formulate the question of the Being which is understood in this understanding, and the question of what such understanding 'presupposes.' (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 424)

Heidegger describes *Dasein* or being-in-the-world, as also a being-with-others, and a being-at-a-time. *Dasein*, for Heidegger, encloses the idea of "how" and "where," as well of "when" and "with whom." These ideas refer to the concepts that van Manen (1997) calls the four existentials. However, before moving onto the existentials, more needs to be said about the lifeworld and the meaning of Being.

The world of a Being, as Heidegger explains, is not the entire world. Rather, the world that a Being experiences is the one which he or she shares with those with whom Beings interact. Altogether they are part of a universal world, the lifeworld. The lifeworld is made up by each world of every Being, and subsequently altogether they form a universal world. Phenomenology states that individual Beings, while they are unique and have their own personal identities, are mutually inclusive and exclusive of each other. Thus, to understand a Being, one has to consider the world where this Being lives and the other worlds where Being is inserted or is a part.

Mentees are part of a dyad. They are part of a pair, and while individually they are their own Being, they are part of larger worlds. For instance as members of *La Familia*, mentees are part of a larger “world” called *La Familia*. Consequently, *La Familia* is also part of a larger world, a university which is an institution part of larger worlds. Beings--as the Latina/o mentees--are part of a world that is hosted in other larger worlds. Worlds are inserted in larger worlds which also intersect with other worlds. This is how meaning is created.

***Dasein* as an-Other.** In *Identity And Difference* (1957/1974), Heidegger explains that what makes a Being different also can make it similar to other Beings. Hence, to explore the experience of Latina/o mentees involves the exploration of students, who along with receiving a college education, are with other students or Beings. Within a world another world appears to be created, the world of peer mentees. They are in a sense a community with other students like them, but they are different from others who are not mentees and different from each other.

Thus, it is possible to infer that Latina/o students do not enter college without history. They bring with them their previous experiences as a result of their culture, their language, and all the other aspects of their multiple identities (e.g., gender and sexuality). Latina/o students live experiences which they make sense of based on the previous experiences they lived. One of these identities is their ethnic classification as a Latina/o. This word also denotes a gender difference because it includes both male, Latino, and female, Latina. But this difference in ethnicity from those who are not Latina/o makes them similar to those who are named Latina/o or identified as a Latina/o. The research project of the mentoring experience of a mentee, who is the peer of another student, is to

investigate how peer mentoring is lived or perceived as a Latina/o student--as a male or as a female, among other similar identities. The Latina/o students' gender is part of other identities that make up the Being of Latina/o students.

Identities occur at a place, and develop through time. Even the mentees' experiences refer to their bodily interaction in the world that somehow can make them identifiable as Latina/o. This may ease or foster the creation of relationships with others, who may also be seen as Latina/o. These are the four aspects of any human experience, and they refer to what in phenomenology van Manen calls, the four existentials or fundamental lifeworld themes. They are used for both reflection and interpretation in phenomenology. They are lived space or spatiality, lived body or corporality, lived time or temporality, and lived human relation or relationality or communality. Next, I briefly discuss each one of them, and how they apply to this research project.

Spatiality: Being And Place

A college campus is a place that gathers people together. Upon a place, like a canvas, the experiences of students are written, and their experiences shape who they are and who they become. Heidegger describes *Dasein* as being in place because a Being is always being in a place. Casey writes that the notion of place has been considered since Ancient Times:

Place is 'prior to all things' according to Aristotle for the very reason which Archytas gives: place's indispensability for all things that exist. *To be is to be in place*: this is Archytas's message, dutifully preserved and transmitted by Aristotle. (1993, p. 14)

Place, as discussed in phenomenology, does not refer to measurements (e.g., length, width, and size), or a mere description of the objects in a place. Rather, it is the relation of a Being and its environment. Beings and their characteristics are or exist in a

place or where they are. Thus, phenomenological description and hermeneutic interpretation happen in relation to the place where an experience occurs, and when the interpretation is made (time is later explained).

How a Being feels in a place is part of the description, as well as how a thing or Being is described in relation to the place. A physical space can make a Being feel comfortable or displaced as in out of place, although, both experiences can happen at the same time. For instance, certain places can make a Being feel united with others, like in a stadium during a game; however, this place, stadium, can also make a Being feel separated from those who are seated around them. The relationships that are established with others are based on a place and can be contradicting within the very same place where an experience is being studied.

Phenomenology considers Beings as part of and in a place. According to a particular place, an interpretation of what an experience is like is produced. For instance, the meaning of my bedroom is not just a place to rest, but also a place to work. My favorite place in my apartment is my bedroom. It is away from the hussle and bussle of the kitchen, where my mother cooks; I could say that this is where I feel safe and most comfortable. Nestled between my oak wooden desk and my tall brown wooden bookshelf, and next to my portable radiator, I find my space to write, read, and work at my computer. The small but high window gives me a peek into the street from where I receive daylight and which allows me to know how time passes by. But my bedroom is not just what I have in my room or what I do in my room, but how my room is organized. This affects how I feel, how my body feels within my room. This feeling is created through an ambiance that also promotes work in addition to being a place for resting. For

me this special combination makes my bedroom a meaningful place that is use-full and rest-full. There is full-ness in rest and work. Furthermore, as each item in my bedroom has been collected throughout time, there is a story to tell about each item. I care for all I have and how the room is arranged. Therefore, my bedroom is not a place just for comfort, but also a place to work. Altogether they create a whole.

In relation to Latina/ o students, consideration must be given to how students perceive being in the physical place of a college or university. In the physical place called college or university, mentees meet with Others--their mentors and mentees. This is also where mentees are seen and live the peer mentoring experience. Place not only situates where Beings (mentees) can be seen, but perhaps, they are also overlooked in this place.

Corporality: Being And Body

Among all phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty appears the most central for considering the connection between Being and the body. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he explains how existence in the world is lived through a body. In there, he states, "I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world" (1945/2004, p. ix).

Merleau-Ponty explains that to have a sensation, such as "Of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold" (p. 3), is to feel the world with the body one has. This is of major importance when studying Beings such as people, students, mentees, etc. Moreover, if the physical characteristics of a person make them distinguishable from others, they become different from others. This can also imply that at the same time those physical differences can make them similar to Others, those who share those physical characteristics. The body in which a Being is becomes part of the experience a Being lives.

Through body sensations, experiences can be obtained, and it is how they are understood. Through the senses and the perception created between one's body and other people's bodies and objects, one lives in the world, makes sense of the world, understands the world, etc. Furthermore, any Being can be identified through the body of the Being.

The bodily experiences of mentees are more than the physical sensations they can obtain through their body. The physical body is also a form of identification. Mentees who are Latina/o can be seen, identified, classified, etc. The bodies mentees have relate to what others think Latina/o students look like. On the other hand, those who do not have the bodily appearance of a Latina/o or what one is expected to look like, might not have their Latina/o experience validated. Both considerations must be taken into account when studying the Latina/o peer mentee experience.

As I referred previously to my Being as a racial Being, the bodily experience that I live regularly reminds me of my Being as a Latino. This can be exemplified in this story. There is a daily reminder when I walk around campus. Minority students tend to approach me because the features of my body make me easy to identify as a "Latino" (see Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Hunter, & Torres, 2008). My phenotype characteristics such black hair, olive skin, brown eyes, short stature, and stocky build easily stand out as stereotypical characteristics of a Latino man.

Associating these features with Latinas/os is discriminatory because not all Latinas/os have these features. Nevertheless, these features usually provide an instant connection to other Latina/o students. In me, they may see a reflection of themselves.

This reflection helps to build an easy rapport with some Latina/o students. However, those who may want to avoid stereotypes may also want to avoid me.

Students who are a minority, less in numbers, less in power, less than Others, having racial affinity, or body similarity, seem to bond faster. Perhaps, feelings of isolation can bring out the need to bond with someone intensively as it appears in the case of Latina/o students (see Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001). My body, as perceived by many as a “Latino body,” seems to help many students to identify me easily as a Latino. As a result of this body identification, I receive invitations to attend other minority programs and activities. Among those programs, members of the peer mentoring program *La Familia* frequently invite me to participate in their events. My outward appearance of “looking Latino” serves as my open invitation to participate in the group’s activities year after year. Despite the physical proximity with members of the program, the mentoring process remains mysterious.

Because race is a visible identity (Robison-Wood, 2009), it is an emotionally meaningful one. The meaning that race gives to certain racial groups makes them visible or invisible, dominant or subordinate, privileged or disenfranchised (D’Andrea, 1999, 2005a, 2005b; D’Andrea & Daniels, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e). The study of any racial group, of Others, such the Latina/o students is by default the study of a racial minority (Darder & Torres, 2004). As a minority group, any possible interpretation of the group’s experience is bound by the interpretation of what being a minority means to the members of the group (Robinson, 1999). The term minority suggests someone who has less power, influence, and acceptance and usually suffers

from discrimination, isolation, and abandonment (Robinson, 1999; Robinson-Wood, 2009).

Latinas/os in the US represent a racial minority, and within the social constraints of racism and discrimination, Latina/o students also represent a racial minority on many college campuses. Latina/o students appear to seek out each other for mutual support through peer mentoring. When they navigate in a larger social context like large public universities which usually are Primary White Institutions (PWIs), Latina/o students appear to rely on social groups that can give them a sense of community. Within this sense of communality, peer mentoring appears and continues to be used among Latina/o students. Although the nature of what peer mentoring is, or how it creates a sense of community among those who gather under the umbrella of programs named peer mentoring, remains under the assumption that mentoring helps. Recalling Jacobi's words, "If so, how?" (1991, p. 505).

Temporality: Being And Time

The effect of time is rarely considered, other than when measuring it. Nonetheless, Heidegger states that time is most influential in how an experience is lived. Heidegger's *Being And Time* (1927/2004) or *Sein und Zeit* in German is a way to prove how important time and its relation with Being is.

Time is an important part of a human experience. Heidegger describes *Dasein* as being at a particular time. When a lived experience happens, the notion of time affects the meaning of an experience. Heidegger clarifies that it is not the chronological sequence of events that matters the most, but rather how the events lived by a Being are perceived, or how the influence of time affects the experience. Thus, time has to be taken into account

to make sense of an experience because Beings exist in time, and their time to live something makes them unique. Perhaps, an experience lived at another time, may not be the same, or the Being does not feel, understand or makes sense of the experience in the same way.

For Heidegger to be is to be in time. Time can change what a Being is. For instance, as young students enter college for the first time, they enter into a new world. They also enter in time where they become part of the history of the place where they are. But as Heidegger explains that the sequence of events or history is only part of an experience; what matters most for a Being is the meaning of an event, which Heidegger calls its “historicity.” According to Heidegger this is what determines the meaning of a Being.

For instance, Latina/o students, who enter a university, enter as a minority, being fewer in numbers, with less college tradition, lesser mentioned in history, etc. However, their presence makes history for the institution where they are and for themselves. Time affects those who become mentees. As members of a group, that collects them as pieces of a large puzzle, together they emerge as members of a larger community, students in a public university within a time context. Thus, an interpretation of a mentee experience for Latina/o students needs to include when these students enter programs, because somehow this experience may be the answer to a question asked at a certain time, as part of a need, or the evolution of a process at a time that leads students to gather in a group that calls them mentees.

Time is also a connection with body. Youth is a time in life where the physical conditions of the body allow students to experience the world and live it in a way that

will differ later on, at a later age. The consideration of time, when mentees live their experience of being a mentee, represents the entering of a time in a new life as beginners in their college careers. While the time of initiation as college students happens, it stands side by side as the time of initiation of Latina/o students as mentees.

Communality: Being And Others

Is it possible that ultimately we cannot address ourselves to ‘the world as determining the nature of the entity we have mentioned? Yet we call this entity one which is “within-the-world”. Is ‘world’ perhaps a characteristic of Dasein’s Being? And in that case, does the very Dasein ‘proximally have its world? Does not ‘world’ thus become something ‘subjective’? How, then, can there be a ‘common’ world ‘in’ which, nevertheless, we *are*? And if we raise the question of the ‘world’, *what* world do we have in view? Neither the common world not the subjective world, but *the worldhood of the world as such*. By what avenue do we meet this phenomenon? (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 92)

As Heidegger suggests, to live in the world is to live in conjunction with various other worlds. Somehow living is living a common world because there is one major world that all Beings share, *Lebenswelt* or “worldhood” (Heidegger, 1927/2004). This is where meaning is constructed. The world of a Being exists within its own world, which subsequently, is within-the-world, the larger world “worldhood.” Worlds exist inside other worlds; worlds are side by side with other worlds, and worlds that are part of the worldhood. This is how Heidegger suggests that Being must be described and then interpreted.

Is the world of a mentee inside or side by side with the mentor’s world? Do mentees “tie” or “untie” with their mentors in the world? Is sharing a similar race necessary for a successful peer mentoring experience? What does a Latina/o peer mentee look for beyond race in the Latina/o peer mentor in order to share a common world with them? Is sharing a world a prerequisite for peer mentoring?

The relation that mentees may create or may lack with one another needs further consideration. When a Being or a phenomenon is being studied, the relation with Others (e.g., people or things) must be considered. Beings exist with other Beings in-the-world, their world and the larger world or worldhood.

Heidegger (1927/2004) explains that existence occurs in the communality of Others. Heidegger calls this the *Dasein* of-being-with-others. Mentees *are* because there is someone who mentors them, and calls them mentees, someone who somehow makes them part of their world. Mentors and mentees do not exist in a vacuum of no one else in the world. Every Being is a Being with Others and is in the company of others. The word mentee means “the one who is thought of” (Roberts, 2000). By being in pairs and as part of a group of Others, Latina/o mentors and mentees may construct the meaning of their experiences. As mentees live experiences with their mentors and other mentees, they enter within the relation of a larger world, a group called *La Familia*, the university, etc.

Taking a step back and looking at the word communality, through etymology, one can learn that it comes from the Latin root *communalis* which means common. If there is something common among Being, then the communality among them must mean more than just being together. What do mentees have in common with each other? What is common among Latina/o mentees? Is there such a thing as having a common mentee experience?

I always wonder what exactly students mean when they say that they find mutual support in peer mentoring. Whatever this is, it appears to help them to persevere throughout the end of the year long program. From my observations, those who are part of a mentoring experience tend to graduate from college, which is contrary to what the

statistics say, where half of Latina/o students are predicted to drop out of college without ever graduating. So it is a marvelous phenomenon when two people continue in a relationship over time. Yet, some relationships may be long lasting, but not be empowering. Relationships of all kinds are hard to maintain, and are both a craft and a discipline (Fromm, 1994, 2006/1956). Peer mentoring is one type of human relationship that warrants further inquiry.

Levinas (1961/1969) states that “the Other,” the phenomenon to be revealed can only be shown when looked at face to face, *tête-à-tête*. Maybe the face that Latina/o students see in their peers is the face of those who they belong to, for instance parents, grandparents, and uncles. Perhaps the face that mentees see in their mentors is the face of those who have cared for them, such as their parents, relatives, ancestors. The racial connection in each other’s faces and features may lead to the assumption of a shared history, and current lived experiences. So if the Other is someone to see, then Being is being with others. This also implies that by being with Others there is a relationality among each other.

The Process Of Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology is a methodology that is not methodological. Rigid and inflexible methodological steps are avoided (van Manen, 1997). As van Manen asserts, “One needs to be constantly on guard against the seductive illusions of technique” (Barret, cited in van Manen, 1997, p. 3). Nonetheless, phenomenology does have a set of guidelines that make up its methodological structure as a human science. Van Manen calls them “research activities,” and they are:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

2. Investigating the experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
and
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 64-65)

In the following sections, I provide a discussion of these phenomenological tasks, and their relationship to this research project.

Turning To The Phenomenon Of Interest

Among all the topics I have come across in my graduate education and in the field of counseling, mentoring and peer mentoring have been the most compelling to me. Interestingly, despite the plethora of what has been written in counseling about various subjects, no counselor has devoted much time or energy to provide an in-depth specialization of the nature of a mentoring relationship. Counseling as an interdisciplinary and a human service occupation has much to offer to mentoring and mentoring relationships; counseling has been promoted as mentoring to be used among peers (D'Andrea & Salovey, 1996). Thus, this project offers an invitation for a counselor and an educator who want to fulfill the present void in the mentoring literature on the nature of peer mentoring.

In the study of a phenomenon of interest, which is what phenomenology pursues, human experience must be considered as the experience of Beings--as a man, as a counselor, as a student, as a Latino, etc. Consequently, any approach to peer helping must be a study of how peers--as students, Latinas/os, etc.--make sense of their experiences, and should provide an interpretation of how they negotiate their environments and their interpersonal relationships with each other. It is in how these relations develop that mentees make sense of who they are in relation with others. Heidegger (1927/2004) says

that a Being is in relation with the world in which a Being is. Reality is the construction of how people make sense of the world in which they live. As British counselor and educator Peter McLeod writes:

The notion of the world being ‘constructed’ implies that we inhabit a social, personal and relational world that is complex, layered, and can be viewed from different perspectives. This social reality can be seen as multiply constructed. We construct the world through talk (stories, conversations), through action, through systems of meaning, through memory, through the rituals and institutions that have been created, through the ways in which the world is physically and materially shaped. (2006, p. 2)

Hermeneutic phenomenology appears suitable for counselors because it attempts to provide a possible understanding of what human nature is (McLeod, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2007). For this study, Latina/o peer mentees live the experience of being in a mentoring relationship. Phenomenology requires turning back towards a phenomenon, and “this turning back” results in the awareness of what a phenomenon or a Being is.

Phenomenology prevents us from taking something for granted. As McLeod also indicates, “The primary aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how the world is constructed” (2006, p. 2). Therefore, the pursuit of a social phenomenon is to learn what connects all human beings as people. In counseling, similarly to phenomenology, human relations are important in their own way, as they are understood and felt. Peer mentoring is a good fit with hermeneutic phenomenology because the study of a phenomenon results in the understanding of something that is hidden or forgotten. As I explained in Chapter Two, the nature of mentoring relations hides behind the gains attributed to mentoring. These gains have made extensive contributions to the multiple manifestations of mentoring, but are not sufficient without recognizing the peer mentoring experiences as part of the phenomenon. Thus, because phenomenology

requires looking at an experience as the experience of a person, of a human being, and because mentoring is in need of an approach to make sense of the relations that occur in mentoring, this study appears suitable for understanding the peer mentee's experience (see Gibson, 2004).

Van Manen writes:

A corollary is that phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of a particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence. (1997, p. 31)

Thus, turning to a phenomenon of interest, the call that Husserl makes as the anthem of phenomenology, is to turn an experience as it was once lived, but which may have been lost. However, phenomenology is not pursued alone, as this study is joined with hermeneutics, which goes beyond description. Hermeneutic asks for the interpretation of a phenomenon, of an experience in relation to those who live an experience.

The Return To The Experiences That Interest Us As We Live Them

The word re-turn refers to a going back (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1147). It is a change of direction towards the place where one may have been before. Phenomenology asks for a return, a sort of going back to the things themselves, as Husserl compels us to do (as cited in van Manen, 1997, pp. 25-26), to look into a phenomenon as it was manifested and lived by those Beings who experienced it. As the Little Prince returns to see the fox day after day, his re-turning gets him closer to the fox. Eventually, the fox is tamed and ties are developed that bind them together in the knowledge of each other.

Phenomenology binds those who study a phenomenon, and the people who are being studied, if not physically, in the mutual understanding of what an experience was like.

Van Manen explains that “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (1997, p. 9). This is similar to what counselors try to achieve in a counseling session this is called empathy. Counselors attempt to achieve empathy with their clients based on the understanding they obtained of their counselee’s lives through conversations, like phenomenology does, although the counselors’ conversations and phenomenological conversations differ in nature. Counselors’ conversations are for counseling, support and guidance, while phenomenological conversations are about inquiring about a phenomenon to gain a reconnection with a lived experience for a deeper understanding of it (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The experience of being mentored, if it is meant to be understood by those who are not inside the mentoring relationship, can only be reached through deep conversations and rich descriptions of what being mentored can be. How can the nature of a relationship that is hidden be shown? How can phenomenology be used to understand such hiddenness? Is there a way to look into a social phenomenon without being blocked by assumptions made about it?

Despite the plethora that has been written about mentoring, most scholars still fail to provide an understanding of what mentoring is (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Maybe the identities of those who are mentored, and the nature of what it is like to be mentored have been ignored due to the difficulty of the analysis of a phenomenon that has multiple manifestations. This obliviousness and challenge to study mentoring may lead scholars to study only what is gained, obtained, reached, etc. While these are valid forms of

investigation, they provide conclusions that overlook the mere identities of those who are mentored, and thus the nature of a mentoring relationship. As Robinson states:

Each of us has multiple identities that compose our lives. Included are race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and disability. These identities are socially constructed in society by way of discourses... Discourses speak to the ways in which people act on the world and as ways in which the world acts on individuals. (1999, p. 73)

Identities are complex and multilayered. Multicultural counselors and psychologists have since long ago acknowledged that reality requires an interpretative inquiry to describe a human experience as it is lived, which must include the identities of those who are studied or counseled (Robinson-Wood, 2009). Latina/o peer mentees, more than being Latina/o, are men, women, sons, daughter, etc.; they are people with multiple identities that compromise how they live their experiences. Thus, a return to the experiences, as phenomenology invites us to do, is needed to reach a connection with how people make sense of life. This return, as proposed in phenomenology, can bring about the discovery of that which is being assumed.

Reflecting On The Essential Themes

A theme becomes essential for a phenomenon when if taken out, the experience is not the same any more. A theme is essential because it is more than part of the phenomenon; it is what makes the phenomenon what it is. The description and interpretation of the experience lies in the identification of what is essential for an experience, which otherwise becomes something else.

Van Manen (1997) suggests three different approaches for the phenomenological analysis of themes: (1) the wholistic or sententious approach; (2) the selective or

highlighting approach; [and/or] (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach” (1997, pp. 92-93, brackets added).

The “wholistic or sententious approach” collects the text and brings it all together as if it were a summary. This is done to reflect upon its overall meaning and then to formulate a statement that expresses the “main significance of the text as a whole” (p. 93). This approach helps to create an initial understanding of a text and begins the task of examining an individual story. The wholistic analysis of stories, anecdotes, etc., can help facilitate the incorporation of several texts into a full description of the phenomenon.

The second approach is to collect “particularly essential or revealing” (p. 93) phrases or words or sentences. This is done to highlight particulars and bring attention to meaningful references. These references may suggest or lead to particular aspects of a phenomenon.

The last approach is the sentence-by-sentence analysis. By far, this is the most detailed textual examination and analysis. It is helpful because an extensive text may become opaque and difficult to be thematized. While this is a very detailed approach, it can help find what is hidden and may be easily overlooked. Among the many words, hundreds of pages, and the multitude of ideas within the transcriptions of conversations, the construction of a text that expresses what is meaningful can be very challenging. Nonetheless, this detailed approach can allow the researcher to bring out what appears as if covered or hidden.

Themes initially may appear as if concealed. Themes are what make up an experience. Nonetheless, they can be identified as essential themes when they cannot be taken out without losing what they represent, the meaning of the experience. Themes can

be found inside the text, and are identified through analysis of the transcriptions of the conversations with participants as well as other sources of text.

For this study, I use all three approaches to examine the stories of peer mentees. I examine the individual stories Latina/o students share with me using a highlighting approach. I focus on the difficult passages with a line-by-line approach when the text resists my attempts to understand it. Then, I gather together these statements into holistic statements, under the heading of a theme that reduces the details, but allows the creation of a possible description of the meaning of their experiences.

Phenomenological Writing

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity: Research and writing are aspects of one process. (van Manen, 1997, p. 7)

The word writing comes from the Greek word *rhinë* which means *to rasp*. Originally to write meant to scratch, to skim the surface and/or piling in layers (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1543). The most important activity of phenomenological research is to scratch the surface of reality. This is done as if it were peeling back in layers of meaning, and making sense of what is found, that which becomes present. Moreover, van Manen says, “To *do* research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always *bringing to speech* of something. And this thoughtful bringing to speech is most commonly a writing activity... Experientially, language and thinking are difficult to separate” (1997, p. 32). The act of phenomenological research is to bring to speech the meaning of an experience, and this is done in and by writing.

In relation to writing van Manen says, “The textual quality or form of our writing cannot quite be separated from the content of the text” (1997, p. 112). The verb to write refers to an action that is most intimate and reflexive. This is contrary to speech, because

writing demands a personal effort that represents a turn back to what was lived through in order to write forward. Whereas talking, the action of speaking, rarely is self-reflective. In phenomenology, to write is both the means of doing research, and the result of the research process; a phenomenological research project is a written document.

In phenomenological research the researcher investigates a phenomenon as if he were carving his way by the craft of writing. He must maintain a strong orientation to the phenomenon, staying focused, and needs to be reflective by considering the parts and the whole and the relationships of the individual pieces or themes (van Manen, 1997, p. 33). After all, qualitative research, as van Manen clarifies, is to show the phenomenon for “what it is like” in its pieces and its totality (1997, p. 34).

Van Manen also mentions that “A good phenomenological description is an adequate elucidation of some aspect of the lifeworld--it resonates with our sense of lived life” (1997, p. 27). And he adds, “A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way” (1997, p. 39).

The Pedagogical Relation To The Phenomenon

To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities. (van Manen, 1997, p. 33)

Van Manen (1997) explains that the meaning of a strong and oriented relation in a phenomenological text is not to provide superficial comments or descriptions, but rather to give or reveal the meaning of what something is. Van Manen describes a phenomenologically oriented text as one that answers the question: “What is something

like?” This research study addresses the question: **What is the lived experience of being a Latina/o peer mentee like in a public research institution of higher education?**

This overarching question entails sub-questions inherent in the whole: What is it like to be a Latina/o? What is it like to be a peer? What is it like to be a mentee? What is it like to be in college? These questions cannot be answered simply by summarizing how mentoring occurs. Rather, these questions must deal with the meaning that lies behind the use of this approach I use. Phenomenology to ask: what is it like for peer mentees to be involved in a Latina/o peer mentoring program during their first year of college?

Also, according to van Manen (1997), if a phenomenological text must be strong it is because it develops out of a profound thinking about what something is. A researcher must care for those who he or she researches. Moreover, a study is grounded in the situation where the experience that calls to be researched occurs. A text is strong when it is oriented and rich in the description of the world where the experience happens.

After 10 years of connection with peer mentoring programs and programs like *La Familia*, I concur with many authors: much remains to be known about this practice (Ragins & Kram, 2007). But it is not simply the length of time that leads me to agree with some scholars. Rather, it is the personal realization that something is missing. As I described in Chapter One, the beginning point of this research began when I realized that I did not know what mentoring was like. I only knew what mentoring could give. I believed that mentoring could help all those who are “mentored.” However, as Heidegger (1927/2004) states, although one can be next to something for a long time, one may never really know it until one cares about it. And even when the realization about it occurs, without caring for it, one can still remain indifferent and continue to ignore what

something is. Phenomenology is grounded in the desire to care which leads to an interest in wanting to know (Heidegger, 1927/2004), this desire also transforms the researcher into a more caring being (see Rehorick & Bentz, 2008).

Those being helped through peer mentoring may not be helped much, if what they receive is a benefit they do not really comprehend. Thus, while many people may be willing to praise mentoring, ignoring what the benefits are in this practice does not contribute to the likely replication of a good mentoring experience. Becoming aware of how something is, as phenomenology attempts to do, can help future mentees know what they can expect and how other mentoring experiences end up as a good experience.

Van Manen writes:

A text is rich, therefore, because it explores not only what is said about an experience as it is described by those who lived it, but it is rich if it investigates other possible “ramifications” [of the experience]. (1997, p. 152)

A text needs to be deep because it needs to explore “the meaning structured beyond what it is immediately experienced” (van Manen, 1997, p. 152). There is more to an experience than the sequence of events that made it up. It is the meaning that an experience has for those who live it and how this meaning is made that determines how persons make sense of their lives. In summary, a text that is strong and phenomenologically oriented tells more than what a person says; it tells of the meaning of the experience.

Van Manen also expresses that there is an educational aspect to every phenomenological study:

We are not simply pedagogues here and researchers there--we are researchers oriented to the world in a pedagogic way. (1997, p. 151)

He further explains:

The end of human science research is a critical pedagogical competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the bases of a careful edified thoughtfulness. To that end hermeneutic phenomenological research reintegrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire. It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives. It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. (van Manen, 1997, p. 8)

Balancing The Whole And The Parts

Qualitative research (*quails* means “whatness”) asks the *ti estin* question: What is it? What is the phenomenon in its whatness? But as one engages in the *ti estin* question, there is a danger that one loses sight of the end of phenomenological research: to construct a text which in its dialogical structure and argumentative organization aims at a certain effect. (van Manen, 1997, p. 33)

The main task of phenomenology is to bring something to light. Heidegger (1927/2004) calls this “clearing.” It is common for many mentoring scholars to lose track of the mentoring experience, even when they recognize the value of what mentors and mentees live. For me, it has been very difficult to stay focused on my phenomenological question. One of the reasons is that the gains and the descriptions I can recall during 10 years of contact with mentoring have made it easier to follow the typical clichés of mentoring, rather than the pursuit of a deeper understanding of what is meant or rather lived when being mentored.

The *quails* of the mentoring experience or its characteristics are easily in mere listings. Phenomenology asks to take a step back from time to time and look at what exactly is being researched. This is a major difference between what this research study is about and what I did before. Phenomenology asks to do something I did not do, the constant revision of what is being said, written, and discussed, the constant revealing of assumptions.

Reviewing the whole and the parts in a phenomenological study refers to looking at how each segment of the study brings to light and clarity what is intended to be shown. In this study, I look at each section to make it part of a whole that ultimately will express a possible meaning of the mentee's experience. How is this done? In the next section, I discuss the way in which I conducted this study.

Onto The Journey

To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky. (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 4)

As with all research projects, a plan is needed to show how the unfolding of the study will be done accomplished. While maintaining what phenomenology demands from the researcher "a single thought that remains steady," there is flexibility in the development of a study because the more that is learned, the more likely it is possible for the plan to change. The research plan bends with our discoveries and unforeseen findings, which in phenomenology is presented in a textual form as a descriptive interpretation of the meaning of an experience. In the following sections, I explain some of the components and guidelines for proceeding in this research project and how I apply the phenomenological principles to the study of the mentee's experience.

The Participants And Their Selection

The nine students invited to participate in this research project came from the *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program, and belong to two cohorts, academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. The reason for this was to have a wider scope in hopes that the current and former mentees might help each other remember and reflect upon what it means to be peer mentored. Although it was intended to have a balance number of male and female participants because there is some research that suggests that gender affects a mentoring

relationship (Murrell, Crosby, & Ely, 1998), this was not possible. Only two male mentees answered the call to become part of this study. Nevertheless, they contributed to a wider and richer description of the experience of being a mentee for male and female mentees.

The limited number of participants allowed for more in-depth conversations. Phenomenology looks for the uniqueness of the human experience, and not the generalization across groups. Nonetheless, there is no lack of meaning found in the small number of participants, but richness in the depth and the insights gained, although there is something universal in the experience of each human being.

Students of *La Familia*, who mentor or who become mentees, are volunteers. Thus, in the same spirit of voluntarism, students were invited to participate as volunteers. Moreover, the only requirement to participate in a phenomenological study, as Moustakas (1994) explains, was that the participants need to have experienced the phenomenon that is studied. All the participants came from the same cohort, except one.

The Invitation

The names of the students were obtained from the data base that belonged to the academic affairs office that housed *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program, which I had access as a member of the advisory board of the group, and with the permission of the coordinators of the program I accessed their names and contact information. Students who participated in *La Familia* as mentees were invited to join this study by an email letter (see Appendix A), and then a phone call served as a follow up (see Appendix B). The students who selected received a letter of acceptance (see Appendix C). Although

no one who responded to the letter of invitation was denied participation, there was a letter of rejection (see Appendix C).

The students selected are called participants, because they co-participated with me as the researcher, through conversations, in the discovery of what it meant to be peer mentored, and thus how they became a mentee. The participants signed a Consent Form (see Appendix D) before they began the conversations with me. This occurred after receiving approval from the Office of Institutional Review.

Privacy

The privacy of the participants was paramount. The conversations took place in a private room. The transcripts and audio files were kept in a private and locked place on campus. Electronic devices (e.g., computer) were kept password protected. Participants were given alias names to protect their identity. Moreover, no information was or will be shared with other members of the *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program or other programs on campus.

The Conversations And The Questions

There were two initial and individual conversations with each participant took place in a private office in the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education (OMSE). The conversations ranged in duration from 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Last, there was a final conversation, where everyone as a group was given the opportunity to share, reflect, and comment on their experiences as mentees and what I uncovered through the process of thematizing.

Some of the questions I used in the conversations to initiate a telling of their experiences were the following:

- Tell me about your peer mentoring experience.
- What was it like to be a peer mentee in *La Familia* for you?
- What are some of the most favorite memories from your time as a mentee?
- What do you remember about the places and times you met with your mentor?
- What does/did it mean for you to be a mentee of a peer Latina/o student?
- What would you tell others about what it is like to be a peer mentee?
- What do you think the race, ethnicity and gender of the mentor has to do with the peer mentoring experience, if anything at all?
- Think about what it was like for when you became a mentee. What stands out for you?
- How would you describe the relationship you have/had with your mentor?
- How did/do you feel when you spend time with your mentor?
- What did/do you think it means to be a peer mentor in a Latina/o mentoring program?
- Do you think that it would have been different for you to be a mentee in a program for all kinds of students?

Transcriptions And Interpretation

All conversations were transcribed manually by me. The purpose of using transcriptions was to have a text upon which to work, as if it were a canvas to identify themes, ideas, and concepts that were key to their experiences as mentees, and that made up what a peer mentoring relationship was like for the Latina/o peer mentee participants.

The interpretation of the conversations was not done through a software program. Phenomenology looks for a more personal and individual approach. The process of interpretation is called thematizing. This method consists of looking at large parts of the transcriptions and journals to generate commonalities. It also looks at sentences and words that may embody the meaning expressed by the participants. It also entails reading line by line or bringing out the meaning of what the participants experienced, in this case what mentees lived when being peer mentored. All this was done to construct a phenomenological text presented here in Chapter Four.

The Phenomenological Text

The themes found in the transcripts were used to construct the textual interpretation of the Latina/o peer mentee experience. It was not the objective of this study to prove whether mentoring helps or not; the focus of this study was to achieve a phenomenological objective that was to show or reveal an experience for what it is. Thus, as shown at the beginning of this chapter, and as van Manen indicates, “The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (1997, p. 36). Phenomenology is highly demanding of the researcher, who needs to create a textual interpretation of what participants lived. Thus, the outcome of the project is a text that can express a possible meaning of an experience. For this study, it was the meaning of what it is like to be a mentee. Therefore, through several drafts the themes are finally coalesced and presented in Chapter Four. This does not assume to be “the last word” of what being a mentee is, but rather how I interpret the experience to the best of my ability as derived through the mentees’ accounts of their lived experience as Latina/o students.

What Is To Come

In this third chapter, I have explained in more detail what hermeneutic phenomenology can do to help uncover the Latina/o peer mentoring experience in higher education, as well as how van Manen’s frame work guides this research project. In the next chapter, I share the three clusters of themes that emerged from the conversations with the former mentees. Then, in Chapter Five, I present the insights gained through this phenomenological study.

Van Manen gives a word of caution when he says:

Phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (1997, p. 9)

So now I go in search of that direct contact.

CHAPTER FOUR: MAKING SENSE OF THE LATINA/O PEER MENTEE EXPERIENCE IN COLLEGE

No matter how provisional our analysis may be, it always requires the assurance that we have started correctly. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 69)

Children's books can have more wisdom than many of the currently called "scientific works." The universality of the wisdom that can be found in their words is timeless. Thus, with a quote from *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*, I begin to open up this chapter, one that I hope lights up a dark corner, until now, of the mentoring garden.

Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop. (Carroll, 1965/1993)

At the beginning of this new journey, Chapter Four, and before presenting the thematic renderings of this study, as a researcher of a human experience, I ponder two questions that have traveled with me, and likely may germinate in the mind of whoever the reader of this study could be. These questions have been taken into account for the interpretation that is to come about a human experience: What are the understandings and insights that this study might present about Latina/o peer mentees? And what format will be most illuminating to present this study about the Latina/o peer mentees in college?

For these questions, some of van Manen's words can assist in the weaving of an explanation, "Human science research is concerned with meaning--to be human is to be concerned with meaning, to desire meaning" (1997, p. 79). But the enterprise of attempting to reveal the meaning of an experience can prove more challenging than anyone may anticipate. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of a concentration camp, expresses very well the challenge of exploring the meaning of a human experience. He had to make sense of what he lived and why he survived while other loved ones, peers, and friends did not.

For the meaning of life differs from [human being] to [human being], from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. (Frankl 1946/1984, pp. 130-131, in brackets added)

As Frankl states, the meaning of something is evasive. Meaning is difficult to grasp because it is related to the four existentials of life. Every experience is trapped in the train of time, when something happens and when the interpretation of the phenomenon is made (temporality). It is also framed by the borders of the context in which it happens (spatiality). And every experience is connected to the relationship a person has with Others (relationality). Finally, every experience is related to the bodily experience a person has with the phenomenon in consort with Others in whom the experience is lived (corporality). Altogether those are the four existentials that enter into how an interpretation is made through phenomenology. However, in *Phenomenology Of Perception* (1945/2004), Merleau-Ponty reminds us that above all, human beings live in a body that feels. He also states that through our bodies, and in our bodies, we live experiences, and we make sense of them. This is why Merleau-Ponty also declares that our bodies can shape how human beings make sense of the world in which they live.

Merleau-Ponty's assertions are especially relevant for this study because it is the investigation of a phenomenon that relates to a physical characteristic, the Latina/o identity. Although a Latina/o or Hispanic identity is an ethnic identity, the assumption is that those who look *mestizos* (e.g., black hair and have Native American features) are Latinas/os; while those people who do not have this physiognomy are not considered Latina/o. But the attribution of this identity is not free from value; it is value-laden, as the attribution of a Latina/o identity usually implies the classification as a minority, someone

considered less than others in a racialized context. This is further discussed later in this chapter.

This study is framed in the phenomenological tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology. In a metaphorical way, this methodology could be considered a window used to look into a possible interpretation, as if it were a room in a house. This study continues to use the metaphor introduced in Chapter Two: describing the peer mentee experience as a “taming.” The meaning that is given to this expression is the same as found in the story of the Little Prince. However, a new phenomenological concept is introduced to interpret the peer mentee experience of Latina/o students in college. This concept is taken from phenomenological philosophy, and is drawn from Heidegger: the concept of “encountering.”

Given that mentors and mentees tend to have a common historical or social background, the connection that tends to result from their “encountering” of each other leads them to build rapport, and a form of communication that is mutually comprehensible to each other. Also, this chapter makes use of three phenomenological concepts to frame and illustrate the peer mentee experience: *Being-with*, *Being-in*, and *Being-for*. These concepts are inspired by Moustakas’ book (1994) of the same title. This chapter will weave together the themes of the mentee experience in relation to these philosophic ideas. But first, I introduce the participants themselves.

Meet The Participants

The hermeneutic interview tends to turn the interviewees into participants or collaborators of the research project. (van Manen, 1997, p. 63)

For this study nine participants were selected; sometimes I call them conversants, other times mentees or students. All of them were given pseudonyms to protect their

identity. Two of them were male students, and seven of them were female students. Some of them were first year students, and others were transfer students.

It is not common to find more female than males among Latina/o students (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003; Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2009). There are more female Latina students who graduate from college, and more female students tend to have a much higher level of academic success. Also, more female students appear to participate in peer mentoring programs such as *La Familia*. These concerns will be furthered discussed in Chapter Five.

While there were two cohorts that were considered for this study, all the selected students were part of the same cohort of mentees, except for one former mentee. After selecting the participants from one single cohort, this other student was chosen because of the special insights he brought. I was drawn to him because I had listened with attention to his comments for a few months before this study was approved. Also, he was chosen because he is a male student and his experiences added an important dimension to this research project. Also, his participation added a second male participant's voice. His name is **Claudio**, and I begin with him.

Claudio

Claudio is a Latino student, who was adopted a few days after he was born in a South American country. He grew up in a White middle-class household in rural Maryland and had very limited contact with other Latinas/os before college. He never learned to speak Spanish, although he admitted he was able to understand a little bit of spoken Spanish. Claudio confessed that he is frequently identified as a Latino. He explains that this is due to his "features." He has black straight hair, olive skin, black

eyes, and is short. He does not call himself Latino--the chosen name for this study to name the ethnicity of the participants. Claudio prefers the word Hispanic.

Claudio acknowledged in our conversations to have never seen himself in “those terms,” as a Latino that is, before coming to college. But his personal experiences were what made him an interesting participant for this study. This refers to his re-encountering his Latino background, through peer mentoring, he became more aware of his ethnicity and how his racial identity developed. His participation, first as a mentee and then as a mentor of *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program, made him a seasoned and knowledgeable supporter of this approach. He had much to say and accumulated a wide perspective of what being mentored is like.

I met Claudio a year before we engaged in conversations. Since then, I paid close attention to him because he was one of the few male participants of the program. Also, his struggle with the acceptance of his ethnic and racial identity appeared most interesting to me. Being a mentee for Claudio proved to be a transformative experience, both academically and racially. It is also safe to say that he developed a higher level of awareness of himself. As a student who joined this group, Claudio was somewhat forced to confront his “Latinidad,” what being a Latina/o is. Claudio learned about his Latino identity not as a bystander, but as someone who belongs to a group made up of and for Latina/o students. He did not reject or resist the encountering of his Latino identity, and as he said, he longed for this “encountering.” Moreover, while not growing up within a Latino culture, his sense of identity as a Latino remained present in his daily life because he was reminded, from time to time, by the people he met randomly, that he “looked”

Latino. The *Dasein* of his being became manifest in his everydayness, borrowing Heidegger's terminology.

Claudio proved to be quite self-critical about his and other people's Latina/o identities. He could see himself as other than himself, and this allowed him to understand what other people see in him as a Latino. This helped him understand why sometimes because of this identity, Latinas/os and non Latinas/os treated him differently. His lack of self-identification as a Latino sometimes was found in some of his comments, but rather than being a limitation, this gave him insights and understanding of two worldviews and sets of values. These perspectives which co-existed in him, proved most useful for this study. Also, as a participant, he pondered deeply the thoughts and ideas that other people have about Latinas/os, including himself, and as a mentee. In our conversations, he communicated well-crafted reflections. His thoughts were helpful in explaining the feelings and meaning of the experiences that many other Latina/o students go through. While other participants could not or would not explain the feelings that they had, Claudio found words to express all the feelings he had and the feelings other students had to express what it was like to be an ethnic and racial minority, and how this identity manifested in the mentoring relationship. This characteristic helped greatly in this study for the construction of the interpretation of the mentee experience.

Gabriela

Gabriela is a transfer student, a junior, and a first generation immigrant to the U.S.A. She was also the very first one in her family to attend college, and she excelled academically in all her classes. The semester before our conversations she obtained As in all her courses. This was a piece of news that placed her as a role model among all her

peers in the program. Nevertheless, our conversations revealed a less optimistic side of her life.

Gabriela struggled to reach a balance between school and family. She juggled several demands imposed upon her at home, school, and work. Most often her multiple identities conflicted with her educational progress (e.g., gender, race, and socioeconomic status). Coming from a difficult economic background, she had to hold on to two part-time jobs. As the only other woman in the household, besides her mother, she was forced to assume duties usually associated with a mother's role as soon as she arrived at home. This experience was common among all female participants, but somehow, she was the participant who expressed most extensively the meaning of the tension and stress that is produced by combining college, family, and work for Latina/o students. She also explained at great length how peer mentoring helped her to handle such conditions.

Also, the most interesting aspect of this participant was her interest in the program and her desire to become a leader of this group. This was evident through her responses, and her interest in applying to be a coordinator of the program next year. She thought deeply upon about the meaning of the peer mentoring experience and delved into the role of how mentees helped to make the peer mentoring relationship successful. This was motivated by her participation in this research project, and her goal to become the future leader of the group.

Because she hoped to become the next group leader of *La Familia*, she gave much thought to the mentee experience. Her comments and enthusiasm were strong as well as her conviction about the power of peer mentoring to help Latina/o students. She reflected on all the possible benefits of this practice for Latina/o students, and how the benefits of

peer mentoring came about. Her support for peer mentoring was contagious among her Latina/o student peers. However, it is not only her enthusiasm that made her an interesting participant, she was highly articulate. This helped to provide a deeper understanding of what being peer mentored is like for a Latina/o student, especially when a Latina/o peer is the person who acts as a mentor and helps another Latina/o student.

Gabriela's mentor was someone she knew before she joined *La Familia*. Once this person became her mentor, she had to think about how the new role of her friend was going to change their relationship. Having a friend as a mentor was a role that, as she said, was different from being a friend. Through this realization about the new role of her friend, Gabriela also thought extensively about the peer mentoring experience for her.

Jimena

Jimena is a vivacious and outgoing student. Her interest in peer mentoring was evident as her comments were rich with details. She had an honest desire to capture the meaning of the mentee experience. She majored in social sciences and this background made her personable and approachable. She was used to talking and analyzing behaviors and social conditions.

I met Jimena a few months before I invited her to join this research group. As with all the participants of this study, she supported and advocated for peer mentoring in meetings and student gatherings across campus. And because she had a good experience in peer mentoring, she wants other Latina/o students to be reached by this peer mentoring program.

Julia

Julia is a first year student who struggled to find support on campus. She appeared initially shy and pondered for a long time about her answers, but this did not weaken confidence in her experiences. She joined the program after she attended a student event where she met some members of *La Familia*. Since then, she is a regular in the study sessions of the group and expressed her interest in other students having such a good experience. There is something special and quiet about her.

Julia revealed in our conversations how important it was for mentees to be comfortable. She came from a family who struggled to support her attendance in college. Financial and other social problems affected her. Additional challenges, such as cultural clashes occurred for her among college requirements, family culture, and ethnic values, as was the case with all the participants of this study. Also, Julia shared that her primary language was English, both in school and at home. This was unusual, since only three of the participants spoke only English at home.

As the conversations progressed on with her, the shy and quiet person became a talkative and outgoing narrator. Julia showed me that something happens to some Latina/o students. Many Latina/o students like her go from being outgoing before they arrive at college, and then become appear quiet and silent. While this is not the type of person who they want to be, some of them stay in this mood, due to loneliness and prejudice. Julia's words expressed how this transition in personality affects many Latina/o students, what some scholars have named or identify as "disaffected youth" (Colley, 2003).

Karina

Karina is an active mentee of *La Familia*. She attended many group programs and study sessions that took place once every other week. She was highly articulate about her experiences as a mentee. I heard about her through the presentations that mentors and mentees gave when recruiting future mentors and mentees. Examples like her were used to keep the program alive and helped in recruiting the future generation of students as mentors and mentees.

Her enthusiasm and level of energy were exuberant. However, she talked extensively during our conversations about her frustrations, and her need to see new faces. She confessed how she struggled to find Latina/o peers at the University of Maryland, but *La Familia* helped her overcome this challenge because she felt connected to other Latinas/os. She was part of a transitional program for students who are accepted on conditional bases. Most importantly, Karina revealed how stress, anxiety, and frustration affect Latina/o students like her. Her experiences as a mentee were complex, but rich in descriptions.

There were many moments when Karina was quite silent. During those silent moments, she pondered her responses and the nature of the meaning of the mentee experience for her and others. She was committed to peer mentoring and her role as a mentee. The enthusiasm she expressed revealed how much she liked the process of being peer mentored and her understanding of the relationship with her peer mentor.

As a mentee, she was critically adamant of the need for peer mentoring of Latina/o students. She expressed that having opportunities to relax, having a fun relationship, releasing stress, and joking with someone eased her anxiety as a Latina

college student. This is where Karina saw the most value of peer mentoring, as an outlet or a cathartic experience within a relationship to feel comfortable with oneself.

Natalia

Natalia is a mentee who showed an interest in the project from early on. She thought about her experiences deeply for almost two semesters. Before I began selecting participants for this study, she already expressed interest in being included. Her mentor, like her, had Christian values and principles, although they belonged to different religions. Although gender is usually associated with the mentoring relationship, Natalia explained that for peer mentoring, as it was for all participants, gender did not matter. Rather, as Natalia and the other participants of this study said, it was age that is a more salient characteristic within the peer mentoring relationship. Closeness in age brought mentor and mentee closer together, as she explained extensively to me.

She had many stories to exemplify her mentee experience and what that meant to her. Also, Natalia expressed views about the role of peer mentoring to help her as a transfer student. She is rather academically oriented as was the case of all the other participants. Moreover, she had a strong sense of family, race, gender roles, and the Latina/o students' struggles between family and school.

Natalia did not shy away from the polemic topics of race, racism, and discrimination, aspects that all the participants referred to implicitly or explicitly. But it was Natalia who named it and dared to show it in her own words. Although all the participants expressed concerns regarding discrimination, she was defiant. She contrasted her experiences with student members of other racial and ethnic groups. As a female

student who had a male peer mentor, despite this gender difference, she could explain how she developed a peer mentoring relationship successfully.

Renato

Renato is the older brother of a Latino teenage high school student, who might apply to college soon. This position within his family structure turned him into a role model. However, this is also what Renato looked for, as all the mentees did, a role model who is also a successful Latina/o.

The values his family had instilled in him through formal and informal education are pivotal in the interpretation of his peer mentee experience. He is the only other Latino male of this study. As many of the few minority males in higher education, he pondered the meaning of his college experience. He talked about the challenges he faced such as isolation, and lack of parents' capacity to help him, although they support him in seeking a college degree. Despite the fact that he is a male, he accepts the help that a female mentor offers. He is not someone, who despite growing up in a chauvinist society, appears to hold values of machismo.

He admitted to be of humble origins and was willing accept advice from anyone. He stated that he looked for help wherever he could find it to overcome poverty and obtain a professional job. The goal for him and his family was to pursue a college education. He described the role of peer mentoring and the value of this practice for success in college, and to eventually graduate. He talked at length of why he joined *La Familia*, and what he needed from this program to succeed in college.

During all the conversations we had (both recorded and non-recorded), he expressed his interest in becoming a mentor. Because of this interest, he paid special

attention to the meaning of being a mentee and what a successful peer mentoring experience was like for Latina/o students. Moreover, throughout the entire year prior to this study that I observed this mentee, he proved reliable and loyal to the program beyond the call of duty. He attended most events from *La Familia*, and distinguished himself among his peer mentees for his interest and enthusiasm to gain as much from the peer mentoring group that he could. He was a very articulate advocate of peer mentoring and the *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program. These additional characteristics made the conversations with him rich in information, and they were very thought provoking.

The two conversations we had were the longest conversations of all. They were rich in information, anecdotes, and full of details about his thoughts and feelings. Even more, he came back twice to narrate a couple of stories that he remembered to make sure I had them written down or recorded. These stories helped to explain his experience more fully as a mentee, and what being peer mentored meant for him as a Latino student. Furthermore, as a male student, he gave insights into what some of the challenges are for Latino male students in pursuit of higher education. He also talked about what a peer mentoring program can do to help other Latina/o students to succeed in college.

Valentina

Valentina is full of energy and is affectionate and caring. No wonder she wants to be a mentor next year. As all mentees who have a good peer mentoring experience, she is an advocate of this approach for other Latina/o students. She did not limit her participation to our conversations. Once we met at a student event at the end of the year, and she asked me a revealing question, “How is your dissertation going?” and then she

added, “We need this study out. I am sure it will be wonderful. Let me know if you need something else from me.”

Valentina is a first year student who had to attend a special academic program for students on conditional acceptance to the university. This program required students to be one or two semesters taking a set of classes to prepare them for college and to improve their grades. She discussed how challenging it had been for her to go through a process of probation one more time. It was not enough to have a great interest in pursuing a college education; her grades, while good were not good enough to be accepted as a freshman on her first try. Through this required program, where she took some special classes, she was eventually accepted into the University of Maryland. Valentina was interested in ensuring that I captured the meaning of her experiences, and sought clarification of that understanding.

Viviana

Viviana is a first year student, and a member of several clubs and organizations. She was the only participant of the study who lived on campus, which is not typical for most Latina/o students. Many participants said that living on campus is too expensive for them and they are not allowed by their families to leave the household. However, while Viviana could afford to live on campus, she went home every weekend. She got laundry done by her mother, spent some time with her brother, and saw her father at night. Viviana shared that while some students may live on the college campus, as Latina/o students, they feel separated from Others, by being a minority. She also talked about being paired up with the only other non-White student on her floor. She struggled with

being understood. Her experience was the experience of being in college, but not feeling that she belonged there.

She needed, as she mentioned, to “go home” every week end, and she joined *La Familia* so she could be with other Latina/o students like her during the week, when on campus. Academically, she appeared very driven, and admitted that no matter what, she would do well in college. Her major was architecture, and she spent much of her time doing homework and studying while on campus.

All the participants lived in Maryland, and all of them except one lived with their parents and siblings at home. All the members of *La Familia* who were selected for this study were highly academically oriented. They all expressed a very strong drive to do well in college. While it is common for Latina/o students to seek help, their interest in joining Latina/o groups and Latina/o organizations was predominant. *La Familia* served to connect them with other Latina/o students, which all the participants shared as a common interest. From this introduction of the participants, I now move to the thematic rendering of their experiences as Latina/o mentees. The themes are anchored by the philosophic idea of encountering.

Towards The Encountering Of The Self

Tell me, Muse, of that man, so ready at need, who wandered far and wide, after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy, and many were the men whose towns he saw and whose mind he learnt, yea, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the deep, striving to win his own life and the return to his company. [He] escaped both war and sea... craving for his wife and for his homeward path... But when now the year had come in the courses of the seasons, wherein the gods had ordained that he should return home...not even there was he quit of labors, not even among his own; but all the gods had pity on him save Poseidon. (Homer)

This is how Homer begins *The Odyssey*. This story narrates the journey of a Greek hero so famous that his stories are still remembered today. *The Odyssey* is an epic

novel that tells the multiple adventures and misfortunes of various characters; however, it focuses on the protagonist Odysseus and his journey back home, the kingdom of Ithaca.

This journey had opposition and adventure until the end. The obstacles Odysseus faced were embodied in the unrelenting fury of Poseidon. Nonetheless, this saga has a contemporary moral for our present day. It exemplifies that there may be no travel that does not encounter detours, delays, and challenges. This is the case, even when all “the gods show pity” on us as Homer declares. Similarly, while we may not be the victims of Poseidon, we can experience various types of challenges that can delay our journey in life. Fortunately, if we are lucky we will incur the guidance and advice of Others, more experienced people that we may come across, so we can still succeed despite the odds against us.

In *The Odyssey* we learn how Odysseus received guidance from the goddess Athena. She is the one who helped him go back to his home, Ithaca. Also, Odysseus’ son, Telemachus, received timely advice from Athena, who often appeared personified in the figure of the trusted friend Mentor to deliver her messages of guidance (see Roberts, 1998). The stories of these two characters show that no one is utterly alone in the world, and no matter how lonely one may feel, everyone can move ahead thanks to the advice and help given by Others. Both characters show that their journey is a return back home, both a physical home as well as a home of the soul and character, the Self.

Despite the gap in time between the stories found in *The Odyssey* and Latina/o peer mentees, there is much they have in common. Latina/o students who become mentees also go through a saga of stories, before they complete the first year college experience. As it is for many college students, Latina/o students go through a time of trial

and error. Also, in spite of many odds against them, as individuals without college tradition and other personal characteristics, Latina/o students work hard with the help of peer mentors and often overcome their challenges. This chapter describes how the experience of being peer mentored results in good feelings about the experience when it results in something good for Latina/o students.

Interpreting Life As A Journey

Life is a journey, and so it seems to be in the act of being peer mentored. This act is always a type of journey done with-Others. In *Finding One's Ways: How Mentoring Can Lead To Dynamic Leadership*, Crow and Matthews (1998) write:

The journey is a common metaphor, perhaps the most common, to represent our heroic and not so heroic life passages. The journey appeals to us because it helps us make sense of our past, present, and future as well as the process of learning how to live, work, and play. Although often depicted as lonely passages through difficult circumstances, journeys are also made with others. (p. 1)

In this line of thinking, because the perception of reality is always constructed and reconstructed based on the references we use to think about it (see Crotty, 1998), the journey of life may be interpreted as something that occurs when for instance Latina/o students act as mentees of student peers, all members of the same ethnic, and at times, also racial group. This journeying as mentees can lead towards the encountering of their Self. This seems to happen when mentees have a “good” peer mentoring experience.

The verb “To Journey,” interpreted in this way, is more than to move from one place to another, the most often definition found in a dictionary (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 774). To Journey can also be explained as the process of change. In *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Self*, Parker (2004) writes, “Our solitary journey toward rejoining soul and role requires relationships, a rare but real form of community that I call

a ‘circle of trust’” (p. 11). At times, it can also be the path or way one takes to go back “home,” which for a Latina/o mentee can be the return to their Self, as it is explained in this chapter.

The mentee experience appears to be part of a larger journey for Latina/o students. However, as any journey, the journey of the Latina/o students who become mentees also has a destination. This is possible, even when its destination is a return back home or to the point of departure, which in psychology could be identified as the Self of an individual (see Cassidy, 1997). What this study unveils is that the final destination of being peer mentored appears to be the encountering of the Self, the finding of the person mentees think they are or who they can be, but which at times, they seem to lose sight of through their college experience. This can be due to discrimination and prejudice placed upon them due to their Latina/o identification. The following sections head toward that destination, the Self of the mentee as a Latina/o student.

Phenomenology presents its findings as interpretations (van Manen, 1997). The interpretation of the mentee experience is presented as the act of being-with an-Other, then as being-in a place, and finding as finding purpose which is interpreted as being-for. This is inspired by Moustakas’s book (1995) of the same name. These concepts interpreted through a phenomenological lens will serve to explain the peer mentee experience of Latina/o students. Moreover, the purpose of this organization is to create a phenomenological text as van Manen suggests it should be:

When a text is successful, and when the reader is open to it, then the text may have an effect that is almost inexplicable. The words literally take the reader or listener into a wondrous landscape, evoking a feeling of disorientation, causing confusion that tends to accompany the experience of strangeness, of being struck with wonder. This effect of the text is contingent not only on the text itself; it may

also be contingent on the reader, the mood, or the context within which it is encountered. (1997, p. 4)

This quote also evokes the notion that the possible end of an experience is an encountering. One can look at the journey of the peer mentee as part of a learning experience during college. Latina/o students encounter their Self through the peer mentee experience with Other Latina/o students, because this is what they seem to lose in a large public university, their identity and the interpretation they make about their Self, rather than the one that is made by those who are non-Latinas/os. And while this seems to be the final stop of the Latina/o students who became a mentee, the encountering of their Self, Latina/o students do continue their journey of growth and development after their mentee experience. This seems clear, considering that the peer mentee experience within the *La Familia* program was meant to be only a year long process. Thus, it needs to be acknowledged that being a mentee is a journey that seems to be inserted within a larger journey that is life and living.

Exploring And Interpreting The Mentee Experience

The interpretation of living life, through phenomenology, is not limited to showing where something is or giving it a name. Phenomenology problematizes living beyond its showing, when it is also engaged with hermeneutics. In *The Foundations Of Social Research: Meaning And Perspective In The Research Process*, Crotty (2005) explains that “In the constructionist view, as the word suggests, meaning is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it” (p. 42). Most scholars tend to name an experience as mentoring when they come across a relationship where someone helps another one. There seems to be some abuse of the word mentoring. Most people use the word mentoring for

all types of relationships, where someone helps a younger person. The use of the word mentoring to identify so many experiences appears to have diluted and confused the meaning of what mentoring is and how it happens. This is common when words are overly used; they tend to lose their power and their meaning ends up being washed out.

Although each mentee was somewhat similar to each other, at the same time each mentee was different. Sameness and difference embraced each other and helped in the formation of threads of meaning. Moreover, while all mentees agreed on mentoring being an experience that helped them, they also initially struggled to describe their experience. Also, mentees agreed on their identity as Latina/o to be the bond that tied them together as a group and with their mentors.

The mentees felt they bonded with their mentors, the program, and their fellow Latina/o students, but at the same time, they felt free and not tied up. Human experiences are more complex than words can often name, and they can be more multilayered than we would like to admit (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology can help untie and clear up the meaning of an experience, as Becker (1992) explains, “Phenomenological research usefulness lies in providing an understanding of phenomena as they are lived by the people in the everyday world” (p. 47).

As Crotty also explains, in the text aforementioned referring to Merleau-Ponty, the world and objects are “pregnant” with meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them (p. 43). Also, the interpretation of meaning is also created as the researcher engages in the world in which he or she lives. Thus, the concept of Self needs to be clarified before leading to the encountering described. This is done as the Latina/o participants describe their peer mentee experience.

The word Self comes from the Latin root *suus* which meant one's own. Self is defined as the identity, character, or essential qualities of a person or thing (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1217). The concept of the Self could be interpreted as the personal view of who a person thinks he or she is. However, before arriving at this final destination, the encountering of the Self, there is much that needs to be said, various aspect of the mentee experience need to be described, and some notions need to be questioned. This is necessary because before one accepts the goodness of mentoring, one needs to understand what the help given through mentoring is. As this study reveals the help that mentoring through peers gives also aims at no other target than to help mentees be who they want to be or want to become, thus their Self.

Also, as stated before, one has the ethical responsibility to learn about the process that leads to self acceptance, to be the person one thinks one is. Caring for the Other, Levinas states, is thinking of the Other as one-self, a self as one wants to be. In *The Courage To Be*, Tillich (2000) states that "The courage to be is the courage to accept oneself in spite of being unacceptable" (p. 164). The acceptance that Latina/o students come to achieve occurs through to being mentored. This will be shown in this chapter in contrast with Others, other Latina/o peers who are not peer mentored. Nonetheless, before moving to the end of this study, the encountering of the Self that Latina/o students experience as mentees, we need to start at the beginning.

Beginning The Exploration

The beginning of this journey initiates with the words of a mentee. And as if we were in a train station, one of the mentees is selected to makes the final call before

departure. When Jessica was asked, how she would describe her mentee experience she said:

To be a mentee is like kind of to have ... support. When you come here [the university] as a freshman you really don't know where to get help or like... the campus is so big... so it's kind of hard to find out on your own... so being a mentee you just kind of feel that you have that support and someone you can ask to for help... "Where can I get for this?" It's kind of how I found out about tutoring from OMSE... because they [mentors] told me about that. I didn't really know... honestly... the campus is so big, I didn't really know where things were... so it just like...yeah, it's a good thing... it's a good program. (Jessica)

This quotation has inspired and called me to go back to the mentee's experiences over and over again. This citation has been an invitation for me to dig up the meaning of it with the purpose of finding the meanings these words capture. These words seem to be pregnant with meaning, referring to Merleau-Ponty's metaphor as quoted previously by Crotty.

In this quote from Jessica, I found how the four existentials of phenomenology (spatiality, temporality, corporeality, and communality) are manifested in the mentee experience. In this quotation, I hear the echo of so many memories the participants shared with me. But through this quote, I choose to begin the journey of unfolding the multiple themes that make up the Latina/o peer mentee experience. They were reveled to me in the conversations I had with the mentees digging for the essences of the Latina/o peer mentee.

The experience of Latina/o students as mentees that leads to the finding of their Self, the inner person we think we are, has its origin outside them. The experiences they live, as we all live in the world, occur outside their bodies, although all students as all mentees are in a body. As it also happens to be they are always in the company of Others.

This is how their mentee experiences acquire meaning, as they later reflect upon their experiences. As Heidegger explains:

The proof for the 'Dasein of Things outside me' is supported by the fact that both change and performance belong, with equal primordality, to the essence of time. My own Being-present-at-hand--that is, the Being-present-at-hand of a multiplicity of representations, which has been given in the inner sense--is a process of change which is present-at-hand. To have a determinate temporal character [Zeitbestimmtheit], however, presupposes something present-at-hand which is permanent. But this cannot be 'in us', 'for only through what is thus permanent can my Dasein in time be determined' (1927/2004, pp. 247-248)

Later Heidegger adds,

Thus if changes which are present-at-hand have been posited empirically 'in me', it is necessary that along with these something permanent which is present-at-hand should be posited empirically 'outside of me'... The experience of the Being-in-time of representations posits something changing 'in me' and something permanent 'outside of me', and it posits both with equal primordality. (p. 248)

Looking Up For the Goodness Of Peer Mentoring

The verb "to look up" means to search for something, especially a piece of work that is written or something that is present in front of us (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 797). Much has been written about mentoring. Now, having completed the conversations with the mentees, I look up to what is in front of me. The good name of mentoring is present once more through the words and stories the mentees shared with me. This is also a challenge. Now, I have to embark in the exploration of what is present, but also in what is somewhat hidden. I need to look up behind the words, behind the comments, and inside the stories for the meaning of the mentee experience.

The overall experience of all mentees who participated in this study was described as "good." All the participants agreed on *La Familia* as being "a good program." Nonetheless, the concern that has stayed in my mind is what made their mentee

experience “a good experience.” Good is an adjective, and as such it modifies something, usually a noun, but in this case it describes an experience.

What is good for mentees? What is good for Latina/o students during their first year in college? What is there in peer mentoring that helps Latina/o students as mentees? What can be so “good” for Latina/o peer mentees?

The adjective “good” transforms an experience into something that may be desirable, and it invites it to be emulated. To say that something is good is also to contrast it to something that is bad implicitly or explicitly. Latina/o students appeared to search for the goodness found in mentoring, maybe because they had lived bad experiences and those experiences motivated them to look for an experience that can be “good.” Nonetheless, the goodness of mentoring had appeared difficult to reveal since the beginning of this study and in the literature as shown from Chapters One and Two. Thus, it is the revelation of what is “good” in mentoring, and in particular what makes a peer mentee experience “good” that this chapter will intend to clarify.

The title of this chapter says that the purpose of it is to make sense of an experience, the Latina/o peer mentee experience. The sense of an experience is the clarification of what an experience is, and how an experience is understood by those who live it. Heidegger inspires this idea because in his philosophy he invites us to look at the essence of things, that is, to return to see what makes things be what they are. It is in the essences of things, that he calls the Being of things, how one can truly understand how something is.

In the same line of thinking, this study looks at the aspect of the mentee experience that makes a mentee be a mentee. Rather than aiming at finding or identifying

the possible benefits that mentoring can have, and the results that a peer mentoring experience can have for a mentee, the essence of the mentoring experience seems to lie right at the core of the mentoring efforts and that is more than the mere outcome of mentoring. In this study, I identify this objective as the Self of the mentee. The Self of a person is not the gains, not the profit, not the various forms of mentoring, but the essence of what makes a student become a mentee, or the self of the mentee

From The Goodness Of Mentoring To The Self Of The Mentee

Similarly as it happened with Eduardo and Lauren in the preliminary conversations to this study, all the participants of this study identified their experience as “good.” They volunteered to talk about what it was to be mentored for them. However, now prepared with the tools phenomenology gives me, I was ready to look behind the words mentees said to me, beneath the blanket of goodness that wraps around mentoring, and to see beyond the goodness that mentoring uses to shelter its continued practice, as mentoring scholars such Colley (2003) suggests. Miller (2002) also suggest further analysis of mentoring, despite he who describes the practice of mentoring as an international phenomenon, and as a phenomenon that has charmed both those who are privileged, as well as those who appear to be in great need of help .

At the beginning of one of the conversations with one of the mentees, when I asked Karina, “What is it like to be a mentee as a Latina student,” she pondered for a second that seemed to be a long time. As her face showed a sign of struggle trying to find the “right” words, she said, “It is something you just live.” What is to live something? What is there in an experience that can be said “just lived”?

These words continued to echo in my head. This was not an evasive answer; it was the most honest answer she could give me. It was the answer that reflected how she has understood mentoring since being a member of this peer mentoring program. Heidegger (1927/2004) explains that what is most evident can also be most evasive as the essence or nature of things.

A lived experience, contrary to a perception, is an experience that is given meaning. It is an experience that may transform an individual. A lived experience is something that goes beyond a mere moment that is forgotten (see van Manen, 1997). Perhaps, this is the way of thinking of most former mentees. If this is true, it might be one of the challenges that may have prevented Latina/o students to see the need to make deeper sense. Perhaps, this is why Latina/o students struggle in college, and consequently why they appeared to be in need of peer mentoring. If this is true, it could also explain why many former mentees struggle to explain what being mentored is like for them. This seemed to be the case of Eduardo and Lauren, and perhaps why other previous mentoring scholars have also struggled to reveal this aspect of mentoring.

Why is it so difficult to tell about being mentored? What is there in the mentoring experience that makes it easier to say how good it is, rather than, be explicit about what makes it a good experience? Can there be more in an experience than words can tell?

Gadamer says that being is language, so if this is true, there should be a way to describe, with words, how mentoring happens. Behind the goodness of mentoring, beyond the appearance where mentees seem to be more engaged in living the mentoring experience rather than in thinking or reflecting upon what they live, I had to cut through this veil and look at the experience in its purest form. Perhaps, the description of

mentoring is or the reasons why they needed mentoring were secondary to the actual living of the mentee experience. However, once the experience was completed, many former mentees say that mentoring was good. Colley identifies this characteristic of mentoring as “the feel good factor of mentoring” (2003, p. 13).

Despite the common agreement and my own recognition of mentoring as good, the goodness about mentoring appears to avoid a simple explanation. Somehow, what makes mentoring “good” seems to hide behind the words mentees are able to articulate about their experience. Above all, it seems that the goodness about which mentoring refers stands behind the common words used to describe mentoring, such as the word “good.”

The adjective “good” appears to print upon the mentee experience and its practice a seal of approval, but giving it a fast approval, the comprehension and understanding of the multiple layers that shape the mentee experience as “good” can be lost or taken for granted, without really knowing how it comes to be that way (Colley, 2003). That is an error; given that not all mentees can be guaranteed to have a “good” peer mentee experience. This can be either because not all mentees receive the benefits promised through mentoring or because their mentoring relationship may not always work with their mentor (see Scandura, 1998 Hamilton & Scandura, 2003).

Being-With As The Way To Find The Self With-In Others

Being alone is a deficit mode of Being-with. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 157)

Heidegger asserts that *Dasein* or being-in-the-world is always being-with-Others. Thus, following Heidegger’s line of thinking, it can be said that living is the experience of being-with-Others. Furthermore, in the constructivist paradigm, not only do we live

experiences with-Others, we also make sense of or find meaning in the experiences we live with Others (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 2005). Nevertheless, while we are always with people, there are periods of our life when it is not possible to have the people we want to be with us, so we may find ourselves in solitude. And even when we may be surrounded by people, we can still feel utterly alone (Moustakas, 1989).

Despite our best efforts and strongest desires, the company of the people we want in our lives (e.g., friends and family) is not always possible during times of change. Times of transition can involve social, personal, and cultural encounters and disencounters. This can also involve facing disagreement of opinions, and opposite worldviews and perspectives. This is likely to happen at the beginning of college, and maybe this is one of the reasons why Latina/o students join peer mentoring programs as mentees. They may do this as a way to connect with Others to recreate the social connections they do not have in college (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Moustakas, 1974). This is the point of departure in this journey that goes toward the promise of the encounter of the Self, as Latina/o students begin college and become mentees.

The first leg of this journey is made up of four themes that compromise the philosophical notion of *being-with* for me. First, I discuss how being a mentee is a form of receiving “companionship” from a peer. Loneliness is the most corrosive feeling Latina/o students seem to live. It is both alienating, and at times even paralyzing. However, as mentees, Latina/o students appear to be able to overcome such an overwhelming feeling. Second, I discuss how mentees see their “mentors as role models” who they want to emulate. Third, I explain how the commonality of background experiences, what I called “being alike,” appear to help mentees to trust and accept the

guidance that mentors give them. Fourth and last, the companionship mentees receive and accept appears to work for them due to their “racial connection with their mentors.” One of the revelations of this study is that race still matters in this society, and matters most to members of a group considered a racial minority group, such as Latina/o students. Some Latinas/os are considered people of color, but not all Latinas/os are, because some Latinas/os are Caucasian or look Caucasian, and their experience may be somewhat different from those who are seen as people of color (see Tatum, 2003; West, 2001).

The college experience of Latina/o students belongs by their asking and looking for help, and they come to be successful when as mentees they had the company of someone, a mentor who could help them. Thus, the first cluster of themes is bound by the concept of being-with, meaning in the company of an-Other who cared for them, but also, in the company of Others who made the mentees feel part of a community, the Latina/o student community.

It Feels Lonely Here

At the core of the Latina/o student college experience loneliness stands out as a prevailing feeling, the driving force to look for help, and above all, the reason that pushed students to look for peers. Claudio describes his mentee experience in *La Familia* with these words:

I guess, I could say that *La Familia* is there for you. It helps you... to rid of that fear of having to face things alone. (Claudio)

Feeling lonely appears as central to the Latina/o experience of all the participants. Being a mentee, as Claudio explains, is the opportunity to feel the company that someone can give, especially someone like them. Being a mentee can help them rid the fear they have

of being alone and the only one of their kind in classrooms, hallways, majors, and overall, one of the few who attend college. Claudio also says:

Because doing it [college] alone is different, very different, I know that for a fact. But in what way, “that,” I can’t describe it that well. But I do feel like when I am with... for example... when I am with *La Familia* room, and you know, just knowing that and seeing the motivation that these Hispanics have for success, you know, it rubs off on me, and it helps me keep my morale or I guess, or you know, [my] motivation for success as well. (Claudio)

What stands behind Latina/o students feeling lonely in college? How can Latina/o students feel alone in a place that has so many peers of their age, with similar interests, and who also are pursuing the same goal of a college education? What is in the college experience that makes some students feel alone while being surrounded by other students apparently like them?

The conversations with the participants reveal that Latina/o students find the companionship they miss during their first year in college in the help and company of a peer who acts as a mentor to them. Being-with peers, mentees become part of a group. When they enroll in programs as *La Familia*, they are part of a mentoring program for students like them, Latina/o; and when they are with their peers in the role of mentees, the enthusiasm and achievement upper class students have “rubs off on them,” as Claudio says. This appears important, the opportunity of being-with Others like them.

It is a mistake to think that all students are alike because they may appear to be alike or are classified under one name. One of the biggest myths about Latinas/os is to think of them as a monolithic group. As Gracia (2001) explains in relation to the grouping of people under one term, is that the “identification... and naming always involve emphasis on similarities and neglect of differences” (p. 25). They come in all possible colors, shapes, and mixes, and from over twenty two different nations, having

different histories, laws, and forms of arrival in the US at different historical moments ending up settling in different regions. Nonetheless, as Trueba (1999) confirms, once in the US, most often the Latina/o experience is one as a recent immigrant, and a person who is somewhat forced to be grouped in one category. However, despite their differences, as Trueba suggests, they often go from a “cultural diversity to a culture of solidarity.”

Despite the solidarity and unification that seems to sink in to the consciousness of people originating in Latin-America, at the core of their daily experience there is loneliness. As Moustakas explains, “Man is ultimately and forever lonely whether his loneliness is the exquisite pain of the individual living in isolation or illness, the sense of absence caused by a loved one’s death, or the piercing joy experienced in triumphant creation” (1961, p. xi). Also, existential philosophy states that we are utterly alone in life (Frankl, 1946/1984). However, the source of this solitude and the cause that makes a person becomes aware of their utter loneliness differs from person to person (Frankl, 1946/1984). For some people as Latina/o students, the source of solitude appears to be more specific. As they expressed in the conversations, lacking of peers who are like them appears the social cause that triggers their awareness of existential solitude.

Fighting against the odds. The experience of being the mentee of a peer appears to answer the call for a palliative way to cope with the solitude Latina/o students suffer. This is not something that happens to all students. Only some students can build relationships with peers that can transform into mentoring relationships. There are times when this does not happen. But when it happens, Latina/o students can succeed despite all the odds against them as member of a minority group.

What is there in the peer mentoring experience that helps to attenuate the solitude Latina/o students feel? How does the mentee experience help Latina/o students cope with their sense of solitude and existential loneliness in college? What can the peer mentee experience do for Latina/o students, given that other forms of social interaction in college do not suffice their needs?

There is a constant pressure to do well in college. While most Latina/o students dream of excelling, they have to cope with the multitude of social interactions, such as new classmates, new college peers, new places, and above all, they are in a completely new environment. In this new place, college students have to prove themselves constantly, and this can prove devastating for some students.

College is a place where for Latina/o students the experience of being a student is heightened when they frequently stand out as different. Often, they can be seen or identified in a classroom when there are no other Latina/o students but one, them. This can become overwhelming, and also a source of their feeling of loneliness. This makes the college a place where Latina/o students may be in a place with-out Others like their-self, so they long to be-with someone like them.

I think it is really important... like they... have gone through the same stuff that you are going through or like let's say they... let's say, that they did bad in class... and then... they want to help you... do better than they did... that's what it would be.... I know if I like, if I did better, I'd rather sometimes... I've made mistakes I guess in high school when I tell my sister I tell my sister who is in high school now. Ok you should do this... do this, do this... or you know you want to help the person... do better than you did... and not to like repeat the same mistakes so. (Julia)

Latina/o students are aware they are part of a selected few students who are given the opportunity to attend college. As Gabriela explains:

Because you don't see many Latinas, I just always feel not only that loneliness, but I always feel I have to prove to myself and my background to people. What I mean, I am kind of that representation that those 30 people in my class are going to get of Latinos so I always feel that I have to... I have to... I don't know, I feel I have to be always on my toes. (Gabriela)

What an incredible pressure! All students have family pressure, work pressure, and friends' pressure, but for Latina/o students, as member of a small group in college, where they feel as a "representative," the pressure is magnified. As Gabriela says, sometimes they are the only person of their group that students may ever meet as a Latina/o so they are the point of reference. In a way, it may be like the expression "sink or swim," where swimming would be to succeed as a student, but often many Latina/o students without help, alone, and unable to find peers and a program that supports them, they succumb to their challenges and weakening conditions.

There are many expectations on Latina/o students who are not doing well in college due to circumstances beyond their control. They are not part of the historical culture of higher education in the US, their parents may not have a college education, and they may not speak English very well. Natalia says:

Yeah, because if you are a Latino, and a professional, you really, really stand out because there are not that many of them, but there are lots of White professionals, Caucasians professionals, but not Latino professionals... and sometimes the fact you like... for Latinos you have been able to get your degree, and sometimes we struggle with many more things than people from other races... and the fact that we have been able to overcast those circumstances.... And still graduate... it's kind of like... I feel that you are, you are stronger and better... I mean... problem solver sometimes... sometimes you are able to work with limited resources better... (Natalia)

The odds placed on Latinas/os are not the assumption they will do well. There are so many more Caucasians, as Natalia says that when a Latina/o student succeeds, it appears to be the exception rather than the norm. Those Latina/o students who become

mentees meet upper class students who are succeeding; some of them are soon to graduate. Thus, who mentees see as mentors are students who can show them that they can also succeed, despite the odds. While all racial and ethnic groups may have members who also struggle, Latina/o students see their experience as more extreme and more challenging; perhaps this is due to the loneliness of being one of the few in their classes or maybe the only one (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006).

When I asked the mentees if there was a type of Latina/o student to be a mentee, often they hesitated, but they did not dismiss the question. Those Latina/o students who join mentoring programs appear to do so because despite their struggle and feeling of loneliness, their confidence is augmented when they are in a group with peers like them.

From solitude to companionship. The Latina/o students who participated in this study looked for companionship because of the loneliness they experience, and also due to the discrimination they often feel. Their racial identity or identification seems to bring them together and ease the rapport with one another. Despite that the term Latina/o, or Hispanic for some people like Claudio, is intended to be an ethnic name rather than a racial group, it is used regardless of its intentionality as a racial classification.

The term Latina/o is what I call a racialized term. It is a term that despite being broader than a racial category, it has racial implications. For Latinas/os, the term Latina/o often refers to those who are mestizos, individuals who are mixed Spanish European, Caucasian, and Native American. The term appears to still bond people together and help them to empathize with each as members of a minority group (see Gracia, 2001).

When I asked Renato what the peer mentee experience did for him, he said that thanks to his mentor and *La Familia*, “I began to meet other people, new people--other

fellow Latinos--and after a while, you know, I am not alone here.” The need to meet other students may be a shared concern to all students, but for students who are part of a minority group, as Latina/o students, the challenge to meet other students who are also members of their ethnic or racial group is their scarcity and difficulty to meet in a large campus.

The experiences that all human beings live can be similar in terms of the feelings, needs, and concerns they have. However, it is in the origin or the causes of their concerns where the characteristics that make them different can be found (Fromm, 1994; Rogers, 1961). The nature of what we are or the identities we hold is what makes us be who we are (Robinson- Wood, 2009). In relation to the mentoring experience, Colley (2003) explains and warns:

Typical accounts of mentoring are focused at an individual level, and tend to erase... power relations associated... and other factors that mentoring may play in either reducing or reproducing inequalities.” (p. 2)

The solitude Latina/o experienced and suffered shook them to their core, and because of that they looked for help. Their primary need appears to be their desire to find someone like them to guide them and prove to them they can also succeed, but also they need to know how to succeed as Latina/o students. As Gabriela expresses, even as independent as she was, she realized she could not do well in college without the help of someone:

I was always alone, always very independent... everything I did it on my own, but, so I don't really like help, [but being mentored] getting help from someone was something completely new to me, you know, so coming here and having that good experience was like, this can be very good for people so I had to get used to running to someone for help. That wasn't something that I was used to, but I think being comfortable enough to admit to yourself that you don't, that you actually need help, you definitely need to be able to have a good functioning relationship between you and your mentor. You definitely have to be the type of person that

can accept when you need help, and to be able to have the... I don't want to say cockiness, but to be able to be forward enough to ask for that help. Because the truth is that, I feel that that's what it is, that's why I was a mentee to begin with, because I knew I needed help. So to be able to verbalize that, I feel like if you can't express yourself then, there is no communication. (Gabriela)

Many of the mentees were accomplished students, as Gabriela was. They were used to working alone and independently. Nonetheless, this could not work in college any more. Gabriela was a transfer student and even during her community college experience, she worked and attended school simultaneously. Often, she was alone, attended classes and left by herself. This appeared to work for her as it seemed to have worked for the mentees before college. However, all of them agreed, this cannot work for them in college. For Latina/o students, college was a different experience. It was more stressful (Karina), more competitive (Natalia), and far more complex (Claudio). Thus, their college experience to work for them required they ask for help through good communication, just as Gabriela explains in the quote above.

The companionship of mentoring. College initially was not what Latina/o students expected. As Gabriela explains, it was “kind of being alone [here]... you look at other people and you are like... not, not all of these people have probably gone through [my] experience... or a lot of things that I have... so you just kind of feel isolated, a little bit, and you feel kind of trapped in terms of how many connections you too can make with these people.” And by these people, she meant those students who are not Latina/o.

What does peer mentoring do for Latina/o students? What do Latina/o students as peer mentees find in a peer mentoring relationship? What is there in the peer mentoring experience of mentees that makes them feel accompanied?

The need for a connection appears rather important for Latina/o students; the need to be with-Others appears as vital for some of them. The company they used to have with peers in high school was initially absent, until they joined *La Familia*. The opportunity to have a mentor, who was also Latina/o, seemed to make the possibility of personal connections more likely. Peers who were Latina/o seemed to offer similar experiences that mentees had. This realization helped me confirm how important the Latina/o identity is and how relevant it is for first year Latina/o students.

In *Latinos In America: Philosophy and Social Identity*, Gracia (2008) explains that “Latinos suffer from stereotyping in a very bad way. Some Latinos have complained about this and have blamed the non-Latino American community for identifying us in ways that are inaccurate and we find unacceptable” (p. ix). However, Gracia sees the stereotyping as a shared responsibility to be deconstructed “because identities are the result of more than one party” (p. ix). Perhaps, young Latina/o students have already understood this and they look for peers to reconstruct and challenge the stereotypes placed upon them. Perhaps Latina/o students who join peer mentoring programs have already learned that it is in the company of Others who are peers, that they can reach the goals they have set for themselves. Perhaps, this knowledge motivates them to form groups such as *La Familia*, and rather than theorize about the value of mentoring, they form peer mentoring groups to compensate what they already see as missing in their college experience.

As all the mentees, Renato stated his desire to find Latina/o students who challenge the portrayal of Latinas/os in television:

Some of us come to college with the mentality that you want to do this. You want to show your parents that you can do it, specially, if we are first generation that

went to college. We want to set that... role model figure for other members in the family.(Renato)

As for Claudio, despite his lack of connection with Latinas/os, he embraced the peer mentoring group because the mentors and mentees were “academic Latinas/os.” Gabriela recognized *La Familia* as a “structured program.” In summary, all the participants appreciated having mentors who had done well, and they agreed that having a mentor who did not do well in college would have resulted in a peer mentoring experience they would not have enjoyed having. Through peer mentoring, mentees seemed to have found in their mentors the person as Latina/o they wanted to emulate. The mentees found in their mentors someone they could relate to, but also someone to look up to, someone who was like them, with the Latina/o identity which they valued the most. It was important also to have someone who proved to them that college was also a place that as Latina/o they could do well in and even excel if they worked hard. This was no longer a dream or rare exception but a possibility materialized through their mentors. This is what mentees found. They found who they wanted to be, in a person who cared for them, their peer mentor. And as Renato explains, as mentees they were also there for their mentors.

Looking For Role Models

The numbers of Latina/o students, faculty, and staff are often limited. This creates an additional challenge to new Latina/o students. Not that many of them can come across potential mentors, guides and examples to emulate. But being part of a peer mentoring program gives this opportunity.

It makes me proud to be a mentee now in the university where there is a very limited amount of Latinos. But being a mentee of another successful Latino is very encouraging because I no longer have to look at somebody of a different race for a role model. I can look at somebody I can see myself in. (Natalia)

Also as Gabriela explains:

I am like, you know, she [my mentor] does so many things, outside of just academics and she can do it, so why can't I? So it's kind of looking at that person and seeing and you know what? She is like me in these ways, and I feel like I can do it too, you know. So not just, of course I am going to graduate, I want to graduate and be like her in that sense but also in the fact that other things that I see her in excelling it... you know. It's not with school work, but she does things for LSU, and *La Familia* and so many extra things.

These two examples bring out the role of mentoring in their lives. They can have role models, people they can look up to and see themselves. These individuals, mentors, who are looked at as role models represent for Latina/o students an individual with their Latina/o identity.

In *Identity And Difference*, Heidegger (1957/1974) explains that, "What the principle of identity... states is exactly what the whole Western European thinking has in mind... the unity of identity forms a basic characteristic in the Being of beings" (p. 26).

Although some mentees do not consider the Latina/o identity as important as much as what they can get from their mentoring relationship.

For the mentor is to be a role model, to the mentee so the mentee looks up to the mentor and tries to get as many things as possible off from them that can be helpful for them in the future. So I do not really think that there is a you know, it really depends if this is Latino or if this is Asian or the races I think that it is mostly has to do with you know the way that the things that you get off from them, the things that you get from them, that is helpful so that is what I think. (Renato)

What is there in a role model that appears important for Latina/o students? What does having a role model do for Latina/o students? While having a role model is important, whether they are Latina/o or not, is not as vital as what "you can get from them" as Renato states. One needs to ponder the power of a role model, and what makes a student who acts as a mentor a role model. These two ideas need further exploration.

Having someone older to look up to. Renato who has a younger brother confesses to feeling pressure to be a role model for him. But also having his own role model helps him to also have someone he can look up to.

I feel thankful because like my younger brother is looking up to me so I am kind of like the role model... so to have someone older than me so they can be my role model, it feels good because I have someone to look up to. I have someone to be like, Oh, wow! She [my mentor] is doing this. She is doing well. So I can be... I can do the same thing.

Renato, as all the participants, is a first generation college student. He does not have role models who have gone to college at home. Also, he comes from a school with few Latinas/os, and very few of his peers went to college. He is the only one going to college without having gone community college first. This privilege separates him from some Others. Who is he going to look up to? How is he going to trust that he can also succeed?

While being compared not always results in a boost of self-esteem, it can help. As Vanessa explains:

It's good to know that I am almost like a good role model for him [my brother], because I am in college. And my father is like... you should look at to your sister, she's got straight As in high school and you gotta do the same thing. And that's hard for him because no one likes to be compared to others. But he does understand that looking up to me, it's different, because I am his sister, it's like competition and competition always exists between siblings but I think he understands that and my father only tells him you should do this because I have for him to get the idea that he has to also succeed. (Vanessa)

Having someone to look up to also means having a person like a sibling to compete with. The competition is intended to motivate, to strive for more. Those Latina/o students who become mentees can look up to their mentors and compete with them; if they can do it, so can they.

I listen to whom I choose to listen to. Karina helped me to elucidate the power a peer can have as a role model. This is something which teachers, professors, and other adult university staff may not have to help first year Latina/o students. She said,

It's more like who you choose to listen to. A teacher can tell me anything, but I may not listen. But I mean, if I actually ask someone, knowing that I am going ask and wanting to listen to the answer, I am gonna choose to listen. So [I listen] the answer to the question I just asked. (Karina)

What is there in a peer that encourages mentees to listen to them? What do peers have or say that can motivate mentees to listen to them? How is it possible that a peer can be listened to more than a professor or university staff? Karina unveils the meaning of this choice to listen to peers. This is something that appeared to happen with-in the peer mentoring experience.

Because not many people have the same experiences that I do... so just feeling the sense of like isolation... kind of, you stick out a little more.... Then... maybe... Yeah, I definitely agree that many of us feel that way.

The similarity in experiences that mentees see in their mentors also includes loneliness and solitude. As stated at the beginning of this cluster of themes, Heidegger describes the experience of being alone as a deficient form of being. For him, being something (e.g., a son, a daughter, a student, and a mentee) is always being-with Others. Nonetheless, this is contradictory to life; being alone is at the core of human living. Although we all seem to fight this feeling, despite all our efforts for the contrary, we continue to be utterly alone. This is an intrinsic aspect of life, one that may lead to solitude, which is the cause of existential anxiety. Thus, having the company of an-Other or being next to Others can be a way of relieving this anxiety.

Finding someone who cares for us may not always be possible. But even if it happens, when the Other or Others we find are not willing to acknowledge our presence

or accept us into his or her life, we can still feel lonely. Nevertheless, if fortune knocks at our doors, and we find someone who cares for us the feeling of solitude can become a bearable feeling. If this does not happen we may be overwhelmed.

If we have someone with us or if we are offered the company of someone, we may be better off to cope with the existential experience of being separated from others. Students who enroll in programs as *La Familia* are offered a person who promises to care for them. Upper class students volunteer to care for whoever their mentee may be. This aspect of the mentoring experience seems quite important for mentees. Moreover, this appears to be what mentees found with-in a peer mentoring relationship. As mentees they were given a peer, one who acted as a mentor, and proved to care for them as a mentee.

Mentees choose to listen to their mentors. They appear as someone like them, above them, but not too high. Mentees appear to be able to relate to their mentors but also to be able to see them as a sibling with whom they can compete as well. As Victoria explains, “It’s important to stay always positive and listen... and be acceptable or accepting of the things you are being taught or given by the other person.” Mentees choose to listen to those peers who inspire them, but also who they can relate to.

Being alike. All the mentees who participated in this study were Latina/o students who can be classified as students of color. College for all new Latina/o students who participated in this study was also initially an experience of loneliness and solitude, as it can be to all new college students. However, for the Latina/o students who participated in this study there was a special concern. They wondered where other Latinas/o students were. The participants talked about how they looked, in many ways, for peers as other Latina/o students. They hoped to find other Latina/o students who could understand what

they felt. These were feelings of inadequacy, what some scholars have called the “impostor syndrome,” which can be defined as the uncertainty that one is worth of the position or place one has. Also, all the participants expressed two initial needs. One was their need to clarify what to do to succeed as a student, and the other was the need to validate the feelings of solitude they began to have upon coming to college.

The question of the “who” answers itself in terms of the “I” itself, the ‘subject’, the ‘Self’ The “who” is what maintains itself as something **identical** through changes in its Experiences and ways of behavior, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in so doing. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 150)

Gabriela explains that the commonality of background and identity, the common Self that mentees shared with mentors, eased the communication between mentor and mentee. She says, “Because you can kind of bond about this [being Latina]... and talk about things of like, you know, that pertain to this college, but then like... also about past experiences before coming here and those kinds of experiences...” Then, she adds, reflecting and pointing at herself, “who you are,” indicating her face, meaning her racial identification as Latina. However, her comments were not only about race; they also referred to the experiences that she lived because of the race she was identified with.

What kind of experiences Latina/o students live? What is to be Latina/o in college? What does the experience of being a peer mentee of an-Other Latina/o like? What do Latina/o students *find* with-in a peer mentoring experience as mentees of other Latina/o students?

One of the answers I found through the conversations with the mentees had to do with the relationships they found with their mentors. As Karina says, “You want to be like them, not them, but like them.” The pronoun “them” referred to Latina/o students who were their mentors who had one or more years of college experience. Some of the

mentors were even juniors, and they were soon to graduate. What was common to all mentors was their Latina/o identity, their undergraduate student status, and somehow, that they all had done well enough to have at least one or more years of college. This was one more year than the mentees had, and because of this mentors became the type of role model they wanted to emulate. However, mentees were clear; they wanted to be *like* their mentors, not their mentors.

This is what I refer to as the finding of the Self. Mentees find who they are in Others who are like them, but as Karina clarifies, are “not them.” This term, the Self, is interpreted as the identity of the person who they are (see Zahavi, 1999). Latinas/os who are first year college students, and also often first generation college students, have the goal of earning a college degree and are looking for mentors who they can emulate. Despite the prejudices placed upon them, or the lack of expectations, a mentor can challenge each one of them. Each meeting with a mentor can be the proof many mentees look for to believe they can also do well. A college degree that may take four or five years may seem like an eternity at the beginning, but the materialization of a peer who is about to graduate and who shares many of their characteristics makes the experience more believable, that they can also do it. As Gabriela says, “I can do this too, you know.” That is what mentees seem to have found in their mentors. In the company they seemed to crave, mentors come to satisfy the thirst of seeing Others like them.

Do I know what “you know”? The similarity mentees assume from their mentors is a principle that extends the connection Latinas/os have with other Latinas/os. This became clear to me as I analyzed the transcripts and looked at an expression I had originally overlooked.

I was initially taken aback by the common use of the expression “you know.” At first, I misunderstood this expression. I thought of it as filler--something people say to fill the gaps. However, this assumption was a mistake on my part. Later, during our last conversation I became clearer about what they meant when saying to me, “you know.” This meant more than I had initially thought. Gadamer warns against prejudices, “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text [or conversation] can present itself in all its otherness and thus asserts its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (1960/1994, p. 269)

When I asked the participants if I had not been Latino, would they have said the same to me or shared what they did just as well? They all agreed, replying with an emphatic “No!” This answer took me by surprise. I had taken for granted and minimized how important my Latino identity is, and the implications associated with my identification as Latino meant to them and Others non-Latina/o.

To know something can be based on what one has lived. Thus, to say “you know,” can be taken as an expression that one assumes or expects that the other person understands what is said or implied. Mentees often said, “You know,” and often they were right. Because I look Latino I knew what they meant because often it was something I had also lived. As Claudio explains, this meant having “olive skin, possibly an accent, having Spanish as one’s native language, having black hair, and being medium size. These, among other characteristics, made up what many people assumed Latinas/os have done. These were the characteristics people saw in him. In my case, they all applied to me, including having an accent that gives away that my native language is Spanish.

Certainly, this saved time for many Latinas/os. There is no need to explain to me what being a first generation Latino means, what it means to speak English with accent, and what it is to be assumed as a Latino. People do that with me all the time. I happen to fill of the stereotypes assumed by many Latinas/os. Nonetheless, many of the participants did not.

Race Does Matter!

Claudio explains that race made him feel both alienated and someone who had more to struggle with.

In an environment where you are the minority, and you are just kind of alienated I think that is one of the component, and the second... and last component, I think, it is the stereotypes out there... the way other people, you know that there is this big public perception of you know, how students of different race do in college or in education in general. That component, the stereotype component I think, and it's just... and also the component of not being a minority, because usually for example, let's say you are White, you are the majority member, and you come to college, and let's say you need help and you need... and you are struggling, you are... you want to reach out to... you have more people... to reach out... you have far more people to ask for help, to get help from... While if you are member of a minority you are... you are perceived... you do not so well... you... there are less people out there... that are there to... that you can go to... and because there are less people... you know... there is this seriously maybe sometimes... it is even harder to approach other Hispanics... sometimes... because maybe they are going through the same thing... and they need help too, so why would I go try to get help from someone who also needs help?... so I think that might be a problem for students, Hispanics, that they have more...[problems]. (Claudio)

It may appear as selfish and limiting to talk about a topic such as race in a small section of this study, given its implications and historical background in the U.S.A.

However, this is not a racial study. Race is part of a theme within the peer mentee experience. And while it is of crucial importance, it is only what leads to identify a theme of the Latina/o peer mentee experience where race comes into place. One needs to keep

in mind that not all that is important is essential, while all that is essential is of importance to phenomenology.

Before an experience is lived, before one becomes aware of an experience, we appear in the world for Others in our physical manifestation. Heidegger (1927/2004) states that to be is to-be-in-the-world-with- Others. Our mere human existence, as he describes it is *Dasein*. That is *being there*, but at the same time being-there-for-Others is being-with-Others in a body with a shape, form, color and identification, based on characteristics that makes us part of a group (see Robinson-Wood, 2009).

Our presence as human beings is not free from judgment and presumptions, beginning with the way we appear to Others, and first of all, it is through and in our bodies as Merleau-Ponty reminds us. And because we do not live in a vacuum, any terms we choose to describe us or to identify us come as a value-laden interpretation. Students who are identified as White, Black or Latina/o have impressions and assumptions about those who are classified or identified as such. At the same time, they are given impressions and assumptions about who they *are* based on their racial classification. This may not be accurate, and it may not be as they think they are, but the assumptions attributed to them fall upon them regardless of their will to accept them or not.

One of these terms to identify people is race. Racial identification and classification is one of the most controversial concepts in our society. This is so mainly because of the assumptions associated with certain groups, or people who are grouped together due to a certain racial identification. Thus, one can say that race matters, and it matters to the peer mentee as well, and it matters with-in the peer mentoring experience. Sadly, race not only identifies students, it is also the source of much oppression and

discomfort for many people, including students in college who are identified as a racial minority.

I include the description of the peer mentee experience with the theme of race because it is through race that Latina/o students are often identified, while this concept refers to ethnicity. Nonetheless, this term used for students who call themselves or are identified as Latina/o. And it happens to direct how their experience as students often unfolds. Although one cannot say that race only affect students in college, it affects everyone.

Race comes to be the thing. It is funny to parody Heidegger, who says that the thing of the thing is the thing. Husserl, Heidegger's teacher and some authors call him his mentor, claimed that philosophy and knowledge were in need of a "Return to the things themselves," a return to see what makes something be what it is. Phenomenology calls this the essence of a phenomenon.

How is it that one of the essences of the peer mentee experience is related to race? What makes the help given to Latina/o students a peer mentee experience? How can the explanation of the peer mentee experience begin?

At the beginning of the conversations, the most frequent topic of the mentees was their Latina/o identity. However, it was unexpected for me that despite living at the dawn of the twenty first century, one still has to talk about race and its negative effect, racism. Perhaps, we all want to dream that we are in a post-racial era, but too often we are reminded that, as a person of color, our color will always be the marker used to highlight our presence.

Human relations, including mentoring, are not excluded from the effect of racism. All mentees referred to it, some named it, others hinted at it, and some participants as Claudio bluntly denounced it with anger and frustration. This was intended to describe a practice perceived as good and with the potential to help students, but perhaps in here lays the contradictory tension.

Race and comfort. Jimena says, “I think it is easier to go to someone of your own.” Being comfortable was paramount to all mentees. To identify something as comfortable, one needs to have experienced that which is opposite. To look for comfort is to escape from discomfort. Being in a comfortable relationship appears as very important for mentees, and what seemed to motivate them to stay engaged in their peer mentoring relationship. And one of the aspects that made them comfortable was someone of their own race.

It’s just because there are not a lot of us [Latinas/os] here... so you feel like we are a great minority... but you feel you would feel more minority because there is not a big affiliation, there is not a big population of Hispanics... and there is more like I guess Hispanic faculty ... or staff... because they appear to be more comfortable with you ... It’s harder to go to the teacher I think. It is easier to go to someone of your own race I think. I know [a Latina professor on campus], I feel more comfortable speaking to her because she is from the same race. We are both Salvadorian, and we are both California...so there are more steps to relate to her in common and...so I can feel more comfortable talking to her. (Jimena)

What is the relation between race and peer mentoring? How do mentees feel when they are seen as a racial Being? What is it to be a racial Being and a mentee? How can race be explained with-in a peer mentoring relationship in college? Does race need to be acknowledged with-in a peer mentoring study for Latina/o students?

Mentoring among peers can help; this is what the participants of this study confirmed throughout our conversations. Although, they also revealed that the help that is

provided by peers is a path out of a social system that still discriminates against people due to their race or race identification. As some mentees explained, they do not see it as an option, but their only choice is to be-with students identified as of their own race or group. Among the many stories and explanations I was given, I chose Nancy's experience to portray and interpret the role of race and racism with-in peer mentoring:

Latino side plays a big role in who I am, and my beliefs, and when people see me, even though I speak English, and you know I am going to have a degree in an American university, people see me as a Latino at the University, as a Latina. They don't care if speak English, if I have an accent or not, my face is never gonna change so I need to be, you know, aware of who I am and not...not leave that side behind me because it's always going to be who I am. (Nancy)

Nancy talked about her experience during the first year student fair, a program intended to help first year students (transfer students) to meet peers and student organizations on campus. However, despite her interest in meeting new groups, and new students, she felt once more turned down by those who she wanted to finally meet and join the White students.

One time, I walked around the [campus]... like my first semester here... [after] transferring from a community college... they had like a sorority hmmm you know, Open House... where they were all outside of McKeldin [so] you could talk to them... and like the Whites, the Caucasian sororities they would not even approach me... they wouldn't... they didn't even offer to introduce themselves...so things like that where you feel like you do not really belong in the school, or you feel like out of place... it left me, it led me to the mentoring program... you feel more like you have somebody that is going through the same thing with you... and you can go for them whenever you need help. (Nancy)

It was puzzling to me to hear Nancy tell this story, and even more troubling to hear the word "Whites." This word seemed to me archaic, old, and the source of all resentment. All mentees used such term to refer to majority students. Also, they associated this group with many characteristics that they do not have, such as middle class, college tradition, coming from high performance school, and a set of values that

promote individualism and independence. Also, the participants identified White students as members of a privileged group, a group many Latina/o students would like to belong to but cannot, due to the indifference they perceive from them or the lack of commonality with them that separates them.

Race continues to matter today. In the new edition of the classic book, *Race Matters*, Cornel West (2001) reminds us that four decades after the Civil Rights Movement, Black youth--and one could also add other racial minority groups-- still lag behind their White counterparts as a group.

The major tragedy of black America in the past decade or so is the low quality of black leadership and the relative inattention to the deep crisis of black youth... With roughly 40 percent of black children living in poverty and almost 10 percent of all black adult men in prison, we face a crisis of enormous proportions. Yet this crisis is not even a blip on the national radar screen of American politics. This is a shame and a disgrace. (p. x)

This condition of abandonment is not exclusive to Black youth. Latina/o students, despite the growing numbers in the general population, still feel lost and abandoned when they come to school and even more so in college, where they represent a single digit in the general population, despite they are one-third or close to half of the population in most areas where they live. College still appears as a place off limits for minorities, including Latina/o students.

What does peer mentoring do for Latina/o students? How does race appear within a Latina/o peer mentoring relationship? Where does the race identity emerge within a peer mentoring relationship for Latina/o peer mentees?

Back to Nancy's story, the rejection or indifference she felt from the White students, members of a sorority, led her to mentoring. The group that represented *La Familia* was friendly to her, and invited her to participate. They were familiar to the

people she met before, so asked for her phone number, and to register for the program right away. Perhaps the implied similarity Latina/o students assume about each other gives them confidence to talk to one another, to invite each other, and to avoid unnecessary questions. Perhaps the continued segregation in which we live, where minorities tend to live in city centers, and White affluent or middle class populations retreat to the suburbs, promotes a constant lack of integration, and out of fear or unfamiliarity they also retrieve from talking with Latina/o students. Perhaps other hidden reasons can promote and sustain a division that appears manifest in race, while it may not be racial but rather social, economic, and cultural.

The result still seems to be the same. Latina/o students, as other minority groups, continue to be separated and search for help; they find it among those who are like them, peers. Race does matter; race can bring people together as well as separate them. It was evident in Nancy's story and the other mentees' stories. What do programs like *La Familia* offer even before mentoring can be given, before mentees have a mentor? The ease of an experience previously lived and known, transfers more easily to a group of people who may look similar to those previously known.

Race matters, even if it is just a reminder to those who are mentees of what they have seen before. Mentees talked about their racialization and how mentoring helped them. Nancy's example illustrates her detour or perhaps return to her group, the Latina/o community, and her perceived rejection by White students. All the participants of the study reflected somehow the rejection or indifference they felt by White students, and how welcomed they felt among Latina/o students. Having Latina/o mentors and being in a program for Latinas/os can be seen as an advantage of the *La Familia* program. But

also it can be the continuation for Latinas/os to stay with-in their own group. This can help but also stop their development, by limiting their association with members of Other ethnic and racial groups. *La Familia*, while they help, also continues to contribute to the perpetuation which the common saying declares, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Perhaps the flocking is easy this way; perhaps it is unintended; and perhaps it is what suits some Latina/o students who may not receive help otherwise.

Race matters, and it matters in peer mentoring for many various reasons. For mentees, it matters because it eases the opportunity to interact with other Latina/o students and also helps first year students to find those who may have a similar history, background, and values. It can help them, too, to identify what they need, because somehow, those who volunteer as mentors have done something good, and they are one, two or more years ahead of the mentees in college. This appears as inviting, because they have or it is assumed they have, a similar background to mentees, thus they can guide young new Latina/o students.

Being-In Thanks To Others

Being in a place can be a rewarding feeling. When arriving at a place that is highly anticipated, the experience of arriving can be the making of a dream come true. But dreams can become nightmares very fast. For some students, the dream of coming to college can become a nightmare if the hope of finding friends and help are not met. For students who grew up in a tight social network of peer and a family nearby, the experience of coming to college in a large place, full of unknown people, might not be the place in which they dream of being. If one feels comfortable in a place, due to the feeling of inclusion, acceptance, familiarity, comfort, and above all, a sense of belonging

that one may have with the place, one tends to stay and enjoy being at that place. The contrary may happen when one does not experience a connection with a place, but rather finds it unfamiliar or unwelcoming. However, a place is more than the physical representation of a location.

A place can be both physical as well as mental. Heidegger explains this idea with the notion of Being-in. He says,

What is meant by “*Being-in*”? Our proximal reaction is to round out this expression to “Being-in ‘in the world’”, and we are inclined to understand this Being-in as ‘Being in something’ [“*Sein in...*”]. This latter term designates the kind of Being which an entity has when it is ‘in’ another one, as the water is ‘in’ the glass, or the garment is ‘in’ the cupboard...Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein’s Being; it is an existential. (1927/2004, p. 79)

A place can be both an outside location as much as an inside position. For instance, there is an expression in relation to a place, “It grew in me.” This means a mental representation of a place that one has grown to like or gotten used to being or seeing. On the other hand, some people may find themselves in a place in which they feel no connection or belonging.

Students can find reasons that justify their presence and experiences in college that remind them why they are there. Also, if students feel welcome and find people who care for them, they are likely to be engaged in their college education. Peer mentoring appears to produce this effect in Latina/o students. Being-in college can be like a natural and rightful place to be, when older advanced peers of the same group succeed by graduating from college. As Gabriela says, students can say “That can be me, too.” When students are first year students, as freshman or transfer students, and can see older peers do well, they can also think and dream that they can be like them too and also graduate

from college; this may happen despite all the assumptions Latina/o students do not do well, or that they are likely to fail in their college experience.

Being-In College

The feeling of being in college should not be taken for granted. This experience appears more complex than the mere fact of registering for classes or receiving a letter of acceptance from the Admissions Office. Being in a place makes a claim to be seen, to be recognized as part of a place, and at times it refers to being accepted in a place.

A college or a university is a place. It can be a place where people who look like you or talk like you, and think like you can be found or be absent. If the odds are not good, students may feel like outliers from their educational experience if an institution of higher education is not a place where they can see themselves in the students around them. Jimena talked about the experience of coming across a Latino student in the School of Business. During the time she entered her classroom in this school, and as the students from the previous class left, she came across a Latino student. The very first time he saw her, he greeted her with familiarity. This was a gesture that she welcomed, but surprised her at the beginning. After coming across each other a couple of times in which he greeted her as if they had known each other for a long time, she dared to ask him, how he knew she was Latina, and that she understood Spanish, as he often greeted her in Spanish, saying ¡Hola! And he replied, “There are so few Latinos here.” This implied that there was something about her that gave her away as a Latina.

A business major is a competitive one. The acceptance rate is quite low, Jimena explained. Also, she never saw a Latina or Latino there other than this student. So if someone was Latina/o, this made them part of a very small group of students. What

appeared intriguing to me was how she was identified as a Latina by this student. She also has the same concern. The student who greeted her, whom I will call Raul, explained to her that it was her looks. It was not her face of surprise as a new student, but her racial or her phenotype characteristics that gave her away as a Latina. This identification was comforting to Raul because he saw in her a person like him, so he felt compelled to greet her. Jimena also felt a connection with him, and soon they became acquainted with one another.

What is in the finding of a person who looks like us? What does the familiarity of a person (even when assumed) do to us? How do mentees see themselves in the company of their mentors?

The experience of being-in a peer mentoring experience is more than a physical location. Peer mentoring happens in college; mentor and mentees meet in places; Latina/o students are in college to attend classes, and study, but the experience of being-in can also be a mental representation of a place. This latter can be most meaningful and influential to Latina/o students. If they can see themselves through their mentor connections they appear to believe this is a place where they may belong, which motivates them to stay.

Belonging With Others

The sense of belonging cannot be taken for granted with college students. They can pay tuition and fees, they may live on campus, they can take a full load of classes, and they can have tutors for each one of their classes. Nonetheless, despite all this they can still lack a sense of belonging. This is detrimental for their motivation and desire to stay in college.

Jimena who lived on campus--the only mentee who did--went home each week end. When I asked her, why, she said she had free laundry and homemade food. However, her answer seemed to hide something so I pushed further with more questions. When I inquired more, she told me that at home she spent time with her father watching TV, studying with her brother, and talking with her mother. Jimena was the only mentee whose parents could afford and allow their daughter to live on campus. She had a meal plan to choose various locations to eat. Her financial status was not of concern, which allowed her to have a comfortable life and a steady allowance. However, despite all her apparent benefits she chose to go home every weekend.

What calls us home? What makes a place to be home? What do we need to find or have for us to feel we are at home? Can college be home?

Home, as the saying goes, is where the heart is. If this is true, Jimena's heart was not in her dormitory room in college. Certainly, no college room can be just like home, but many students long for the opportunity to have their independence. They long for a place away from "home," even when it may be for a few months out of the year only. It is a taste of future independence. Jimena, as did many of the mentees, missed their homes, while other students of their age longed to be away from their homes.

Jimena was an active member of *La Familia*. She met regularly with her mentor and enjoyed the program and activities of the peer mentoring program. Nonetheless, during the weekend, when *La Familia* did not have events and her mentor worked, she decided to go "home." When the other mentees were asked what they liked about their mentoring experience, many of them said being with their mentors. They met in the library, the Union, the cafeteria, and other places on campus. They could go to these

places on their own, but they chose to go there only when they agreed to meet with their mentors. The places they met with their mentors had a special meaning when there was someone there to meet them, someone they could find there, someone to listen to them there. Thus, having someone in a place and being there for the mentee was a key aspect of the mentee experience.

Being-For The Other

The notion of being-for Others is a clusters of themes. On the one hand, they refer to Latina/o students who are present for other Latinas/os; whereas, on the other hand, it refers to the purpose that Latina/o students recover, thanks to being peer mentored. For Heidegger (1927/2004), the German expression of Being-for someone or another is *Für-einan-dersein*, whereas the more common expressions are *Füreinandersein* or *Füreinander da sein* or *Für einander sein*. This philosophical expression can also be translated as being for each other.

The presence of a Being can provide a sense of company for another Being, but it also can refer to the call of consciousness to help and guide someone. Being-for can also be interpreted as the equality among Beings, mentor and mentee. In the next sections, from this line of thinking, I explain three ideas on how peer mentees see their mentors, and how mentees see themselves as recipients of the mentoring efforts in relation to the notion of *being-for*.

Heidegger explains that the reason why *Dasein* is to be in the world, with others, *for* Others, is because this is how we come to be in the world as sons, daughters, Latinas/os, mentees, etc. Heidegger explains:

The Other can *be missing only in and for* a Being-with...its very possibility is the proof of this. (1927/2004, p. 153)

Later Heidegger adds:

Dasein-with is encountered in a mode in which they are indifferent and alien. Being missing and “Being away” [Das Fehlen und “Fortsein”] are modes of Dasein-with lets the Dasein of Other be encountered in its world. Being-with is in every case a characteristic of one’s own Dasein; Dasein-with characterizes the Dasein of Others to the extent that it is freed by its world for a Being-with. Only so far as one’s own Dasein has the essential structure of Being-with, is it Dasein-with encounterable for Others. (p. 157)

Claudio recognizes that being there for Others is not always being accepted or included; sometimes it means the opposite. It means to be excluded, but included in another group. Claudio talked extensively about his experience as a college student. Before he was a mentee, he experienced the constant reminder that he was Latino. Although, as he says, “[He] never saw himself in those terms.” He used the term Whites to describe those Others who sometimes he hoped to be. He also grew up mostly surrounded by Whites. But despite that familiarity, there was a greater familiarity that called more strongly.

As members of a minority group, mentees were given an opportunity to be with Others and these Others were there for them. There were many experiences where mentors proved to mentees they were there for them, to help them, to guide them, to give them company.

We Went For A Walk

Being-for someone may not be in a way that is completely life changing. It might not be the impressive epiphany experience that a mentor may expect. Nor might it be an event that can be so life altering that it becomes a pivotal moment of transformation. Being-for someone can result from a simple event that allows a mentee to encounter an individual who is willing to help and assist in any way he or she can. The offer of help

that a mentor gives may never be needed, but a mentee can always enjoy having a peer who cares enough to offer to be there for his or her mentor.

Nancy told me about her first experience meeting her mentor. This experience set up the mood of their relationship. He showed to her that he was willing to meet her, at any time and place. Also, their walk during their first meeting was metaphorically how both would carry out their peer mentoring relationship. Nancy met her mentor, whom I call Jeremiah, in front of the main library. They sent each other text messages and agreed on meeting in front of the Library. Her mentor was bicultural. His mother was Latina from Central America, and his father, in Nancy's terms, "American," which I later confirmed meant White.

They walked and talked as Nancy says. What proved important for her during their first meeting was that Jeremiah shared aspects of his life with her, and she could see how much they had in common. Both of them were Christians--although from a different denomination--, they lived at home with Latino family values of closeness, affection, sharing household chores, and traditional Christian values. Nancy was a first generation college student and so was her mentor.

The walk that Nancy took with her mentor also was a walk along their previous life experiences. They walked around the library and then sat to talk. This was their first meeting, but it set the path both of them would take the rest of their mentoring experience. Nancy also was beginning to walk the path her mentor had already traveled. He was a senior and she was a sophomore. Her mentor had a similar background as hers so he had to deal with similar challenges, but he was about to graduate. This helped her to think that she could do that too.

Her mentor's experiences resembled what she wanted to do. He was about to reach what she desired in college. Also, her mentor saw in her where he was a few years back. Nancy recognized in Jeremiah a peer. When asked about her first meeting she responds, "Because he has lived the same." As she walked and talked with Jeremiah, Nancy began to feel she had someone for her. Later, she would send him papers to review, homework to look at, and ask questions about his opinion. Jeremiah was with Nancy, and whether Nancy asked him to do something or not, they walked together as mentor and mentee, not only physically as in the first time they met, but also as mentor and mentee.

Being-for The Other As The Same

If being in the world with Others is being as Others see us, one has to wonder what Others see in us when they identify us with a group or recognize us as "one of them," or as a mentee. Mentees shared during the conversations thoughts about how Others saw them, and by Others, they meant Latinas/os. The Latina/o peer mentees came to see themselves as successful students, and then be-came successful students, through the eyes and modeling of their mentor.

Claudio prefers the word Hispanic. It is interesting to note that the word Hispanic, in contrast to the word Latina/o which is more political, alludes to Spain. Although Claudio did not state that he uses the term Hispanic because of the association with Europe, his experiences were described as a person talking about Latinas/os in third person. When he refers to Latinas/os, he appears not to feel Latino. When asked what makes someone a Latina/o, he talks about music, skin color, and food. Also, he mentions

a “way of being,” a way of being that differs from those who are not Latinas/os and not like him.

The Other participants of this study used the word Latina or Latino, depending on their gender. However, this is not something the mentees always called themselves. They were identified as such by those who were non-Latinas/os, as well as those who are Latinas/os. Jessica, when leaving a classroom, was greeted by a peer she had never seen before. He recognized her as Latina. They both enjoyed coming across each other. Similarly, all the participants expressed joy coming across Others who are like them, identified as Latina/o.

What is to be Latina/o? What do Latinas/os do? What makes someone Latina/o and another person not? What is in a name? What does a name do for Others? What is there in a name that can help mentees feel comfortable?

The answers to such question can be quite complex and open for debate. What seems clear from Claudio’s experience, and the other mentees is the description that there are characteristics that can make a person feel Latina/o or “be” Latina/o. Above all, it is the way Others see the students who are Latina/o that reminds them or makes them feel they are Latina/o and not like Others.

Being-There In The Corner Of My Eye

It was Gabriela who used this expression to describe what it was like for her to have a mentor. Her mentor was someone she knew before she joined the program. However, once she was paired up with her mentor, the relationship between Gabriela and her friend changed, in terms of what Gabriela expected from her friend, who now was turned into her mentor. What do Latina/o students see in their mentors? What do mentors

offer to their mentees to there for them? What is there in the peer mentee experience that helps mentees when their mentors are for them?

Advice, suggestions, tips, among other things, are the benefits commonly associated with a peer mentoring experience, but mentoring can be more. As the fox revealed to the Little Prince before his departure, “What is essential is invisible to the eye,” although it is with our eyes how we see the world and the people we have around us, but there is more to see. What we need to see is more than the physical world. What we may see is the meaning people give to things.

Definitely [having my mentee nearby] pushes me to do the same. I found many times when I am at the library doing my paper and I am like ah, but when I see her there, just even like in the corner of my eye and I see her doing the same thing then I am like ok yes, it keeps me on track to know like this is the path she took and she did so well and like I said not just academically but just the fact that her work ethic like the fact that she works hard and even if things get really hard, even if it means pulling an all nighter, whatever it takes for her to get her job done, then that definitely pushes me to do the same. I definitely feel like... kind of like a support...kind of like pushing me like come on you can do this you know, let's get on track. (Gabriela)

Being there for mentee is not only to have a physical presence; it is the meaning of the presence their mentors have for them. Seeing that someone like them, an-Other Latina/o is doing what they are doing, working, studying, in the library, etc., all these tasks and more motivates Latina/o students to accept the guidance they are given. If the person who they trust performs well in college, the living example they provide is reinforced by seeing what they do. Gabriela, as all mentees, had a part time job, full load of courses, responsibilities at home, and was the first one in her family to attend college. This was overwhelming. Her red eyes, her coffee mug, her exhaustion at her arrival during our conversations were proof of her demanding schedule. However, she appeared

reinvigorated when she talked about her mentor. Not only was she not a stranger to her, but she was also someone who did what she was doing as well.

Being for the mentee not only is being available to answer a call or to give advice, but also being there when mentees are where they need to be, in the case of Gabriela, in the library. In the corner of her eye, it was part of her world. When Gabriela says, she was in the corner of her eye; she was also inside her world. Being there for a mentee is being in the mentees' view, world, and life. Heidegger states that being is being there, thus *Dasein* in German means *Da* (there) and *Sein* (to be). Being-with is being there for the mentee in both intention and physical presence, as well as doing as mentees need to do to succeed as students.

Being And Technology

Although I had not initially intended to discuss technology, the participants referred to this topic so frequently that a realization dawned on me: this is a theme of its own. Therefore, technology is discussed as an integral part of the mentee experience in this chapter. However, it is discussed in a separate section to show in more detail how technology served the peer mentee experience. This section shows how technology was more than a means for communication, but it also led to a way of being for mentees within the peer mentoring experience with other Latina/o students. Technology helped Latina/o students feel connected when they were not physically present with their mentors, and they could also receive help and stay in touch with their mentors by means of technology, instead of waiting until they physically met.

Technology And Mentoring

The benefits of mentoring to one's academic success, career aspirations, and personal development are widely acknowledged. So, too, are some of the components necessary to a rewarding mentoring relationship--one being the ease and frequency of interaction and communication. Technological advances and, in particular, forms of computer mediated communication (CMC) such as e-mail, listservs, chat groups, and computer conferencing offer the potential for enhancing the mentoring process. As yet, however, little thought has been given to how CMC might be incorporated into the mentoring process. (Bierema & Merriam, 2002, p. 11)

Technology appears as an intrinsic constituent or component of the mentee experience for the Latina/o students who participated in this study. Through the use of technology, the notions of being-with someone, being-in a peer mentoring relationship, and making sense of the college experience were greatly enhanced. During our conversations mentees talked about the various types of technology they regularly used to communicate with-in their peer mentoring experience. They showed me many of these devices, gadgets, software programs and applications they used which included cell phones, iPods, Notebooks, laptops, Apps, Twitter, Facebook, among other things. Technology allowed the dyad to communicate far more often than meeting in person, but there was more to technology than just communication or the devices used. This revelation came as a result of seeing how technology appeared to motivate in mentees, so new questions began to emerge. What does technology mean for mentees? What does the use of technology do for the mentee's experience? What do mentees show or hide through technology? What is technology for Latina/o peer mentees?

If the interpretation of the peer mentee experience includes technology, in a phenomenological lens one needs to wonder what phenomenological philosophers have stated in relation to technology and the essence of a Being. This thought led back to

Martin Heidegger. In the essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger (1977) declares: “The essence of technology is by no means anything technological” (p. 287). This explanation is daunting to me, because if “The essence of technology is *not* technological,” what is it? In the same essay, Heidegger later states, “Technology is a way of revealing” (p. 295). Through that statement, the possible meaning of technology for the peer mentee experience can be explored. Consequently, if technology is not a technological matter as Heidegger states, but it can be a way of revealing, or perhaps concealing, what is the result of using technology for mentees and for the peer mentoring experience?

Through this line of thinking, it seems to me that the use of technology deserves attention beyond the description of the gadgets and devices mentees used. Perhaps the act of being connected with Others or being-with Others through technology aims at another aspect beyond the instrumental use of communication. The conversations with the participants revealed to me that one needs to be wary about the meaning of technology and its effects in human relations. Although technology is most frequently used for communication, it could also lead to the creation of a new form of being-in-the-world-with-Others, especially for mentees as college students.

Thus, prompted by Heidegger’s essay (1977), in the following sections, I explore the last group of themes that make up the Latina/o peer mentee experience in relation to technology. In his essay, Heidegger refers to two possibilities of being with technology, one as “concealment,” and the other one as “revealing.” In this line of thinking, conversations with the mentees are explored to find out what may have been revealed and concealed *to* and *about* Latina/o peer mentees.

In Search Of The Essence Of Technology

The use of technology is so abundant in the participants' conversations that it has become a topic impossible to avoid. Thus, it is necessary to bring more light to this aspect and its possible implications for the members of a mentoring dyad.

While considering theoretical and methodological development in these... areas, of mentoring scholarship, it is important to identify emerging research areas. First future research should account for the impact of technological advances that may limit the amount of face-to-face interaction between mentor and protégé (e.g., distance learning, flextime, email, and telework). (Butts, Durley, & Elby, 2007, p. 96)

Heidegger (1977) declares that technology can help bring out the essence of who we are, but sometimes the essence of an experience is made up of several essences. While technology appears as another essence to consider for the study of the peer mentee experience, this does not seem like an easy task. Heidegger explains that contrary to the distrust some people may have about technology, technology in itself is not bad.

Technology is not demonic; but its essence is mysterious. The essence of technology, as destining of revealing, is the danger. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 308)

Technology can help, but it can also be an obstacle to being-with-Others. For instance, Karina says, "We talk through chat or text. That's how we usually communicate with each other." Here I found where the first challenge of the use of technology lies.

There is danger of concealment when using technology. People can hide behind their gadgets or ignore other people's presence by listening to music, reading tablets or nook readers or talking on the phone. Technology has the power to hide and show at the very same time, and not in the same aspect for everyone. Communicating mostly through technological devices can also hide the company that only the presence of another human being can give. Karen provided a revelation that proved a cause of concern to me. If

mentees only hear or communicate with their mentors through technology, one needs to consider what technology does or how technology enhances or conceals communication with-in the peer mentoring experience.

What do mentees talk about with their mentors? What kind of communication do mentees have through technology? What can be said in technology that may not wait until mentees can meet in person with their mentors? Is communication through technology the same type of communication as face to face?

All participants suggested that technology helped them as mentees to communicate. However, despite its utility, as Heidegger suggests, the essence of technology is mysterious. Gabriela helps bring understanding of what technology means for her as a mentee,

I definitely think our various forms of technology enhanced the mentee experience. It helps mentors because they can get in contact with us, but the truth is that we need them more than they need us. So the fact that we have so many options as means to reach them is very comforting, very much so because there've been times when she [my mentor] doesn't have [IT] service.... on the top floor of Mckeldin [library]... or something, so I can't reach her [my mentor] through text... so I am like [I have to] wait. (Gabriela)

It was discouraging and disruptive for Gabriela, as it was for all mentees, when they could not connect with their mentors by one of their technological devices. There are two ideas that come out of Gabriela's comments. First, mentees appear to need contact and communication everywhere, all of the time. Second, technology enhances their mentee experience. It helps them have a better mentoring relationship, but how?

While technology can allow students to communicate with their mentors and vice versa, one needs to be cautious of the type of communication that may take place by means of technology, as Gabriela's dependence on technology reveals:

I can always send her a message on or something. So to know that there are so many, you know, various ways that I can reach her is very helpful. Definitely [technology] enhances the relationship between a mentor and a mentee, definitely. (Gabriela, in brackets added)

Again--the idea of technology enhancing the peer mentoring experience is mentioned. However, it still was not clear how technology worked with-in a peer mentoring relationship. Then, something else emerged--mentees *liked* technology and used it with ease. This is clearly different from older generations. However, before moving to the effect of technology, consideration needs to be given to the meaning that technology creates when used for communication.

More Than Just Talk

One of Karina's comments shows how technology helped to do more than communicate, through this means of communication, other results were achieved.

It feels relieving [when being able to communicate with my mentor through technology] because if you are stressed, and you feel like no one understands you, I guess you'd feel more comfortable at that very moment to talk to someone that probably isn't part of your personal life, but who's willing to listen. And then you can relieve yourself from the stress that you are building, because this person doesn't know anyone else that you know. So you know they won't tell anyone else, but you can feel more relieved, because you can let it out. And this person [the mentor]... you can just contact this person and "Oh, none of my friends would listen to me... my teachers are just killing me... I am so stressed...I have so much homework..." (Karina)

This comment helps to elucidate of the meaning of technology for the mentee experience. Stories like this helped me to consider if technology was used by mentees to simply connect and communicate with their mentors, or if there was something other than communication that happened through the use of technology with-in a peer mentoring experience.

As the conversations with the mentees progressed, the more apparent it became that the use of technology seemed to be more a way of being *with-Others*, rather than just a means to communicate. Again the idea from Heidegger came to echo in my head:

The essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and on the other, fundamentally different from it. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 317)

What is technology for mentees? What does technology facilitate or inhibit *with-in* Latina/o peer mentees? What does technology do with-in the peer mentoring relationship? What do peer mentees experience by means of technology? What do mentees show or hide through technology?

If technology is used to reveal and to conceal, technology sheds new light on the peer mentoring experience. Before, technology may have been an instrument to use, but now, perhaps one can become the instrument of technology. These ideas need even further consideration.

Coming To Be With Technology

Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to essence of technology. (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 287-288)

Heidegger appears to foresee the future, which is our present. Today, technology can make us appear to be “unfree” and already “chained” to it. Technology does not appear only with-in the peer mentoring relationship; technology is a part of life and an extension of the peer mentee experience. Now, we all seem somewhat “trapped” with technology because it is present in every single daily activity. Undoubtedly, many activities are dependent on the use of technology. This is new for many of us (professors,

counselors, and administrators); we were born and grew up before the insurgence of technology. However, for college students, technology is not new; it has always been with them. Herein lays the first distinction about technology. For the older generation technology reveals a new part of life, whereas for the younger generation of college students, technology conceals its origin because it has always been present, an omnipresent aspect of living life.

Since my days as a college student, much has happened. Two decades ago, I lived the early days of the emergence of computers. Back then during my undergraduate college years, I had the privilege of carrying out research to prove the effectiveness that computers could help ESOL students learn vocabulary in English. In those days, this was called Computer Assisted Language Learning or CALL for short. Back then, the use of technology appeared as a revolutionary idea.

In today's digital era there are dozens of new devices in addition to the computer for learning vocabulary, including voice activated and controlled devices. Young people cannot conceive of life without computers or cell phones. Gabriela, one of the participants explains the omnipresence of technology in their lives:

We grew up with technology, so I don't know what we would do if we didn't [have technology].

For those of us who are older and in the middle of our lives, we experienced the technological revolution as something that took place during our lifetime over the last three decades. Technology has changed much of the way we live. For instance, we waited for messages to arrive, sometimes in the form of a letter, which was occasionally lost; we talked with people either in person or via a hard-line connection; we had to transport

ourselves physically to learn about or visit new places. Now technology allows us to communicate, connect and learn anytime, anywhere in today's world.

What have we learned about technology or through technology? What is in technology that helps or conceals? How can technology be of help to students as mentees? What is technology for college students within a peer mentoring experience?

The conversations with the mentees showed that technology is not new to them. Technology, as Gabriela and the other mentees states, has always been a part of their lives. Life for mentees is attached to technology. For them technology and its use is part of living whereas for older generations, technology is something many look at as a side plate in the grand dinner of life. For college students of this generation, technology--whatever devices they use--is intrinsically life and how life is meant to be lived, and this becomes an extension of the peer mentoring experience for mentees.

Being In Touch

If the use of technology reaches beyond communication purposes, an intrinsic part of being for mentees, consideration must be given to the way in which technology provides a "virtual" presence between the mentor and mentee. Heidegger (1927/2004) states that Being-in-the-world is being with-Others. But for mentees this being-in-the-world is also being-with-technology, or rather through technology. All students today have some form, or type of device, for being-in-the-world-with-Others. By means of technology, students communicate, but also and perhaps more importantly they "form" connections with Others. Again, Gabriela's words shed light on the use of technology:

I guess technology has played a big role in keeping us in touch. (Gabriela)

If the use of our bodies can help us touch and be in touch with Others, the use of technology can extend our capacity to touch or be in touch with Others. Touching is one of our senses. We touch to feel, we touch to recognize, we touch to greet Others, we touch to express affection, love and sometimes hate. But how can technology help us *touch* Others? How do we touch when we use technology? What do we touch when technology is used? What is touched in mentees when they use or are reached through technology?

The touch that occurs through technology seems to reach an inner aspect that mentees need to feel because it is how they live today. Perhaps, it would be awkward to ask mentees not to rely on technology or to limit the amount of technology they use to “keep in touch” with one an-Other. Perhaps, the touch that technology offers is more inviting and less intrusive than a touch that is done in person, with our hands, our presence, and in our physical bodies. Keeping in mind Heidegger’s words, which say that the essence of technology is not just the devices one may carry to communicate, perhaps, one can say that technology helps mentees to touch each other, providing the ability to be inter-connected with one an-Other at all times.

In *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being And Time*, Dreyfuss (1999) states that “Our understanding of our being is never fully accessible” (p. 35). Being-in, Dreyfuss explains in this text is being amidst existence, amidst being-in which is being-with-Others with whom we live. By touching each other through some form of technology, mentees may ameliorate the solitude and aloneness that caves in around the mentee. Through the touch of Others, even when through technology mentees may be able form the community they long for in college.

The word community means communion, union with Others (Neufeldt, 1977, p. 282). What appears to come forth is a new way of being or how we *be-come* in union through technology. For those of us who grew up without technology, we can say that perhaps we can live without technology; if we did not have it before, why do we need it now? However, for these mentees and other younger generations who have always used technology, the touch through technology seems so natural that without it they might feel that they are missing something. We need to remember that mentees, as part of a new millennium, learned to live in the current world, a world full of technology. Others have always been present to them through technology, whether it is an email, a phone call, a web chat, etc.

Staying In Touch

Initially I failed to see the additional meaning of technology when I saw it merely as a means of communication. Thus, I failed to comprehend that technology contributed to form community. Being in touch, touching each other was needed. Latina/o students as a minority, fewer in numbers, minor in influence, and less visible in a college campus needed this contact. The communication they had through technology only served to help them touch one another, have their presence felt when they were the only ones in their classes, the only ones of their kind walking along the hallways, and the only ones who could be identified as Latina/o students.

“So technology has helped us stay in touch a lot.” (Karina)

Mentees stayed in touch. Without touching, mentees were touched, and without being touched, they touched others, their mentors, as their mentors touched them, the mentees. This touching allowed them, mentees, to feel a surer part of a peer mentoring

relationship, to share experiences. Their messages went from just saying “Hi!” to asking for help in serious matters, such as choosing a major or coping with family obligations and school work.

Being able to communicate with their mentor at any time or ask any question helped mentees stay in the touch. In *The Lost Art Of Listening: How Learning To Listen Can Improve Relationships*, Nichols (2009) says:

Mutuality is a sense not merely of being understood but of sharing of being-with another person. Here it isn’t just *I* but *we* that is important. Our experience is made fuller by sharing it with another person. (p. 37)

Through technology, sharing can be prompted and facilitated when a student is busy, but stills needs help. It may be more comfortable to say “I’m in a hurry,” “I cannot meet you today,” “Sorry I have to go now,” via email, a phone call, a text message, a shout out in the internet, etc., rather than trying to meet in person. This allows the dyad to say what they want to say, ask what they need to ask, and somewhat cultivate a shared friendship while not being physically present all the time.

It’s hard to like meet up with people when you have your own stuff to do, and you are a senior, you have to get ready to graduate and things like that. So technology has helped us like staying in touch a lot. (Gabriela)

Gabriela had a busy schedule. As a junior transfer student with an education major, she had to plan and register her senior classes a year in advance, take the Praxis test to be a certified teacher, and apply for an internship, in addition to attending five classes. She had little time to explore places where to meet new friends; she was always “on the run.” She said her first year on campus was overwhelming at times and a source of great loneliness because she did not know anyone on campus upon her arrival. She also had two part-time jobs to pay for school. So technology was vital for her.

Despite difficulties with meeting her mentor in person, through technology they were able to touch, communicate and develop a mentoring relationship. And when schedules allowed, they found ways to meet. Busy schedules were a common challenge for most mentees and mentors.

Technology facilitated communication between mentors and mentees. Technology can allow us to touch one another, even when we are not present, even when our experiences are different. We can touch one another on the shoulder, so to speak, through technology and bring to the Other's attention our views and thoughts, as well as feelings. Mentors were able to act as a mentor by giving advice, encouraging students not to give up, and supporting their mentees whenever mentees seemed to be losing interest in studying or giving up, even though they were not face to face. As Heidegger states, "Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others" (1927/2004, p. 155). But if this world that is shared cannot be communicated or interpreted, it cannot be "shared" thus, here lies the meaning of technology. Technology serves to share the world in which we already exist. For many first year college students, technology, sharing and mentee-ing were synonyms.

As An Instrument and As A Process

According to ancient doctrine, the essence of a thing is considered to be *what* the thing is. We ask the question concerning technology when we ask what it is. Everyone knows the two statements that answer our question. One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 288)

Heidegger (1977) says that technology can be understood in two ways. One way to understand technology is as an instrument, usually to communicate, and the other way to understand technology is a process that occurs when technology is used to

communicate. The instrumental definition of technology refers to what is done with technology, to communicate, to stay in touch, to send a message, to send or read an email, etc. The anthropological definition of technology is what technology allows us to produce by means of it. This can be seen when receiving a message in a moment of distress; it can be comforting and reassuring for a student.

Renato shares a story about when he sent his mentor a text message after she lost a dear relative. He remembered that his mentor had been “there” for him when he had lost a close relative as well. The text message he sent her was in recognition that he was there for her as she had been for him. She understood his message, Renato said. Shortly after the message, she was back on campus and they were able to meet. This meeting renewed their mentoring relationship and he felt closer to her than before. Mentees may not mentor their mentors through advice and knowledge about college, but they can also be there for their mentors as their mentors are for them. Renato describes the mentoring relationship as a two way street. Claudio also says that it is a partnership of equals where one gives more than the other, but both parties give to one another.

Thus, even though two people were physically apart from each other, the reception of a text message at any time and place showed the mentee that he or she could be close to his or her mentor as the mentor had been for them. In this case, the use of technology provided a process that conveyed to both mentee and mentor that they cared for each other. Technology served to share and communicate their feelings and caring, something that Renato as a male and his mentor as female might have had trouble saying or expressing in person. Perhaps, the concealing of emotions due to self-consciousness or lack of confidence in expressing feelings can be eased through technology.

Another way that mentees experience the use of technology as an instrument and process was through information sharing. Most mentees were in constant need of information and advice. In one of our conversations Renato talks about the chaos he felt with a class that he was near to failing. In a text message, he disclosed this problem to his mentor, who responded that she had also struggled with the same class. Within a day his mentor, who I call Carla, was able to make an appointment with a tutor. Carla walked with Renato to the meeting and called him afterwards to find out how useful he thought it would be to work with the tutor.

Natalia also shares a story about her communication through technology. She struggled with some of her writing assignments. She felt embarrassed, nevertheless, she shared these assignments with Jeremiah, her mentor, via email. He proof read them and sent them back to her with corrections and suggestions, also via email. There was no need to meet face to face; but he always offered to review homework whenever she wanted.

I would email it [my paper] to him and he would actually email it back to me in a timely manner... like he would really look over it, correct some of the grammar mistakes, and give it to me in a timely manner.

Technology gave mentees the confidence that their mentors were always present even when not physically there. Information could be given by means of technology; help with school work could be asked and received through a technological means. The experience of using technology was useful for mentees, and it was also transformational in terms of what it did by means of that technology.

Students and technology. Heidegger warns against conceiving technology only as a means. He suggests being alert to the possible concealment that technology can bring about.

The coming to presence of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will be present itself only in the unconcealment of standing-reserve. (Heidegger 1977, p.315)

All mentees acknowledged technology as a vital component of their relationship with their mentors. “There are various types of technology; [this] was very, very helpful” (Gabriela).

Before and after the conversations I had with the participants, I saw the mentees using all forms of technology. I saw them reading and sending text messages. They made phone calls using touch screen cell phones. They checked emails on their laptops, which they carried in backpacks everywhere. Some of them had iPods (a digital music device capable of holding 10,000 songs, and also videos); one of them even came with an iPad, which is a flat one-sided touch screen computer with dual cameras for face to face web chatting. Gabriela trusted her iMac calendar, part of the iPad, with her schedule as the most reliable source of information for her daily living. She wanted to show me and validate that we were scheduled to meet an hour earlier. I did not realize that I was running late. This made me grasp the reality that college students really appear to live in a technological era, and furthermore, in a digital life.

What is in technology that captivates students so deeply? How do mentees come to adopt technology in their lives so fast? What does the use of technology create in the life of students and mentees that gets them following such devices as their compass?

As an individual from an older generation I feel nostalgic about the past. Students do not carry actual papers anymore. With the swipe of a finger, students allow us to be present in their lives, or make us disappear from their “presence.” In Heidegger’s terms, technology “conceals” and “reveals”.

As Gabriela talks about her peer mentoring experience, she moves one of her fingers over the screen of her iPad; our meeting is revealed and concealed. The surface of that device was the face of her consciousness. In that way, I was both present and not present. In front of me, with a swipe of one of her fingers, she went from the web chat she was having with a friend, to her daily schedule to show me where I fit into her life. A new screen showed my presence in her life, 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM, Tuesday May 3, 2011. I became “revealed.” With another swipe of her finger a new page appeared, as a new awareness of what her life could be, for instance her music, email, Internet, etc. She connected her awareness or what to do based on that device, what was revealed to her on the screen. This is how she knew where she was expected to *be*.

After I saw where my presence was in her life and that I have altered her scheduled by running late, with another swipe of her finger on her iPad screen, her conversation through web chatting became present to her once more. I momentarily disappeared or was concealed. She signed off with her conversant, and then, she became my conversant or revealed.

Technology as an instrument. Heidegger states that, “Technology itself is a contrivance in Latin, an *instrument*” (p.288). Technology is a means, an instrument in the hands of college students today. By means of technology, they can also be *with* each other. Heidegger explains it like this:

The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is. The whole complex of these contrivances is technology. Technology itself is a contrivance in Latin, an *instrumentum*. (1977, p. 288)

Heidegger suggests that one way to interpret technology is as an instrument, a means to an end. The way an instrument is used can also influence the way of being because of how an instrument is being used. Heidegger (1977) explained this as *causality*, referring to methods the Greeks used to explain how things came to be. It is not just the thing that causes a person to be how he or she is, but also how the thing may transform the person. A musician who plays the flute is a flutist; one who plays the piano is a pianist; and the one who plays the guitar a guitarist. But what is a mentee who uses technology to communicate? How can a mentoring relationship be called if it is based on technology?

Some names have been proposed for this conundrum, online mentoring and virtual mentoring. These forms of mentoring come with websites for guidance and implementation (e.g., <http://www.serviceleader.org/virtual/mentoringresources> retrieved on January 2, 2012)

When asked what technology did for her, another one of the participants says, “Technology has helped us, like staying in touch a lot” (Vanessa). Students can be in touch, they can touch Others through technology as previously discussed. Vanessa goes on to explain, “Physical... communicating is different from communicating with technology. I don’t feel like technology replaces it [face to face], but it helps you to get stuff done. Sometimes, you’d say things via a text that you would not say in person.” The use of technology can help to connect, but it can also separate people.

What do mentees communicate through technology? What is there to communicate as a mentee with a peer? What are the things mentees communicate when using technology?

It may not be so much how we communicate, but rather what we communicate, what we become by means of communication through technology that matters. It is easy to fall prey to the devices that give us the option of a quick email, a short text message, a virtual card on the net or another technical form. This may be a result of rushing through life, and along the way also rushing through *with* people. Rather than taking the time to expose oneself in a face to face meeting with an-Other, we tend to resort to technology. This can serve to camouflage our feelings, hide in secrecy, and create a false self, what Heidegger calls the “unconcealing of the being.”

Technology can conceal, as Heidegger (1977) warns, to prevent self-disclosure, but it can also help reveal our being. Through technology we may dare to say what we might not declare in person. Provided there is distance not to see the other person, at least for a while, it may seem easier to say what we feel through the Internet or in a text. Perhaps later, we can brush off the message, shrug our shoulders or nod. We could even pretend not to have said what the other person tells us we told them through email, Facebook or some other means. This is important to consider when technology is being used within a peer mentoring experience. Latina/o students enroll in these types of programs for the purpose of connecting with Others, to be-with Others, mainly those who are like themselves, as peers Latina/o students. For this, technology can help, but it can also prevent students from having a real encountering. Claudio regrets not meeting more often as a mentee with his mentor. Now as a mentor, he would like to meet more often in person, but his mentee prefers communicating by texting rather than meeting in person.

Facebook, text messaging, and cell phone calls were the most common means of communication that appeared among the participants of this study. These media showed a

new side of the phenomenon of what it is to be mentored for this generation of students. As already discussed, technology can help to communicate; it can also transform the way we choose to communicate with one another, the things we communicate in person and what we say through technology. In the following sections I discuss three forms of connectivity that mentees mentioned most often in this study.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the largest and undoubtedly the most popular form of communication and interconnectivity in the Internet today. Membership accounts on Facebook have reached over a billion people, mostly young people, although politics, mass media, and pop culture icons as well as academia are also making use of this type of virtual community to access and connect, again mainly with young people.

Professors include Facebook in their classes, and use it to connect with students. For young students, the use of Facebook and communication through Facebook is considered a key way to accept someone as a friend. Not to accept a request to be “friends” can be insulting and alienating. Some college campus offices request students to enroll in Facebook to share information and to keep them abreast of programs and events. Regardless of the possible downfalls of this media due to privacy concerns, Facebook is part of the daily life of students. There appears to be no turning back or away from Facebook, at least in the near future

What is it like to be a mentee connected through Facebook with a mentor? How is being-in a web form such as in Facebook different from being-in person? What can Facebook do or give Latina/o students that a person to person or face-to-face might not offer? These are some of the questions that came to my mind as I listened to the mentees’

stories. The use of Facebook seemed recurrent. Initially I hesitated. I thought this could be a trend that may fade away. But I realized that the use of Facebook was not only a new technology used in the mentee experience, but also the use of Facebook was an essential component of the mentee experience.

Without sites such as Facebook, the mentees who participated in this study would not have had the experience they had. Perhaps, some of the mentees like Gabriela and others who had busy schedules would have never developed a mentoring relationship if they had to wait until they could meet in person. Facebook became such an important aspect of their lives that leaving it out of this study would have meant to leave out part of the mentee experience of what made Latina/o students feel they were being peer mentored.

He Facebooked me. It is Claudio who used this phrase, “He Facebooked me.” Claudio highlights this action as the outcome of his first meeting with his mentor. The rite of passage for him was when his mentor added him as a friend in his Facebook page. Initially, I overlooked this action, but then Natalia also mentions this action as one of the outcomes of her first meeting with her mentor. Then, Gabriela mentions this action too, as a way she felt her mentor was there to help her any time.

What does Facebook do for the mentee experience? Who is the mentee who communicates through Facebook? Is there something in the communication through Facebook that may differ from the communication of person to person or face to face? If technology can bring us closer while physically distant, can it also separates us from those who we are physically close?

With-in all the conversations, all participants mentioned the use of Facebook. They all had a Facebook account, sometimes even two accounts. They felt especially happy when they were added as a friend in their mentor's Facebook page; this made them feel connected. They communicated more often and on a regular basis with their mentors on Facebook than they did in person. Some mentees expressed that they thought they were in more personal contact when their mentor added them as a friend.

I would just... like maybe Facebook them, I would be like hey! What's up? How are you doing? Like let's get lunch some times, just to catch up with them.. you know? (Jimena)

Now and then. While the use of sites such as Facebook is new--it is less than 10 years old-- it is undeniable in its effect and popularity, particularly with young people around the world. The use of Facebook is so common among mentees. As Jimena says, "He [her mentor] would like Facebook me to tell me stuff... So it was a good experience" Claudio, however, explains that despite the easiness of connection with Others, Facebook might not always be a permanent communication. This was illustrated with one Latino student he met during orientation as a freshman; "We befriended each other in Facebook and connected often." After some time, they "drifted apart." The other student lost interest and did not communicate with him through Facebook anymore.

Facebook may go away or fall out of fashion, but mentees expect to keep in contact, to keep hearing from their mentors, even after graduating. Constant communication with their mentors is not something students expect to go away. As Julia asserts,

[Communication] should be permanent... once you meet [your mentor]... like coming as freshman... even like during your senior year when you are graduating... you just are or should be in contact... even if you are not in the

program any more... like if I was a mentor... I would just.... like maybe Facebook them.

For now anyway, Facebook allows mentees to see new postings on their mentors; in this way they learn how their mentors' lives are progressing. With the possibility to comment on life events through pictures or updated statuses, mentors and mentees can post their text and stay connected with each other. Their feelings and hopes are known without the need for a private space and time because Facebook provides such spaces.

Facebook was the means whereby they showed their personal statuses, so the presence of the mentor and mentee was always "there" with each other. As soon as either one posted something, Others could see it, too. "The purpose is just to tell stuff," Karina says. Perhaps it was nothing profound, it rarely was, but the postings or rather the frequency of the postings made mentors and mentees feel connected. Regular postings contributed mentees to say what Julia says, "To have a good experience." They heard about their mentors even when mentors were not talking to them; mentees saw their mentor "revealing" their presence there, on the Facebook site. Mentees acknowledge the presence of their mentors through Facebook.

Facebook friends. The action of befriending, to become friends through Facebook, can be seen as a public acknowledgement to Others that a mentor has become friends with a mentee, and for the friends of the mentee to see that he or she has a new friend who is also his or her mentor.

Natalia, when asked how her first meeting went with her mentor, asserted with a tone of confidence, "He added me as a friend in his Facebook page." A smile appeared on her face. It was not the revelation that they were both Christians, nor the role her mentor played to help her during her first year, or the fact that he mentioned how hard it was to

combine Latino family obligations and school, but rather being added as a friend in Facebook that Natalia considered as an aspect in their relationship most worth mentioning. It was vital. This was for her, an epiphany after her first meeting with her mentor.

What is in the use of technology that makes students happy? What do mentees see by being accepted in Facebook or another site that appears as an accomplishment? What is the meaning of being Facebook friends for Latina/o peer mentees?

Becoming a friend in Facebook allows mentees and their other Facebook friends to see each other online. However, despite the easiness of being contacted through Facebook, the physical contact with each other also appears as vital for mentees. As Julia best explains,

I mean, yeah sometimes emailing, Facebooking are easier, but you also need to see them physically, to better the relationship, to make it closer. Because it show... the mentor actually cares enough to take the time of day to actually come and meet with you rather than just being like anyone can be on Facebook, and doing something else at the same time, but when they come out in person... it shows that they actually care for the mentee.

Although valuable and useful, Facebook has limitations as Julia warns. Mentees, at least occasionally, need to see their mentors face to face. They feel that mentors need to spend face-time with them to show that they, the mentor, really cares and that they are not doing something else while they chat or message mentees through Facebook.

Karina explains what she expects from her mentor and how she knows her mentored cared for her, even when they communicated through Facebook.

I guess it depends on your mentor. If you can communicate with your mentor and Camilla [my mentor] is really... well, Camilla is sociable. So she is always chatting me on Facebook and asking me if I need something this week, "If you need help, you need to tell me, so I can find help," "Or if you just want to talk." I mean, we have personal problems like... but my mentor always asks me, "Do you

want someone to talk to?” Or “Someone else?” It’s kind of confidential, like going to the doctor. You need to feel comfortable with your doctor because he’ll tell you what’s wrong, he’ll tell you what’s going on, and I guess, a mentor is just someone out there instead of, other than who you are used to. This is how your mentor is just helping you out.

The sincerity of the relationship is felt by Karina. Through these conversations she clearly recognizes that her mentor truly cares. Her mentor gives Karina the possibility of talking with her or to find someone else, whatever it takes to be helped.

Facebook allows mentors to be-there for their mentees. Being-there, being-with the mentor is how mentees have a “good experience.” Mentees felt their mentors’ presence even when their mentors were not present with them. The feel-good-effect of the experience lies not only with a mentor listening to mentees, but also caring for their needs, giving them options to talk to Others. Friends in Facebook might not be different than being friends in person, but mentees desire to be added as Facebook friends. As Karina explains, the use of technology such as Facebook can show that the mentor “is just available to you... Hmm, just there. And you don’t feel uncomfortable, trying to... [communicate] It doesn’t add stress to your stress.” Karina goes on to explain that being-in presence in a means such as Facebook is different from being alone, “Like when you have a class.” In class students are alone, they are forced to talk, are expected to have an opinion, they need to show they are present, and impress the teacher, the TA, other peers, etc. A class results in a grade; each moment is a possibility to improve that grade or fail the course, but through Facebook mentees do not feel alone, rather they feel the constant presence of their mentors.

Friendship can be honest or not. Being friends in Facebook may require the same effort and dedication as being a friend in a face-to-face relationship. The difference may

be the opportunity to connect instantly on Facebook and use what students from this generation already accept as “good” and as a sign of acceptance. In the future other means may also become popular that permit mentees to be accepted into and be-friended by Others. In the mean time, Facebook is used on a regular basis.

We Sent Text Messages

All the participants of this study used text messages, from the time they received their first phone. Some of them have had a cell phone for over a decade, half of their lives. They appear so attached to their phones as if the phones are a part of their bodies. Maybe, for them, phones are a part of their bodies. Consequently, it is not surprising to see that much of the communication they had with their mentors revolved around the use of text messages. Even Facebook is now available as an application that can be found in the phones (e.g., Blackberries, iPhones, and smart phones).

What is in a text? What does it mean to receive a text message for a Latina/o peer mentee? When is a text message suitable for a mentee? What is said in a text message?

Claudio says that while he did not meet very often with his mentor, they frequently sent each other text messages. Renato also said that although he had enrolled in *La Familia*, he did not become engaged in the program until his mentor sent him a text message at a time when he was struggling and losing interest in school. Gabriela could not imagine what it would be like not to have technology or to send each other text messages daily. All mentees expressed similar experiences of sending or receiving text messages from their mentors. Thus, this section appears as pertinent to describe another aspect of the peer mentee experience.

The ludic side of messaging. There is something playful about text messaging. Students, who like to play, accept the use of text messaging as a game. They use short phrases and jargon in their text messages, they can send them quickly, and they do not need to sit down, open or turn on a laptop to text. Students have developed their own code to communicate, all for the sake of making communication fast and accessible to Others as often as possible.

Phones are not only used to make voice calls; it seems that text messages are more common than calls now. More students reply to a text message than to a phone call. There are ways to communicate and codes that allow for faster typing. A whole new language or idiom has developed as part of the communication through text messages. For instance, “lol” means *laughing out loud*, a common reply to something that is funny, “ttil” means *talk to you later* when the person is busy, and “brb,” which means *be right back*, is used to ask the other person to wait. There are many other similar expressions commonly used through texting.

Students appear addicted to this form of communication as if it were a video game or some other high tech toy. They send each other text messages while in class, on the way to class, in the halls, even when they are present in the same classroom. The connectivity that allows a text message is instantaneous. Once a message is sent, it can be read immediately. It is one of the forms called “chatting.” Initially chatting was a basic program over the Internet that allowed two people to talk with each other for free, regardless of their location. Today there are updated forms of chatting, including video and texting, offered on many technology means that allow more than two students to chat together at the same time.

Texting as weaving strings of meaning. The word text comes from the Latin word *tex*, which means weaving. And while today we associate the word text with a written document, it is not hard to see that a text is made up of words that are woven together to create a message with a meaning. As a piece of cloth with a finite number of colors, the weaving can result in a plethora of combinations and designs. This is also true with words and texts. There are a somewhat fixed number of words in a language; yet the combinations of those words appear to be endless. Based on the word selections and arrangement, an oral or written linguistic piece can be classified as a poem, a fairy tale, a romantic novel, a personal conversation, etc. It is not just in the word combinations, but in the meaning that is conveyed where mentees feel support and valued through the use of texting to communicate with-in the peer mentoring experience.

Receiving a text from their mentor proved to the mentees the presence and the actual listening of their mentors to their questions, requests, and inquiries:

Like when I would tell him I have this project... and you know... I didn't do so well in this exam... well, I have this paper coming up... he would actually listen and he would text me later and say good luck on your exam or let me know if you need... if you need somebody to review your exam... and like I would email it to him and he would actually email it back to me in a timely manner... like he would really look over it for some of the grammar mistakes, so he was not just offering but he would actually give it to me in a timely manner. (Natalia)

Natalia also says,

We can meet whenever you [the mentor] have time... and then I texted him and we met at McKeldin (library).

This showed Natalia, as it did other mentees, that if mentors had time, at any time, a text message could help them to spend some time together.

Close to one an-Other. Sending and receiving text messages appears as a personal and intimate act, not in the sense of private, but as an act of sharing spaces and

letting each other know that they were thinking about each other. For mentees it proved to them that they were cared about. As Natalia says, her mentor would text her later, and for Natalia this meant that her mentor actually listened to her.

For Natalia, as with the other mentees, there was a responsibility for mentees toward their mentors.

I guess they [the mentees] should try to make it easy for the mentor and text them you know... I'm free these days... can you meet up? Instead of... waiting on the mentor to text you because sometimes they can get busy too... And they have things going on, too. So if you want... want to meet with them or if you, you know... just text and take the initiative, just text them and talk to them. (Natalia)

How could mentees not text their mentors? Texting is free! Texting is expected, not only because it is easy but also fast. The use of technology is not a one way street. Mentees could also contact and reach out to their mentors. Perhaps, without a face to face that could intimidate a person, the use of text messaging helped ease the awkwardness of getting to know someone, so that when they did meet person to person or face to face, the commonality of somewhat knowing each other through texting aided in a better peer mentoring relationship.

Questions can be asked, ideas can be shared without the apprehension of being physically together. An answer can be given without fear by having something that mediates between mentor and mentee. When I asked Natalia, "How does a mentee feel comfortable in a mentor/mentee relationship? What makes you comfortable?" her answer was:

The fact that Jeremiah... hmm... texting me... and he... you know... he would message me in Facebook... even if it was not about school... or the mentoring program... and he was telling me... what his life goals were... and kind of... I wasn't the only one sharing my... my personality... and goals in life... he was also sharing with me about what was going on in his life... so I felt he gave me

enough about himself... for me to... let him... you know... get to know me, also.
(Natalia)

It was not only the mentee sharing. The easiness of talking through text messages gave Natalia the courage to ask a male mentor personal questions, share her life goals, and get to know each others' personalities. This is something that may appear as awkward and difficult to achieve face-to-face. But through texting, when they had their first face-to-face meeting, they had conversations that in normal circumstances may take years to attain. The use of technology can ease the break-through and perhaps speed it up while still letting the mentee, and likely the mentor as well, feel comfortable. Given that the use of smart phones, Blackberries or iPhone was common among all mentees, text messaging appears as a free, easy to access and familiar form of communication. Also, the informal type of language that can be used with codes can help to ease and speed up the communication between mentor and mentee. Two people are sharing with each other, instantly and with-each-other. As Renato says, "I related to her, and she related to me. So... she helps me, I mean... she texts me, she calls me sometimes. You know? She checks on me, and she is 'How are you doing?' or 'Where are you?' and sometimes I do the same, back to her, you know? Just you know, to stay in touch." As Renato says, "Technology helped us to be in touch." This is how mentees were also in touch with their mentors through texting, but also by calling each other.

We Talked On The Phone

Talking on the phone seemed less exciting to many students. They appeared to prefer the use of newer means such as Facebook or Skype, a form of live camera chatting where two or more participants can see each other while they talk. Although Skype is a

popular means of communication and students liked it, it is not included in this study because mentees did not regularly use it to communicate with each other.

Answering phone calls appeared optional for many students. Calls seemed to be intrusive; nevertheless, phones were used some times. Mentees called their mentors with questions, doubts, and just to say hi! When I called them on the phone, it often went to voice mail, and then they generally called back. But when I sent text messages, they always replied, almost immediately.

Karina talks about her experience using email and text messaging. One time she had a paper that she wanted her mentor to look at and provide some constructive critiques to improve the paper. Due to her classes and because she procrastinated, Karina emailed the paper to her mentor the night before the paper was due. Karina also included a text message asking her mentor to read the paper by the next morning.

Karina says she was embarrassed to call her mentor and risk waking her up, given that she finished and sent her paper at 2 AM. After she sent her text message her mentor replied in one minute. Karina expresses much joy over the presence of her mentor who was there for her. Her mentor would read the paper; she did not mind the amount of work it would take her to make corrections to the paper. Karina says with joy, “she was there.”

It seems important to Latina/o students, as mentees, to have a mentor who is there for them, and most importantly it seems that *there* is there through technology. This means mentors “are” there at any time.

Karina got her paper back the next morning, edited. It was easy for Karina to make the corrections before she printed it out on her way to class. She never met with her mentor in person until a week later, but her mentor was “there for her.” It is not only to

be there, but to see the Other there through technology, that makes mentees feel they are in a peer mentoring relationship. They do not have to wait until they meet. Mentors and mentees are and can be present and reachable at any time.

Technology is not only a means; it is a way of being there for the Other. Mentees have or can have their mentors there instantly. There is no wait and see. If the mentor replies, they have a person instantly present, whether it is 2 AM as was the case of Karina, or the next morning. Her paper had a reader, and she was able to complete it in the company of someone who cared for her.

From Devices To Virtual Communities, Mastering Technology

But this much remains correct: modern technology too is a means to an end. This is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology “spiritually in hand.” We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 289)

We are accustomed to controlling or mastering our environment. We live in climate controlled spaces, we drive cars to get to where we want to go, and artificial light can transform night into daytime. We live in boxes (rooms, offices, and cars) and we also use boxes to communicate and see the world (TVs, computers, ipads, tablets). It is not mandatory to attend a concert in person; we can turn on another box and listen to the concert, or open a box and put in a DVD to watch the recorded concert as it is played. Living in boxes demands attention when being mentored also comes out of a box (a phone, a message through computer).

Despite widespread use of technology, there is controversy and hesitancy in the use of technology, mainly in education. Warschauer (2010), in *Technology And Social*

Inclusion: Rethinking The Digital Divide, tackle the problem that access or the lack thereof to technology creates a technological divide, a division that can affect social communities based on income and younger generations who are keener with adopting the use of technology versus older generations. This can affect schools, which tend to be reluctant to hire or retain teachers, often older people, who are unfamiliar with technology and thus scared and hesitant to include the use of technology in their classroom teaching. To off-set this divide, Solomon, Allen, and Resta (2002) propose solutions to include technology in the classroom and teaching as early as possible. This appears as a suitable recommendation given that young Latina/o students, including those who become mentees, do not appear to shy away from the use and inclusion of technology in their mentoring relationship.

Egbert (2008) proposes the use of technology in education, although his call may sound like a late call. Most students use all types of technological devices to communicate with each other and to create their own virtual realities. Some of them have used technology for over a decade now, more than half of their lives. Some students learned to insert a DVD or turn on a TV much earlier than they learned to read and write. Before learning their 3 Rs some students learned to rewind, forward, play and pause.

The use of these devices and other digital forms of communication through technology appear as an intrinsic part of the daily life of all students. Whether they have a laptop or not, they can have access to one or they can borrow and use the latest ipads or tablets (light, portable computers.) The library, Union, and other places with-in a college campus have many of the technology gadgets available for lending to students. Moreover, all students have cell phones, many with the latest updated software programs that can

function as mini computers. Phones can connect to the Internet for providing wireless service. With these little devices, students can do everything from making a phone call to reading tweets--which are usually one-liner messages--, read or send email documents, download homework, watch TV, listen to music, etc. It is no wonder that technology enters the mentee experience. It is this high tech lifestyle of instant connectivity that leads to particular forms of communication that are unique to this type of technology.

There are codes, statuses, synchronization of programs that let all students connect with each other, and instant sharing of data as location, experiences, and activities. They share and remind each other of events, programs, and other events. However, despite all of this technology to connect and to communicate, Latina/o students, as well as many other students, still acknowledge feeling lonely. The plethora of words and devices that fill spaces, physical and mental spaces, still seem insufficient to fill the spaces that separate people from each other. For the mentees who participated in this study, three ways of being (Being-with, Being-in, and Being-for) through technology appear as identifiable in their own right.

In *The Art Of Being* (1989/1992), Erick Fromm, an existential psychologist who extensively wrote about the being of human beings in position of having or doing, asks two important questions, questions that validate the value of this study: "What is the goal of living? What is life's meaning for man?" (p. 1). These questions appear as relevant today as they were decades or centuries ago. There are religious answers for them, there are empirical answers for them, there are biological answers for them, etc. All possible answers lead back to what Fromm and many other scholars have concluded since long

time ago: “We are happy if our wishes are fulfilled, or, to put it differently, if we have what we want” (p. 2).

What do Latina/o peer mentees want? What do mentees find within a peer mentoring experience? What is given to them even through the use of technology?

Through technological devices and software applications, the mentee experience appears to be shaped and becomes what mentees want to be. Mentees want to be successful students like their mentors. Part of how Latina/o students experience the power of mentoring in their lives is by making sense of their experience in college and learning from their mentors that others can also succeed. Despite the lack of Latina/o students on campus, despite parents and siblings who do not understand what they need to do as students, despite that they are alone, they have peers who act as their mentors, and above all, these mentors serve as role models who are willing to be with mentees, and help mentees achieve what they, the mentor, has achieved.

Heidegger describes technology as a means, a means to an end. Nonetheless, in some aspects it is also a way of being within a peer mentoring relationship, a particular way of being where certain topics or feelings can be shared with others through technology. While a person can also create avatars that are representations of beings, those they may want to be and partly those who they are, avatars only are mere representations of the self a person. Perhaps they are only partial representations, and after all creations of Being in a virtual world. However, these creations through technology are also “worlds” where experiences can also be lived.

Living authentically is something mentees can have as an option, thanks to the help received from mentors and programs like *La Familia*. Because technology has

become accessible to everyone in today's world, regardless of a person's economic status, this facility can both help as well as inhibit Latina/o students to access the connections, with Others. The choices that make students who they are, are the choices that help them to reach and be reached. Heidegger is right; it is a means, a means to being, being like mentors while still being who they are, while still being their self.

As May (1961) states in *On Becoming A Person: A Therapist' Views Of Psychotherapy*, "We cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly *accept* what we are" (p. 17). Acceptance of who we are for our own self, and those who are *with* us, and *for* us, just as mentees expect their mentors to be *for* them and to accept mentees as they are so each mentee can become who he or she wants to be.

But this much remains correct: modern technology, too, is a means to an end. This is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring persons into the right relation to technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, "get" technology "spiritually in hand." We will master it. The will to master becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control (1977, p. 289).

This different means of communication can provide instant access to both information and to the possibility of connecting with others. It can help mentees remind themselves of the reason they are in college and that while they may not see many Latina/o peers, they can access those who are one, two, or more years ahead of them, some of them ready to graduate. They can say as Gabriela said to me, "I can do this, too!" It is possible because if this person, the mentor can graduate, a mentee can also graduate.

The multiple ways technology connects *with* people can also be a way of being, being like the mentor, being *with* the mentor, and being *in* the position the mentor is in. A person can have website profiles, where they can choose the information to share, how to share the information, the post, and with whom to share information. However, a mentee knows that the person he or she talks to is a person who is like himself and they can see how much the mentor cares about them.

The End Can Be A Beginning

At the beginning of this chapter I used quote from *Alice In Wonderland*. In this quote the main character, Alice, says,

Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop. (Carroll, 1965/1993)

However, the end of a story is not always the final end. Sometimes, the end is just the beginning of a new journey. The conclusion of this study says, the experience of the mentee is the experience of a student who is helped by a peer during their first year in college to ameliorate the solitude and the feeling of abandonment they suffer as Latina/o students, more needs to be considered.

What happens once these feelings are overcome? What happens after Latina/o students as mentees have learned to cope with discrimination or prejudice in the company of peers? What comes next for Latina/o students in college experience in college?

The fullness of human life lies in living life, and not denying the experience we go through. To live may seem simple, but to live with purpose, with meaning, and with intention is complex and demands courage. In *The Courage To Be*, Tillich (2000) writes,

Courage is self-affirmation “in spite of,” that is in spite of that which tends to prevent the self from affirming itself.” (p. 32)

The experience of life has as its purpose to confirm who we are, and despite the opposition (assumptions, prejudice, and other limitations), being true to who we are and who we want to become is paramount for a truthful and meaningful life. Consequently, as the in mythical origin of mentoring when after many adventures Odysseus finally goes back home, he finally begins to live, the end of his study which shows that Latina/o students thanks the mentee experience can be who they want to be, the type of student they dream of being. However, this needs to have a peer mentoring experience that is reaffirming of the self, as Tillich suggests for which courage is needed.

The next part of this study is the study refers to the lessons learned. This can be interpreted as the pedagogical learning that has come about from this study. If the Self of the mentee is reaffirmed through peer mentoring, and if solitude and “need to be” are seen as deficit modes of Latina/o students in a college or higher education, as educators we need to reflect on what can be done to improve the conditions that result in the restrictions Latina/o students perceived in relation to their development.

Thus, with the words of Gabriela Mistral, a Chilean poet and educator, from the poem titled “Decalogue of the Teacher,” I transition from what has been learned about the peer mentee experience to what can be taught so educators and supporters of peer mentoring can do to improve the educational experience of Latina/o students, and possibly other students who have similar experiences to them. The poem, found in the next page, I present in a bilingual format to help monolingual readers understand its message.

DECALOGO DEL MAESTRO

Gabriela Mistral

1.- AMA. Si no puedes amar mucho, no enseñes niños.

2.- SIMPLIFICA. Saber es simplificar sin restar esencia.

3.- INSISTE. Repite como la Naturaleza repite las especies hasta alcanzar la perfección.

4.- ENSEÑA con intención de hermosura, porque la hermosura es madre.

5.- MAESTRO. Se fervoroso. Para encender lámparas has de llevar fuego en tu corazón.

6.- VIVIFICA tu clase. Cada lección ha de ser viva como un ser.

7.- CULTIVATE. Para dar hay que tener mucho.

8.- ACUERDATE de que tu oficio no es mercancía sino que es servicio divino.

9.- ANTES de dictar tu lección cotidiana mira a tu corazón y vé si está puro.

10.- PIENSA en que Dios te ha puesto a crear el mundo de mañana.

DECALOGUE OF THE TEACHER

Gabriela Mistral

1.- LOVE. If you cannot love much, do not teach children.

2.- SIMPLIFY. To know is to simplify without reducing essence.

3.- INSIST. Repeat as Nature repeats the species until reaching perfection.

4.- TEACH with intention of beauty, because beauty is mother.

5.- MASTER. Be fervent. In order to ignite lamps you have to carry fire in your heart.

6.- VIVIFY your class. Each lesson has to be alive like a being.

7.- CULTIVATE. In order to give it is necessary to have much.

8.- REMEMBER that your craft is not merchandise but that it is divine service.

9.- BEFORE dictating your daily lesson look at your heart and see if it is pure.

10.- THINK that God has put to you to create the world of the future.

(translated by Carlos Zalaquett, 2012)

CHAPTER FIVE: *BILDUNG* AS THE FORMATION OF THE SELF WITH-OTHERS AS A PEER MENTEE

Setting The Final Path

At the end of a research project, the reader expects a “word of wisdom” that is distilled from the study. In today’s research, there is a tendency to give a recipe that can cure, solve or simplify a problem. There is a reluctance to present the investigation of something with the sole purpose of providing a further and deeper understanding of it (Creswell, 2007). This lack of understanding for the sake of understanding is not often frequently offered through other research methods. Most people are used to receiving or expecting easy fast answers. However, phenomenology breaks away from this tradition and claims a return to the things themselves (van Manen, 1997). Understanding is the base for action; understanding needs to be at the core of our living, and understanding is the first step for promoting change that is liberating rather than perpetuating oppression. As Freire (1970/2002) explains:

Human beings emerge from the world, objectify it, and in doing so can understand it and transform it with their labor. (p. 125)

Phenomenology claims a return to the essences of things, what Husserl called “the things themselves,” so we can once more re-live what an experience was like and those who did not can understand it from the inside. Phenomenology, as a research methodology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon. Its purpose is to lead to a closer contact with what makes a person human. Van Manen (1997) states that it is not what we can do with phenomenology what matters most. The aim of a phenomenological study is rather what phenomenology can do *for* the researcher as well as those who are affected by the investigation. There is a transformational aspect in doing

phenomenological research, and this helps the researcher to become more tactful in a pedagogical way. Pedagogy is at the core of phenomenology because it looks for ways to improve educational practice. And consequently, pedagogy is the return to which the study is about.

In a humanistic frame of mind, grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, this last chapter describes some of the insights gained. To do this, two concepts are drawn from phenomenology: *Bildung* and *Self*. They are used to discuss the knowledge gained through this research project.

Distilling “Wisdom” From The Study Of A Human Experience

At the end of every encounter, at the end of every journey, and at the end of every experience one may live, there is always something learned, even when we may forget about it, because we can all learn from every experience we live. This is how we collect “wisdom,” which can be interpreted as the knowledge that we share with Others as well as the knowledge we share with ourselves. Nevertheless, it may appear presumptuous to relate one’s work with the word “wisdom.” Thus, this concept needs further explanation to avoid such an assumption.

Although the word wisdom usually is associated with senior people, it can also be gained when an experience is deeply thought about and analyzed. While people of advanced age are expected to have “wisdom,” they are not the only ones who have it.

Certainly, it is hoped that seniors would be wise, due to the long life they have lived, which likely has given them the opportunity to live many experiences, from which they can draw many lessons. But Sacred Texts (e.g., The Bible, The Koran, the Popol Vuh, and others.) are considered sources of “wisdom” as well, and because of that, they

are often quoted. In the mythical and religious realm, “wisdom” is also found in the men or women who may have retrieved themselves from the world, and spend their entire life time in meditation, contemplation, and close contact with nature to reach enlightenment (e.g., Buddha, Confucius, and others). Scientists can also be said to have “wisdom.” They are considered to have wisdom because they may work on something (e.g., a study, a research project, and others) for many years. Therefore, the reader may wonder what “wisdom” can be found in a qualitative study done by a graduate student.

What can constitute wisdom within a phenomenological study? How can wisdom be shown or shared with Others? Is wisdom the opposite of factual knowledge? What can be said so it can be considered wisdom? What is the wisdom that comes out of this study? What is the “wisdom” that comes out of the study of the peer mentee experience from Latina/o students?

Instead of associating the word wisdom with the expertise of a scientist or the vast knowledge of a senior person, I propose to use this word in a metaphorical way to present some of the “soundest courses of action” learned from the knowledge gained through this study, but through a pedagogical standpoint. As van Manen says, “All theory and research were meant to orient us to pedagogy in our relations” (p. 136), and I would add, in our relations with those we care to know. Going back to the etymology of the word mentee, it means to be thought about, from the root *ment*, but to think comes from Old Greek, meaning also to think with care, with attention (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 848; Roberts, 1999).

I care about the peer mentee because as a Latino student myself, I see this practice being used extensively with those who are of my ethnicity. Before this study, I failed to

find the rational of how the “good” experience promised through this practice came to happen. Now after completing this study, I have increased my understanding about the Being of a mentee. Being mentored is part of a social process whereby a Latina/o student is helped through the validation of who they are. Mentees find their Self, the person who they want to be in the company of peers who mentor them. But more than this, Latina/o students can receive a complete educational experience from their peers.

Time Has Helped

In *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary On Heidegger's Being And Time*, Dreyfus (1999) writes:

What Martin Heidegger is after in *Being and Time* is nothing less than deepening our understanding of what it means for something (things, people, abstractions, language, etc.) to be. He wants to distinguish several different ways of being and then show how they are all related to human being and ultimately to temporality. (p. 1)

This research study has taken place over a period of 5 years. The result is a type of knowledge that has resulted in a deeper understanding of the peer mentee experience. Future mentees, and supporters and practioners of peer mentoring who read this study might be able to reach a deeper level of reflection and comprehension of the mentee experience. The knowledge offered here is not a matter of abstracts, but of essentials. This study shows some of the essential elements of a peer mentoring relationship for Latina/o students who are mentees. And this study concludes with the meaning of temporality in the mentee experience as part of the educational experience of Latina/o students. Here lies the wisdom of this study.

Wisdom is unavoidable, when we reflect upon our and other people's experiences, we can clarify and make explicit the meaning of lived experiences (van

Manen, 1997, p. 77). For instance, before his departure, in the last chapter about the friendship between the Little Prince and the fox, the latter character shared a secret with the Little Prince. This was the wisdom the fox had gained through his existence. The purpose of sharing this secret with the Little Prince was not only to confirm what the Little Prince had learned by taming the fox, but also, to teach something else, some of the wisdom the fox had learned about life and living. This seemed important to the fox in case the Little Prince may have overlooked this piece of knowledge through the experience of taming or establishing ties with each other. The fox said to the Little Prince:

And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." "What is essential is invisible to the eye," the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember.

The final thought and lesson learned from this study can be summarized, as “What is essential is invisible to the eye.” The physical eyes often only look at the outside world, and not the inside world. The process of reflection requires training and purpose; it does not seem to happen without intentionality. The result of reflection is a look back, to see what is often inside rather than out, while it is manifested in the exteriority of our actions and drives.

What else has been learned from this study? What is the meaning of the peer mentee experience within a temporal perspective? How can the wisdom of this study be shared with Others? What has been distilled from this study, even when not initially intended?

The word of wisdom that is presented in this last chapter does not come from my personal voice alone. The wisdom that is distilled in this study comes mostly from the

cumulative voices of the participants. It also comes from some of the scholars whose books and articles I have read and cited in this study throughout the previous chapters. Some of the cited scholars have expressed encouragement, and have believed in this project. For instance, Kvale from Denmark shortly before his unexpected passing--sent me the preface of his new book to guide me with the interpretation of my conversations. Moustakas' assistant emailed me, when I began working on Chapter Two. He encouraged this study using phenomenology. Colley emailed me from England with words of support to explore mentoring from another novel perspective. Roberts from Wales sent me a warm email of encouragement. Castellanos from California and Gloria from Wisconsin found this study interesting. Gibson encouraged my study to answer her call to pursue the study of mentoring through phenomenology. Nevertheless, most rewarding of all has been the support received from the participants of this research project. They entrusted me with their voices to say what they lived, and what they learned through and about mentoring and peer mentoring.

What Is Left To Say?

Phenomenology is a form of research that aims at creating a textual interpretation of an experience (van Manen, 1997). Interpretive inquiry treats a phenomenon--a human experience--with care and freedom. The purpose of phenomenology is identification and description rather than modification and control (van Manen, 1997). Questions come back again and again and phenomenology accepts them because they help further plough the road that a phenomenological interpretation has carved.

What is left to say after an interpretation is presented? What needs to be said after an explanation is given? What can be gained beyond the uncovering of a phenomenon?

As a result of this study, it can be said that being a mentee can be a transformational experience in college for some students, particularly those who had a good peer mentoring experience. Herein lays the temporality of the meaning of this experience. This chapter also brings forward some aspects of the mentee experience that were partially covered in previous chapters, recognizing that some aspects of mentoring still remain incomplete. This incompleteness suggests the need for further research.

As I consider the questions that did not get raised, I take heart in Rilke's words:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (1929/2000, p. 35)

The questions that surfaced in this study attempted to clarify the mentee experience. The questions that were asked need to be revisited in order to reconnect with the lived experience of mentees. Questions can reveal, as well as remind us, how students are educated. Latina/o students in college are more than trained in a field, science or occupation. They are and need to be "formed," and encouraged to develop in a holistic manner, both inside as well as outside the classroom. Thus, the key concept of this chapter is *Bildung*.

The Concept of *Bildung*

To understand a human experience, of what a student's education is like, requires language to lend a helping hand in many forms (e.g., metaphors, stories, coinages, and others). Phenomenology also invites the recovery of old terms that may help in the elucidation of a phenomenon.

The language, which is used for the foundations of what today's education is or wants to be, demands a look back at terms that served as the bases of current educational thinking. One of these terms is ***Bildung*** which Gadamer (1960/1994) explains as:

The concept of *self-formation, education, or cultivation (Bildung)*, which became supremely important at the time, was perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century, and it is this concept which is the atmosphere breathed by the human sciences of the nineteenth century, even if they are unable to offer any epistemological justification for it. (p. 9)

And then he adds:

The concept of *Bildung* most clearly indicates the profound intellectual change that still causes us to experience the century of Goethe as contemporary, whereas the baroque era historically remote. (p. 9)

The concept of ***Bildung*** can help us further understand how peer mentoring helps Latina/o students, and what gaps peer mentoring appears to fill. In the following section, I describe what peer mentoring seems to help and promote in the education of Latina/o students. Moreover, I reflect upon what education is and what it should be, based on the needs of the mentees and their other personal identities.

Making The Connection With The Past

The challenge of utilizing old concepts or terms, despite their historical validity, requires a return in time (Eco, 1976, 1986). Some aspects of old concepts can be assumed, while others need to be relearned to gain a renewed interpretation of how these concepts connect and are present in today's world. Consequently, one has to stop and wonder how terms such as ***Bildung*** connect and relate to the Latina/o peer mentee experience.

What is *Bildung* in the peer mentee experience? How is the concept of *Bildung* found within the peer mentoring experience? How does a philosophical concept of

German philosophy find its way into the experience of Latina/o students? What is the relationship between *Bildung* and the peer mentoring experience of Latina/o students?

Purists of the Latino culture will always strive to find examples or terms that come from Latin America or Latino culture in the USA to interpret their experience. This can often be done. But at times, foreign concepts need to be used because the experience some Latinas/os live is grounded in another culture. Also, terms found in other cultures can sometimes be a better fit to interpret an experience. Although borrowing terms is taking something that may not have an origin in the group that is being studied and so this may have some limitations.

While the term *Bildung* is a borrowed from another ethnic group, it can help to explain how peer mentoring contributes to the education of Latina/o students in college.

Gadamer (1960/1994) can help further clarify this concept:

Bildung (like the contemporary use of the German word “Formation”) describes more the result of the process of becoming than the process itself. The transition is especially clear here because the result of *Bildung* is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual *Bildung*. (p. 11)

Gadamer further adds:

What constitutes the essence of *Bildung* is clearly not alienation as such, but the return to oneself which presupposes alienation, to be sure. (1960/1994, p. 14)

Bildung usually is translated as education. However, what it is understood by education today seems to be restricted more to content and the formal process of education as divided into grades and levels. *Bildung*, on the contrary, means construction of the Self, the cultivation of the self, and of human nature. Thus, the concept of *Bildung* seems more extensive than having an education and some knowledge, or attending

classes or passing certain educational levels. It refers, as Gadamer explains, to an ideal of man or woman, the one a person wants to be or become. It refers to the ideals teacher as representative of society want to form. And it can be interpreted as the ideal Latina/o students strive to become.

The term *Bildung* suits the nature of this study for several reasons. Peer mentoring is not only a matter of tutoring or telling someone what to do (Coley, 2003). Education is more and it should be more Freire, (1970/2002). Mentoring contributes to the *Bildung* of Latina/o students because it intends to form a relationship that educates, guides, and builds upon ideals. It is a relationship that occurs within an educational system, and in an educational institution such as a college or a university, but it goes beyond to what happens outside of a physical space of classroom, while it still takes places in a university or college.

The need to belong. The participants of this study described their need to belong as essential to engage in their educational experience. Those who are mentees have a mentor *with* them. Mentors can help mentees feel they are *in* a place where they are wanted and to which they belong; and if mentees drift away at some point in time, they can be reminded of the reasons *for* which they came to college. This was explained in more detail in the previous chapter, but this is pertinent to remember because it is part of the formation Latina/o students receive in college.

So that's pretty much what I think you get from *La Familia* besides like the feeling the sense of that you belong to a *familia*. (Victoria)

When I am in the *La Familia* writing workshops or their time management workshops, one of their activities or get-togethers or study sessions, hm... It kind of reinforces my belonging I guess, and even in the earlier parts, like it helped me increase that belonging, because I didn't really have that belonging prior to *La*

Familia, or college. Back in high school I didn't feel I belonged to any kind of big race, I guess you would say... or ethnicity. (Claudio)

I felt I wanted to belong... but I didn't really have a chance because not many people talk to you... when you know... especially... coming from a community college... you are already behind... in knowing people... so you feel at a disadvantage because you don't know anybody. (Natalia)

What is there in the peer mentoring experience that helps students stay in college?

How do the feelings towards their mentors and mentees stay after their mentoring experience concludes? Why is the need to belong with Others so compelling to Latina/o students?

The formation of students starts with their sense of belonging (see bell hooks, 1994, 2003; Palmer, 1998). For a Being to be, one needs to be in a place that recognizes one for oneself. Self needs to be seen as it is present and not expected. However, minority students who are few in numbers can also feel less present in college due to their weakened influence. Thus, it is likely they struggle to feel that they belong in a college setting. As O'Donohue (1999) states, "The human heart is a theater of longing. One of our deepest longings is to find love and friendships" (p. xxv). Sometimes students can feel they are part of their school, but sometimes they may not.

A college education, in particular, is part of the formation that individuals need to have today for the ideal of the person they want to become in society. This forces Latinas/os as well as students from other groups to attend college. Nevertheless, the enrolling in an institution of higher education does not always translate into a feeling of being welcomed or feeling they belong to a place where they need to attend classes to obtain a college degree (see Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). But by being a mentee,

Latina/o students can find Others like themselves with whom they can create a sense of belonging through the finding of Others, peers who are like them.

Faculty and administrators can help create places of belonging (see Castellanos & Jones, 2003). This must be a shared task and responsibility, and not something placed upon mentors to help mentees or mentees who “have to” make their mentoring relationship work; otherwise, they will be left to their own devices to cope with college. This last scenario can be overwhelming and result in the disengagement of Latina/o students’ educational experience due to exhaustion. Karina talked extensively about the need to crack jokes, relieve stress and the need for new faces. Natalia saw her mentor as an inspiration and someone who listened to her. All mentees agreed that it was helpful to have someone assist with their stress and cope with the responsibilities of their daily experience between college, home, and work. Not having someone to give Latina/o students company or who could help them feel they belong contributes to a feeling of hopelessness. Some of them as Gabriela and Julia said, “No matter how hard you try you cannot make it work on your own here [meaning college].”

I have felt this before. Having few peers to ask questions of, being expected to perform at a certain level but not having an attentive ear to listen, or lacking a text message from a friend, all contribute to feelings of isolation. Walking through the halls of campus, and rarely seeing faces that I can recognize, I seldom hear my native language in some places on campus, although Spanish is so common in the US. Also, I hardly ever find people who understand what it is to care about an aging parent, unless they have one. But often, other Latinas do understand that whether they are undergraduate or graduate students. This is part of the “you know” students said to me over and over again. And

yes, I know, and they know, we all know because we live similar experiences as Latinas/os.

The need to belong to a group. All the participants talked about their need to belong. College is a place where this cannot be taken for granted. Mentees with their peer mentors, peers who have carved the path ahead for them, give them a sense they can belong too. As O'Donohue states, "The family is the most powerful structure of human belonging in the world" (p. 30), and for those who can find a group who supports them as a family, which coincidentally is also called *La Familia*, the sense of belonging can be most rewarding. It is a finding of the Self, in a place where there are few like one's Self.

O'Donohue writes, "The family is the first place where you stretch and test yourself" (p. 31). Joining a program as *La Familia* can be like finding a family in college, and for young new students, who know they are being graded in every class, who are tested often, and attend large lectures with many students who they know nothing about, finding someone who calls them mentee can be like being part of a family.

Renato chose to major in Criminal Justice as his mentor did. Because of this, he asked his mentor how tough certain faculty were, what to study, and how to prepare for tests. The commonality of his experience with his mentor gave him a sense that he was doing something that someone has already done. He knew, although he may have not seen a face like his in class, that his mentor took the same course and passed with a good grade. This created in him a sense of confidence and belonging. Being a pioneer as the first one in his family to attend college, he became someone who kept alive a tradition his mentor began, as he said, "Latinos can do well in college." This is not only a statement he heard, but something he saw in his mentor that gave him the confidence to know he could

also “make it.” Also, being part of a group of mentees who were striving to do well, an academic group gave them the opportunity to meet peers like themselves that study together towards a common goal, to graduate from college.

La Familia has regular study sessions, where students gather for one or two hours to study together. Each one chooses his or her own subject and assignment. Mentors and mentees choose to come together to be with one another. Being a mentee meant to have a mentor, but also it meant to be part of a group, a group of peers who shared more than the college experience. These peers who were part of *La Familia* were peers in race, sometimes in gender, and all were Latinas/os.

The need to belong to a place. The college or university where students choose to attend is the place where students hope and expect to acquire the formation they long to receive to prepare them for a life, hopefully, more prosperous than their parents. Renato’s parents asked him to work with them the summer before entering college. The lesson they wanted to teach him was how hard they work, and if he did not earn a college degree, that type of life and kind of work could be what Renato’s.

What my parents wanted to get across was “you don’t have to do this, you don’t have to go around holding a vacuum and cleaning... it’s a not a bad job, but you can do better than this. If you go to college and earn a degree you can be in an office and giving orders.” (Renato)

A classroom is considered the formal place where education happens; however, much can be learned outside the classroom, and this should also be considered part of the educational experience students have. For instance, peer mentees meet and gather with their mentors and other members of the peer mentoring program outside classrooms, after or before classes, and while connected by an educational experience, they do not restrict

their conversations to school work. This consideration is worth paying attention to with regard to the learning, *Bildung*, that happens outside the classroom.

Peer Mentoring And Its Pedagogical Meaning

Education or better said, pedagogy, is at the core of the peer mentoring experience. Peer mentoring happens within an educational setting--a college or a university--as in the *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program. And it appears to be used to compensate what seems to be missing for some students. As one of the participants confirmed, this is how she felt when she arrived in college:

You don't have anyone to ask for help, and you always need someone or you are going feel like helpless in school and this is a hard school, I think. And it helps you to know that there are people here to help you... and they are here to help you to give you resources that you can use to succeed like throughout the year.
(Jessica)

What is formed in Latina/o students who are peer mentees? What does the peer mentee experience do to Latina/o college experience? What aspects of the college education does peer mentoring help?

Jessica brought to mind that while being helpless may not always be the feeling Latina/o students have, as newly arrived students in college, at certain points in their college experience, all feel utterly alone because they feel they have no one. But being a peer mentee appears to fill in those gaps of time or stages during their college experience when students feel alone.

[Mentors are] are always there for you. They help you with your resume and things like that. They are making sure that you are staying on top of your educational needs. And whatever you need to do in order to succeed in college, just like your parents. (Renato)

Renato's words echo in my head, and I find them humorous, "just like our parents." Although most college students want to get as far away as they can from their

parents, when they turn 18; nonetheless, they still miss an older figure when they may be in need of help. Their desire for independence, and freedom should not be confused with their experience of solitude or abandonment.

Whiles sometimes mentees also called their mentors older siblings, regardless of the name, mentees accept mentors as if they were their parents because they always need help and want someone to be there for them. Mentees appreciated having someone there for them, not because they did not want to try to live on their own, but because their educational experience is one that also requires having someone there with them. And when parents or siblings cannot help, mentors can be there for the mentees, and they can fulfill the need Latina/o students have for someone being there for them.

The education of Latina/o students needs to be interpreted not just in relation to the subject matter, the area of knowledge or the career students want to pursue, but also in reference to the education students receive that forms them into their being, the Self, the person they want to be-come. This should be the case for all students who are part of an educational institution, and not just some students who bring the knowledge of a college experience, or have the intellectual preparation for academic work.

The experience of Latina/o students feeling lonely, as being the only one of their kind in college, or not being understood, can also be the feelings other students who are not Latina/o can share. Here lies an opportunity for educators and administrators to be aware of such feelings, and while they cannot be with students all the time, they can foster programs and support systems that can help students through those difficult times. This can help students not to feel disengaged and utterly alone, and in the long run, benefit the whole educational experience of students and faculty.

***Bildung* With-In Peer Mentoring**

Peer mentoring, while it happens at a university, and it has been somewhat institutionalized in programs such as *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program, is not a program or an activity that circumvents educational policies, nor is it part of the curriculum of a major or an education program (e.g., minor, certificate, and diploma). While peer mentoring happens because students need help, this type of helping approach goes beyond, or rather outside, formalization of classes and courses to help prepare students within a field or occupation. As the participants of this study have expressed, they mostly talk with their mentors, and this happens by email, on the phone, by text message, in person, etc. Mentors offer their help to mentees and mentees benefit from this relationship.

While peer mentoring is not part of the formalized educational process, students who become mentees accept this practice as part of their education experience. Mentees recognize it as a crucial part of their education, and one of the reasons for their success. This recognition leads to other questions that aim at revealing the value of peer mentoring and how peer mentoring can educate Latina/o students in addition to classes, faculty, and university staff. The use of peer mentoring reveals a certain degree of compatibility between this approach and Latina/o students.

The concept of *Bildung* serves to explain the role that peer mentoring has in the educational formation of students. The concept of *Bildung* in this chapter is drawn from philosophy. It refers to the wider concept of education, which includes all the educational experiences students have and helps with their formation. All of these experiences ultimately form and shape students beyond the area of study in which they decide to

specialize. However, because a formation is accomplished with someone, this concept cannot be understood as a process in isolation, but rather in the company of an-Other or Others. *Bildung* is a process that to be understood, it needs to be interpreted, based on the characteristics of the participants that make them be or become who they are, the self of each person.

The Concept Of The Self

Merleau-Ponty states (1945/2004), “True philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world” (p. xxiii). While human beings are in the world at all times, they do not necessarily understand the world in which they are. Moreover, each human being is in the world with-Others; whether they are conscious of it or not. Phenomenology can teach us to see and to connect with the world in which we all live as human beings.

Phenomenology can help to regain consciousness of our personhood with Others.

Heidegger (1927/2004) reminds us that Being-in-the-world is also always Being-in-the-world-with-Others.

What makes human beings who they are? What is the essence of a Latina/o peer mentee? Who are human beings, when they become the person they strive to be? Is Being truly and honestly what makes a human become authentic? What is a Latina/o peer mentee to Others who see them? These are some of the phenomenological questions that can help us relearn the self in relation to being mentored. While Chapter Four addressed what the essences of being a mentee are, this chapter opens up the discussion further of what makes a Latina/o student become a mentee, and who and what Latina students become due to the peer mentoring experience. One question still lingers for me: “What is the self of a peer mentee for a Latina/o student?”

The “wisdom” that is distilled in this chapter aims at a philosophical and psychological understanding of the “self.” The concept of the self has been extensively studied in philosophy because it deals with identity and what makes a person who she or he is. However, the vast treatment of the concept of the self also leads to many various interpretations. The psychological interpretation of “self” usually refers to this in relation to identity, while the philosophical interpretation of “self” deals more with the notion of consciousness, the reflective condition of being self-aware.

The concept of the self is quite evasive. It can have multiple interpretations, depending on the context in which its definition is made. For the sake of this study, and the clarity of the analysis of this idea, the concept of self is analyzed as the self of self-awareness.

Self-awareness cannot come about as the result of criteria of self-identification, since this would lead to an infinite regress. In order to identify something as oneself one obviously has to hold something true of it that one already knows to be true of oneself. This self-knowledge might in some cases be grounded on some further identification, but the supposition that *every* item of self-knowledge rests on identification leads to an infinite regress. This even holds true for self-identification obtained through introspection. That is, it will not claim that introspection is distinguished by the fact that its object has a property which immediately identifies it as being me, since no other self could possibly have it, namely the property of being the private and exclusive object of exactly my introspection. (Zahave, 1999, p. 6)

The concept of self is salient for the understanding of what Latina/o students become, when their true “self” is recognized and nurtured. This appears to be the main role of peer mentors, as the participants of this study reported. A holistic formation during their college experience appears to be neglected by faculty, staff, and other peers who are not Latinas/os, or do not share similar cultural and social backgrounds. With-Others is an important link in self-formation.

The Formation Of The Self With-Others Through Peer Mentoring

The verb “to form” means to shape, to outline, and to configure something or someone. It means to give structure to someone or something that is already created. It refers to the body of a person or a thing (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 529). However, if to form someone is to shape someone, one needs to wonder how the formation of the peer mentee is done through peer mentoring, or perhaps it should be asked how the Latina/o student is formed through peer mentoring.

What is to form someone through peer mentoring? How does the formation of a student happen in peer mentoring? How does a peer who acts as mentor intervene in the formation of a college student who acts as a mentee? Where does the formation of Latina/o peer mentee students occur?

The formation of a person or of a self, in a more philosophical terminology, is not the creation of something out of nothing. To form is to work with what one has been given, with what is available. One can only form something out of something. This notion denotes possibilities, but also implies limitations. One can only do so much with what is given or is available. The material, the location, and the project in mind open up possibilities, as well as limitations to the possibilities that can be explored.

From another perspective, the formation of an individual, as an independent Being and as part of a community or Being-with-Others, requires a sense of community. A person is formed based on the willingness of this person to change, and become what is intended for him or her. Moreover, to form requires the thing or the person who is present always in a place, to recognize that all people are with Others, and also an-Other to other people.

The formation of a person is both a state and a willingness to be formed. For instance, in relation to college students, the student who is a mentee is formed in relation to the willingness of a peer who mentors. The student who is in the role of mentee is formed in relation to the intervention of a mentor. Thus, to form is a process of two parties. Moreover, in reference to education, most people are taught by someone rather than self-taught. Then, if we understand education as the formation of someone, or *Bildung*, one may wonder even more about how students are formed within a peer mentoring experience.

Bildung Of The Self

Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away [abgefallen] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its self, and has fallen into the 'world'. 'Fallenness' into the world means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. Through the Interpretation of falling, what we have called the 'inauthenticity' of Dasein may now be defined more precisely. On no account however do the terms 'inauthentic' and 'non-authentic' signify 'really not', as if in this mode of Being, Dasein were altogether to lose its Being. 'Inauthenticity' does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to quite a distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world--the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein-with of Others in the 'they'. Not-Being-its-self [Das Nicht-es-selbst-sein] functions as a positive possibility of that entity which, in its essential concern, is absorbed in a world. This kind of not-Being has to be conceived as that kind of Being which is closest to Dasein and in which Dasein maintains itself for the most part." (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 222)

Heidegger distinguishes between two types of self. The one people see every day, which he calls the "They-self." This is the self people see of us in-the-world everyday based of the assumptions and impressions of the identities with which we are associated. And the other self, Heidegger calls the "authentic self" this is the one we think we are or the one we want to become. These two types of self are not always similar or compatible; most frequently, they are contradictory to each other. The befallen presented by

Heidegger is not a fall from grace or a religious fall, but one that refers to the inauthenticity.

In Heidegger's words, the authentic self refers to the authenticity of who we are, and it comes from existence, living. The self, the one Others say we are, is not always the self-conscious one who we think we are. There can be agreements between what Others say we are and what we think we are, but frequently, this is not the case.

Renato can help to clarify the notion of the "they-self," based on assumptions [prejudices], and challenges many Latinas/os have imposed upon them. This represents an obstacle to the authentic-self many Latina/o students want to become.

I guess one of the useful things for Latinos is because... for me it was kind of tedious process to be accepted to this university at first... because I had to go to a summer program. And it was like 50/50 chance, so if I didn't do well, in the summer then I was not accepted. So we had to transfer from high school to college and in doing that, you know, most times of what you hear about is that Latinos, you know... being on the street or doing crime, or being like locked up, but you do not really hear much about this Latino graduating with a Ph. D. somewhere, and so there are other Latinos who are very successful and have an idea, who have an ideal in life, have a goal and then achieve it, but you do not hear about those. So I differentiate myself from those Latinos who are, you know... addressed how as the press wants many Latinos to be viewed... So all that they see in the news is oh Latinos are immigrants, you know, they do not have papers, they do not go to college, or are uneducated. But there are Latinos who go to school and achieve the things, you know, degrees and have a good work and good pay. So now I see myself as that other type of Latino, the one who wants something in life... who wants to earn a degree... go far in life.

It appears, as Renato confirms, that one of the reasons why Latina/o students become mentees is to challenge, and not follow the path of self that Others say Latinas/os are. Rather, Latina/o students such as Renato choose programs, such peer mentoring, to strive to become the type of Latina/o students they want to be. Peer mentoring is a way for mentees to protect their authentic-self, the ideal of the person who they want to become.

Latina/o students struggle with these two types of self. Renato calls it “myself,” the self he believes he is, rather the one people usually see about those like you, other Latinas/os. This is the one he wants to be, the one he sees he is, opposite to the self Others, other people see, in the everyday life. Latina/o students, as Renato’s world portrays, struggle with this contrasting dichotomy, authentic-self versus they-self. Peer mentoring can give mentees the opportunity for the authentic-self they strive to become a reality in their existence in college. The successful mentors, who mentor mentees, are the type of self mentees want to become. Their peer mentors are the role models that many Latina/o students strive to become for their authentic-self.

Luckily, for many Latina/o students, the peer mentoring experience serves them well. Many Latina/o students as mentees have a good experience, which helps them to become the self for which they strive. But this is no accident. Mentors have their requirements and needs. For Latina/o students not to be “be-fallen,” as Heidegger would describe it, they need to be authentic and be recognized in their authenticity. Thus, the formation of Latina/o students is the formation of the self they strive to be. Education can help Latina/o students as mentees reach their goals. Renato confirms that peer mentoring may help mentees reject the assumptions made about them, or in Heidegger’s terms, to reject the “they-self” of Latina/o students given to them through assumptions and prejudices.

The Self As An Incomplete Being

After concluding the conversations with the participants and identifying the essential themes of what it is like to be a Latina/o peer mentee, I find more questions that demand attention.

Are students who have a successful peer mentee experience done with the help they need? Is there anything else students need after peer mentoring? Is peer mentoring something that they can overcome or triumph over once they have a year of peer mentoring? The answer to these questions seems to be No! Human beings are in constant action, striving to be the self that is desired. Herein lies the notion of *becoming*; our inner drive pushes us to continue to become who we want to be. The self is a Being that is always incomplete; it is always in the making or undone. Choices always have to be made to continue in the process.

Formation of the self in today's world. Education, as it is now, has been institutionalized and systematized. Education is the way contemporary society has organized to help people become who they want to be, the self for which they strive. It is the formal way to help individuals become who they want to be. New professions have emerged to guide students in their education and professional careers. Mentoring works as a transition and compensatory practice; new professions are born due to the social changes that have resulted from social divisions and social transformation of the industrial era. In *The Blackwell Handbook Of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach*, Savickas (2007) explains this emergence of mentoring in current society:

In today's information era, the typical worker encounters numerous transitions across occupations positions. During the agricultural era, workers grew up on the farm and, if they remained there, they knew what to do. If they wanted to leave the farm, they could take advantage of advice from a "friendly visitor." When the industrial era replaced the agricultural era, a new discipline called vocational guidance emerged. Guidance personnel succeeded friendly visitors as they adopted the modern perspective of science as the solution to life's problems. They believe that guidance occurs when science touches an individual. Street youth, immigrants from other nations, and migrants from the farm to factory often felt lost in the city and tempted by urban ills. They sought and received vocational guidance, based on scientific ability tests and interest inventories, about where they fit into the work world. (p. xviii)

But before a person becomes a worker, he or she must be a student, and certain proficiency must be obtained. Today, a college degree appears as the standard rite of passage to professional life. But not all students have parents, friends, brothers and sisters, who can guide them:

Today the ground is shifting under our feet as we experience the most rapid economic transformation in history... The fragmentation, tentativeness, and discontinuity of 21st-century jobs leave workers rife with tension, ambiguity, and insecurity. Rather than developing in an occupational position, they must adapt to a long series of different assignments... In an uncertain world, workers must construct certainty within the self and then attach themselves to significant others who can assist them to adapt to the series of tasks, transitions, and traumas that they will encounter. Essentially, mentoring involves the secure attachment of a protégé [mentee] to an individual who eases transitions and prompts adaptation. Thus, for me, mentoring has emerged as the prime form of career assistance for the information age, one rooted in a helping relationship that provides visiting, guiding, and counseling yet much more... (p. xix)

Students are workers in training. Under the promise of a common pattern for career preparation, the objective is to give all students the same opportunities. Students are expected to achieve the same levels of knowledge. Most of all, through standardized curriculum and tests, the same level of mastery is expected at each education grade. This continues in higher education as well. However, people are not like clay that can fit molds that produce the same in each output. People are unique and receive information and live life differently. Students in a class, having the same teacher, reading the same textbook, and having the same test may have quite different learning outcomes and may report different types of learning outcomes.

The experience of peer mentoring intends to help mentees, as Savickas (2007) suggests, to help with the transition. But the help provided to mentees also changes them. The change that is produced in them results in part of the help mentors give them, and the

interpretation of the relationship that mentees establish with their mentors. Students are not alone. They go through their educational experience along with peers who are doing what they are doing, receiving an education, and other peers who may be one or two steps ahead of them. Their upper class students still retain the closeness to the experience that first year students live. Thus, the peer mentee experience is an experience lived with Others, not only those who mentor them, but also those who are mentored alongside them. As Savickas also comments, workers (and one could say students as well) need assistance. Peer mentoring provides not only the help needed due to the social changes of our industrialized society, but it is also a relationship that is “rooted in a helping relationship that provides visiting, guiding, and counseling.”

Formation through lived experience. One of the mentees guides us towards an important revelation:

It just happens. It's like when you are going to be in a relationship with a guy or a girl, you know. You become boyfriend or girlfriend. Some things just happen. And you just don't know; how they just happened, they just did. So, but you know, with her [my mentor], this like a sister relationship, you know. I am very thankful for it. And I appreciate it because I would not be here, where I am today, had it not been because of her. I continue to regard her as important... and she has helped me to work harder, and study harder and improve in the second tests, so it definitely helps. (Renato)

Being peer mentored, as Renato explains, happens, however, not necessarily because a student becomes a mentee; he or she may not know how it happens. Although being peer mentored is an experience that mentees live, which may either transform them or form them, not all mentees are aware of it.

Renato confirms that mentees are still in college. While there is an approximate 50% attrition rate of Latinas/os in higher education (Kelly, Schneider, & Carrey, 2010), all the mentees who were active in the *La Familia* Peer Mentoring Program continued

into their second year of college. But if this is the case, one needs to understand what helps mentees stay, while other Latina/o students may not. As discussed in Chapter Four, being open, vulnerable, and having self-reliance, the type of Latina/o students who join *La Familia* stay in college. There appears to be a difference between Latina/o students who become mentees and those Latina/o students who do not become mentees. One may find this revelation as part of the secret that can help certain types of students.

In Renato's words, "I would not be here, where I am today, had it not been because of her," and then he adds, "I continue to regard her as important..." Renato, as the other mentees of this study, continue to regard their experience as important beyond their year as mentees. The program only requires them to be mentees for 1 year.

Peer mentoring is an experience that needs to be understood because it helps to form students as part of their educational experience in college which this study has shown. What happens to Latina/o students who attribute their college success to peer mentoring? Heidegger points to the way of what is necessary in this regard:

Dasein's 'Essence' is grounded in its existence. *If the 'I' is an Essential characteristic of Dasein, then it is one which must be interpreted existentially.* In that case the "Who?" is to be answered only by exhibiting phenomenologically a definite kind of Being which Dasein possesses. If in each case Dasein is its Self only in *existing*, then the constancy of the Self no less than the possibility of its 'failure to stand by itself' requires that we formulate the question existentially and ontologically as the sole appropriate way of access to its problematic. (Heidegger, 1927/2004, p. 153)

The next section discusses how students as mentees form their self in relation to the formation of the self of Latina/o mentees.

Formation as undergoing a transformation. Heidegger gives a revealing explanation about how an experience is lived:

To undergo an experience with something--be it a thing, a person, or a god--means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of “undergoing” an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. (1959/1982, p. 57)

The word undergo has several synonyms, such as endure, feel, have, know, pass, see, suffer, sustain, taste, undergo, and witness (Neufeldt, 1997). Thus, one can infer that an experience is something, as Heidegger describes in the quote above, that can be felt and also suffered. Some experiences can be joyful or the sources of our current happiness, while others are quite painful and frustrating. Nonetheless, an experience is always a possibility for transformation. Through an experience one can change, quite drastically or practically, going from the person that one was to whom a person later becomes.

Latina/o students who become mentees undergo the mentoring experience through or with the peers that are assigned as mentors. This experience can result in a good experience, as is the case for all the participants of this study. Nonetheless, for this to become a good experience, more than the willingness of both parties is needed to make this relationship work.

As learned in Chapter Four, students who become mentees undergo a process of guidance in the company of Others. Thus, one has to understand and consider what it means to be in the company of Others. The other of the peer mentoring experience and the one mentees become must be understood in the synchronicity of their experiences within a peer mentoring program. This study only considers the mentee experience. Only mentees were invited to share their experiences, and their voices are heard throughout this study. There are advantages and challenges of this specificity. While mentees have received little attention and their individual voices need to be heard, mentors also need to

be heard. Claudio brought to my attention this aspect that escapes the scope of this study. Claudio was a peer mentor when I engaged him in conversations. He had a difficult time trying to remember what it was like to be a mentee.

What makes mentees change within a peer mentoring experience? What are the possible transformations that Latina/o peer mentees go through within *La Familia*? Is being peer mentored a way for Latina/o students to transform so they can succeed in college?

Formation of the being-with-Others for mentees. In *Self-Awareness And Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation*, Zahavi (1999), describes self-awareness as psychological in relation to personal identity. This deserves further attention when considering that the Latina/o peer mentee experience is the realization or self-awareness of what an ethnic identity contributes to an experience, and how this transforms the peer mentoring experience into a racial, and at times, counter-representation of the self. By this, I mean that a challenge to the self that is described or assumed by Others, is not necessarily accepted, by mentees as their authentic-self:

The gaze of the Other reduces me to that which I am (I am what the Other takes me to be) and so it furnishes me with the self-identity of an object. To apprehend myself as seen is to apprehend myself as seen in the midst of the world, as a thing among things. It is to find myself in a situation where I use *language* and adopt a third-person perspective on myself, apprehend myself as an Eskimo, an intellectual, an exploited miner, or a failed piano teacher [or a mentee]. (Zahavi, p. 163)

The participants of this study showed some of the transformations they went through. They came with goals: they all wanted to graduate, they were willing and eager to ask for help and they were undoubtedly academically driven. However, they felt lonely, discriminated, and longed for Others like them. Through the peer mentoring

experience they were assigned each a mentor, someone who cared about them, offered to help them, and who usually looked like them, as well as a role model in which they could see themselves. These characteristics allowed mentees to regain their inspiration to reach their goals and motivated them through the interactions they had with their mentors to complete assignments, and get good grades. Being with their mentors proved to be helpful for mentees because they had someone with them. The physical contact, weekly encounters, attendance at events together, phone calls, text messages, facebook messages, and even walking at times.

The Return To The Things Themselves As Lived Experience

The themes uncovered in this study all refer to the notion of “Being,” as invoked by Heidegger (1927/2004). This notion of “Being” for Latina/o students as peer mentees refers to their being with “Others” as well. Other students who share their Latina/o identity with the mentees, but who somehow are also distinctive, come together with the mentees to create a mentoring experience among peers. The experience of being mentored is something that occurs “with” them, rather than to them. Moreover, it is in their commonality as Latina/o, that mentees are able to see themselves “in” their peer mentors who become their role models.

Undoubtedly peer mentoring can produce change, and for some students, this study confirms that. However, this transformation may be more than a complete transformation into something else. For some Latina/o students, the transformation that happens to them as mentees does not seem to be about becoming other than who they are, and that is being Latina/o students in college. For some Latina/o students, the transformation they live is to become who they are from the start. As Latinas/os, many

students despite their high aspirations and expectations feel trapped because Others around them have an outlook on them as Latina/ students who are incapable of succeeding in college. All peer mentees expressed their desire to debunk this expectation and stereotype. Mentees appreciate the reaffirmation they receive of their identity as Latina/o, which is not contradictory to their expectations for success as college students. So in the end, what does mean for pedagogical insights?

The End Is Just The Beginning

The end of this research project appears as the beginning of a new road that opens wide ahead of me. The path, which is suggested, is an invitation towards a Liberatory Education for Latina/o students. They appear to be in need of a break from the “culture of silence” that some minor-entities, smaller groups, continue to endure (Freire, 1970/2004). Minorities tend to be silenced because their voices are either subjected to the majority or they can easily get lost in the voices of those with power.

From the voices of the participants in this study emerged a message. Latina/o students found and encountered who they wanted to be, their Self, due to the help they received as mentees from peers in a peer mentoring program. While Heidegger (1927/2004) states that to-be-in-the-world is to-be-with-Others, the company of Others is not something that happens automatically.

The Call For A New Path

As a counselor, I feel compelled by the pursuit of a path towards a Liberatory Education. This concept comes from Liberatory Psychology, a term that Martín Baró (1994) coined and developed into a type of psychology. Through this psychological approach, he suggests that liberation occurs and must occur for people to live

authentically. Otherwise, they become subjugated beings to someone else's will and determination. This limits their possibility to be, and being is what all beings strive to reach. This liberatory psychology came as a result of the observation and analysis of the oppression he observed in El Salvador and other Central-American countries, and which characterizes what Latina/o students live in their college experience as oppression, discrimination, and solitude become debilitating.

This study has show that some Latina/o students can be liberated through peer mentoring. Through peer mentoring they can be who they want to be, when they emulate the type of student they want to become through the peer mentoring process. The possibility to belong to a group allows them to find a place in college and to connect with other successful Latina/o students. As

Lee (1998) states, social justice is action, which cannot be done alone or in a passive state. As he suggests counselors can be part of the social change that is needed among students in this case, Latina/o students. However, this responsibility should not be placed upon counselors or students alone. And while students can serve as peer helpers, peer counselors, peer tutors, or peer guides, there are more elements that need to be unveiled with-in the peer to peer relationship.

Liberatory education can set students free to explore who they are and not to replicate the creation of individuals who consume, buy, and act as if they were directed by Others (Freire, 1970/2000; Fromm, 1994). But for this to happen, as Heidegger (1927/2004) suggests, humans have to be authentic; they need to strive to be who they are. Authenticity demands the responsibility to be, despite social expectations to be someone else (Moustakas, 1974). This requires courage as Tillich asserts (1980), but it

also requires support from Others, who are also in the same quest; thus, peers can help. However, some questions still remain. What does it mean to have a peer mentor who is not a first generation college student, but who mentors a first generation college student? What do Latina/o students see in the peer mentoring experience that they might not see in a faculty member who is Latina/o?

As Colley (2003) suggests, there must not only be a better understanding of the peer mentoring relationship, which this study provided, but also further unveiling of the oppressive forces that may lie hidden in the mentoring relationship (e.g., gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and race). This study has shown one of these forces of oppression. It was the assumption of what Latinas/os are expected to be or know. Claudio expressed that it was expected for Latina/o students to struggle more than students from other groups. Renato concurred with him in our last group meeting. This is a challenge for Latina/o students. If they do bad, it is normal, because it is expected; if they do well, this is a surprise.

Not Mystifying Mentoring Any More

Mentoring can help; this was said by all the mentees in this study. However, all educators can do more to help Latina/o students. As van Manen states, “Phenomenology is a philosophy of action especially in a pedagogical context” (1997, p. 154). Can all Latina/o students cope with these challenges? Do Latina/o students take greater challenges than other students? What might educators do to improve the educational or pedagogical experience in the classroom?

The combination of family obligations, college requirements, and financial constraints affects the college experience of Latina/o students, as it may for other students

as well. But perhaps, these conditions, initially seen as weaknesses, can also be the strengths they see in their Latina/o peers. And by sharing similar cultural and social challenges, and despite them, it inspires mentees that their mentors can still succeed.

The use of roles models, the sharing of experiences in the classroom, the creation of communities within a class may serve as an invitation to support each other. To only resort to peer mentoring to alleviate students' problems (e.g., anxiety, stress, and loneliness, among others) is to expect too much. One needs to be cautious of how much students can give and how much they are willing to give; otherwise, they can quit school all altogether, leaving worse than how they entered the university.

Peer mentoring inspires students as Gabriela to say, "I can do this too, you know." She came to believe and trust that she could also succeed as her mentor did. So did Renato, Claudio, and the other mentees. Seeing someone do well, having a personal relationship, and learning from that person appear to be characteristics that help Latina/o students. But mentoring is part of a social educational system that needs help, and peer mentoring is only one avenue for it.

Social Forces Of Oppression

Social forces in the form of assumptions may act against the development of human beings. While there are laws against oppression, oppression and discrimination these still happen, and regardless of the consequences, some people continue to affect adversely others in their daily living. The everyday life of Latina/o students, as it is for other minority students, is not free of oppression, and while mentoring can help, it is not the complete answer.

Colley (2003), as other scholars, suggest that social identities, such as ethnicity and race can leave mentees feeling ostracized, lonely and overwhelmed, as it happened to the mentees in this study, who expressed feeling lonely and overwhelmed. Thus, they may need as Karina expressed, to crack a joke, to release themselves. And as Renato and other participants stated, they are willing to accept help from whoever wants to give it to them regardless of gender.

Oppression emerges out of the identity given to people, including college students. Social characteristics, which are given to some groups by Others results in the formation of identities that deprive growth and empowerment. The attrition rate of Latina/o students is alarming. Those few Latina/o students, who appear to be helped through peer mentoring, are not enough to sustain all hope upon one single practice. The typical cohort of mentees who stay in a peer mentoring program usually is between ten to twenty participants. This often represents less than a tenth of the entire population to whom this program is aimed. Given the dwindling numbers of Latina/o students in higher education, one cannot but wonder what will happen to Latina/o college students in the future. Do people in college and universities honestly want Latina/o students in college? How much are the faculty and institutions of higher education willing to adapt, support, help, and guide Latina/o students so they can graduate? Are public large colleges and universities the places where Latina/o students should be?

This disparity in student enrollment in public institutions of higher education demands closer attention. In Heidegger's terms it demands "care." Care in this sense entails understanding of what it means to learn for different groups of students, to find out the multiple reasons Latina/o student may feel affected and eventually choose to drop

out, care about an environments in colleges and universities that is impersonal, distant, which is contradictory of their values as well as that of their *familias*.

There must be a break from and with the “culture of silence.” Otherwise, the culture of oppression will continue. Oppressed minority students, such as Latina/o students, who find alternative practices to cope with harassing environments that do not welcome them, need support that is based on understanding. Their need to prove Others wrong, as Gabriela said, is a feeling that comes out of rage, anger, and frustration. How can we expect students to sit silent, in large classrooms and enjoy lectures? How might the college environment “be there for them”?

The Promise

11-11-11

Todavía hay
ola en el mar
azul en el cielo
esperanza en el destino
y silencio en la piedra.
Seguiremos viviendo
y muriendo
como siempre.

11-11-11

Still, there are
waves in the oceans
blue in the sky
hope in destiny
and silence in the rock.
We will go on living
and dying
as we have always done.

(printed with permission from the author Teresinka Pereira, my translation)

A promise is a declaration that something will or will not be done, given, said, kept or released. It is the assurance on which an expectation is based, and the indication of something for a future time (Neufeldt, 1997, p. 1076). A promise can be made and then broken. However, there is a moral obligation in giving one’s word that a promise made will be kept. The moral assurance given by one’s word may always be present in one’s mind, but forces outside oneself sometimes get in the way.

At the end of this study, as the final words are written, a promise is made.

Latina/o students entrusted me with their stories, through them I could understand the how they lived their experiences as mentees that talked about how by being cared for by peers they can recover the hope and desire to succeed, when there are times they lose this hope. The responsibility that was entrusted to me was to show them as they showed themselves to me. I promised to honor them by showing what appeared in their stories, and then to make phenomenological recommendations for what might be done to improve their college experience. I hope I have done this to the best of my ability.

However, there is more for me to do now; the promise carries with it further implications.

As O'Donohue states in relation to the sense of belonging for adults:

In contrast to how a child belongs in the world, adult belonging is never as natural, innocent, or playful. Adult belonging has to be chosen, received, and renewed. It is a lifetime's work. (1999, p. 35)

The result of this research project is the bonding of me as an interpreter of Latina/o peer mentees' words to show to Others the mentees' experiences. I have been entrusted with the knowledge of how some Latina/o peer mentees made sense of their peer mentoring experience, and how in the personal intimacy of a one-on-one relationship peer mentoring helped them. Their words showed their vulnerability, and then their thriving, thanks to this practice, including highs and lows. As Heidegger would advise:

And no matter how this inner sphere may get interpreted, if one does no more than ask how knowing makes it way 'out of' it and achieves 'transcendence', it becomes evident that the knowing which presents such enigmas will remain problematic unless one has previously clarified how it is and what it is. (1927/2004, p. 87)

Thus, I hope I have clarified more than I have obscured the Latina/o peer mentee phenomenon. I hope some of the enigmas have become less problematic, accepting that a human experience will always be more complex than what any written text can possibly describe or capture. Thus, much more will always remain to be done, said, and accomplished.

The promise that concludes this study is the promise to bring help to this practice and the work to promote peer mentoring to reach Others. Other Latina/o students may also benefit from the practice of peer mentoring as mentees. Some Latina/o students will find the help they need or desire, through peer mentoring. If this practice is promoted, and explained, other Latina/o students may have a better chance for a successful mentoring experience, and those who do not know about it may have a better chance not to let it pass by. While peer mentoring captures the hope of help, some Latina/o students will have to wait for another approach to find help, and another way to cope with their college experience. There might be other sources from which to find help as well. Peer mentoring is not for everyone. As Gabriela and Natalia said, it requires one to be open, vulnerable, and willing to be helped, but some Latina/o students may be too hurt to open up, and peer mentoring may not be for them. Then, what and where do we turn?

This Could Help

Those who become mentees and have a good peer mentoring experience are also entrusted with a task after the mentoring experience. They must share what they learned and what they gained through peer mentoring. For that, I can also help as a counselor who advises, who guides, and of course, counsels.

Life is an eternal circle, represented as such since old times in many ancient cultures (O'Donohue, 2004); those who receive are also expected to give back. As the poem that is chosen to end this study says: there is silence in the rock; some will not talk about the goodness or troubles of mentoring, but the hope which lies in the sky is that no matter how strong a storm is in the sky, there is always blue in the sky, even when then sky may be covered with clouds and rain.

The blue in the sky is reminiscent of hope that is always somehow present, and *still* there. Thus, may the hope of Latina/o students who will always *still* be there, let *there be* hope in destiny, and may we all go on living with hope. This can be easier when we are in the company of Others; peers can help, and we can also help as Others--as mentees, friends or colleagues. We all can walk together along the path of life.

As a beginning researcher with a decade of commitment to peer mentoring for Latina/o students, I hope to raise the voice that can help those who need help. I hope this study contributes to the expansion and the utilization of peer mentoring, through a caring and a culturally sensitive pedagogy that may help and do no harm.

While more needs to be said and researched about peer mentoring this research has sought to provide insights into the mentee experience. In the voice of the Latina/o students, who participated in this study, there is more to learn, but being a mentee:

It's like a bond that's stuck with you that sucks. It's not an obligation but it's a good experience that helps you feel more all the time. But it also changes you. So you see your freshman year [pass by as] you chill and whatever, doing work, then you gotta get more serious because you want to get out of college. You need to get serious, because now it's about how to get done your business. (Renato)

Students' voices can speak louder than the questions that have been asked. Their voices reveal a culture of silence and oppression, and thus the pressing need to listen to

their voices is even more pressing. This is the context in which peer mentoring thrives, and perhaps, this is why this practice appears as the response to mitigate the oppressing forces that subjugate Latinas/os. If peer mentoring is a good experience, one still needs to wonder, how is it that peer students need to help each other, despite the massive buildings in which they attend classes, the major programs they have been given opportunities to complete, and the peer mentoring programs established on campuses.

Perhaps, we have forgotten that for most human beings the most important thing is to be treated as human and be accepted for one's own person or Self. This can be empowering for anyone who fears being accepted. Through a responsible practice of peer mentoring, we all may become allies in the college goal of success for all students.

Mentoring Revisited, A Reconsideration Of The Mentoring Experience

There are various reasons for revisiting a place or the memories saved about an experience. Revisiting something can help us confirm what we have learned, seen or found. The act of revisiting implies the re-petition or the re-living of an act already done, but with the possibility to find something new (Neufeldt, 1997). Thus, it can be said that the act of revisiting can lead to both the encountering and the re-encountering of something. In each case, revisiting can help remember what was memorable or reveal the feelings lived through an experience. Phenomenology can help to revisit an experience and through that, it can help us become conscious once more of an experience. As van Manen states, "Phenomenological research aims at establishing a renewed contact with original experience" (1997, p. 31).

What is the need to look back at something already seen? What is the purpose of revisiting something? Is there any risk in revisiting something by repeating what has

already been said? Why do we need a “renewed” contact with an original experience as phenomenology offers to do for us?

As a way to begin the explanation of the need for revisiting what this study has revealed, one can say that the act of revisiting can help conclude this study with a higher degree of certainty of what was uncovered through the conversations, and the interpretation that was made about the Latina/o peer mentee experience. In “Mentoring Revisited: A Phenomenological Reading of the Literature,” mentoring scholar Roberts (2000) concludes that “A simple desire to revisit the mentoring phenomenon and describe how it is perceived and conceptualised by others who--by dint of their individuality perceive, describe and conceptualise [mentoring]” is of great value (in brackets added). Also, by revisiting what has been learned, a better explanation can be given about concepts and ideas that were previously presented, but might not have been complete.

As Roberts later asserts, “The value of the revisit for myself has been great, with the hope for enhancement and appreciation of the mentoring phenomenon achieved. As articles and discussion on mentoring proliferate, revisiting mentoring... may prove useful to others and facilitate further research and debate.” (2000, p. 163). In the same line of thinking, at the conclusion of this study some ideas remain incomplete so they demand to be revisited.

This last section of Chapter Five proposes to “revisit” what this study has uncovered about the phenomenon of mentoring for peer mentees to further explains some aspects of the interpretation that was created. Also, this last section shows what was learned to those who may be interested in understanding the process of being mentored or being a mentee for Latina/o students, for instance educators, counselors and educational

administrators. Moreover, given that phenomenology is a philosophical methodology, which aims at the understanding of the world through philosophy, Heidegger appears as an appropriate philosopher to open up the last set of themes related to this study.

Being-In-The-World-With-Others, From Individuality To Communality

Although Heidegger was often quoted in relation to *Dasein*, the being-there of a phenomenon, any phenomenon cannot be complete, in terms of its interpretation, without considering its relationship with the world in which it is inserted as well as its relationship with Others with-in the world in which it happens. Those two aspects need to be made apparent. As Heidegger states throughout *Being And Time*,

Being-in-the-world shall first be made visible with regard to that item of its structure which is the 'world' itself. (1927/2004, p. 63)

Later Heidegger explains that

Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The word of *Dasein* is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with*. [*Mitdasein*] (p. 155)

Heidegger seems to suggest that we do not live our experiences disconnected from Others. This can lead to conclude that while our experiences may have certain meaning for us; other people can give to the same experiences a different meaning. Meaning is the result of what we are able to create *with-Others*, and *with-in* the world in which we live experiences. Besides, the experiences we live happen in the world we share with Others, as Heidegger reminds us. And although the experience of the Latina/o peer mentee may appear to have interpreted through an individualistic worldview, by focusing on who the recipient is of the mentoring efforts, the mentee, despite recognizing that mentoring is a dyad, there is more to the experience of being mentored. All

individuals are part of larger social networks or units, and as Heidegger explains in the quotes above, the being of *Dasein* is also being-in-the-world-with-Others.

Social systems, and social networks, are part of other larger “worlds,” what Heidegger calls the “with-in world.” This is also how mentees appear to live their mentoring experience. Mentees are part of a group at all times, groups that subsequently are also inserted or are “with-in” other worlds, that is using Heidegger’s philosophic terminology. To show these concepts, the notions of inclusion and exclusion, resistance, and the challenge of interpreting an experience will further be discussed in the following sections. This appears relevant because while the interpretation of the Latina/o peer mentee is an individual experience; this experience is part of an experience that builds community, for instance the Latina/o community, the undergraduate student community, the college community, etc.

Being mutually inclusive and exclusive. There was an event that all mentees regularly attended. This was a recurrent program that often brought almost everyone together, mentors and mentees, on biweekly bases. This event was the study sessions which often took place on Wednesday evenings. During one or two hours, mentees and mentors studied, read, or asked questions about classes, assignments, and teachers. The participants were said to enjoy this program not only for the benefits of studying with someone or finding the answer to some of their questions, but also because it gave them the opportunity to come together as a group. During these times, mentors and mentees had a rare opportunity to come together and meet other participants in the group. It was a rare opportunity because there were very few options where mentees could meet other mentees. The opportunity to meet other Latina/o students, who were part of the college

experience, and were also succeeding in school, was rare but exciting to them. While this was not intended to be a social event, it became one. The study sessions became the main gathering that mentees look forward to for connecting as a group, as members of *La Familia*. This event is what made them feel part of a community.

Community, bell hooks (2003) explains, is the result of “Progressive education, education as the practice of freedom, [that] enables one to confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection” (p. xv). bell hooks explains that an education that is liberatory, “It teaches us how to create community” (p. xv). She also says that as an educator, “I work to recover our collective awareness of the spirit of community that is always present when we are truly teaching and learning” (p. xv).

Perhaps, what many of us, for instance as educators and counselors, have forgotten, but Latina/o students have discovered, is that the sense of community is vital in the educational experience of all students. This may be what some students miss, but regain, thanks to programs like *La Familia*. Programs as this one can make students, when they become mentees, feel part of a community. If a sense of community is not found inside the classroom, students may resort to programs that can create the community they feel they have lost. This is also a learning experience, something that Student Affairs professionals have called a co-curricular experience (see Keeling, 2004).

One of Nancy’s stories also reminded me of the exclusion many students experience. Nancy wanted to be part of a sorority with White students, but these sorority students did not invite her to join their group during the Open House that Nancy attended for new students. However, this experience of rejection led Nancy to explore other possibilities so she met members of *La Familia*, who invited her to join and made her feel

welcome. From the exclusion of a group, Nancy as the other mentees found inclusion in *La Familia*. She was included when she was welcome into this Latina/o group. Once Nancy was in a group with members who look like her and welcome her, she found a sense of community. However, as part of a group, Nancy was also outside other groups. There were gains, but also losses. Students by being part of *La Familia* also were separated from other groups.

It can be said that students who are part of a group, they are also separated from Others. The sense of community and perhaps somewhat segregation can also bring back students to feel a sense of community with other students in a college campus, mainly when they share some identities. The word community comes from the root *communion* which means in common (Neufeldt, 1997). As Heidegger says, “The common formulation of the principle of identity thus conceals precisely what the principle is trying to say: A is A, that is, every A is itself the same” p. 24). However, later Heidegger clarifies that “Each one of them is different from the (other) two, but itself the same for itself” (p. 24). The unity mentees find among peers of the same ethnicity can make them feel similar, but also sets them apart from those who are not like them. In itself, their common identity maybe lived individually by each member of the Latina/o community and the peer mentoring program, *La Familia* but also as a group. This reminds us once more than being a student, a mentee, a Latina/o, etc., is always being-with-Others.

Being-with-Others. People are always in interactions with each other, whether these interactions are or not validating of their self, that is the person they think they are (Moustakas, 1974). However, the relationships people make also imply that there is a disconnection. Even within the mentoring relationship there is contradiction. A member

of *La Familia* is also someone who has boundaries with those who are not members of *La Familia*; the inclusion found in a group also sets them apart from others who are not of that group.

The separation can also be found with-in a group or a relationship. Mentees within a peer mentoring relationship are the main recipients of the mentoring efforts, while mentors are expected to give mentoring to mentees and not necessarily receive it. Although in certain cases, this may happen. As Renato told, in the story when he called his mentor and showed support and offered help; there can be ways to return back what mentees are given when they live are mentored. Gabriela clarified this mutual inclusiveness of being a mentee, and at the same time the exclusion within the relationship when she said, “We need them more than they need us.” By “they,” Gabriela meant the mentors, and by “us,” she meant mentees. It can be concluded that there is mutual need between mentor and mentees, but mentees need mentors more than mentors need mentees.

What is to be needed? What is needed by mentees? What brings mentees inside a mentoring relationship? What needs set them apart from their mentors? What do mentees share with their mentors and other mentees? What do mentees have that differs from their mentors despite the many similarities and proximity in age?

Educators need to be cognizant that students experience both inclusion and exclusion with-in their educational experience. Mentors and mentees are together in their undergraduate college experience, but their needs differ, although they may relate to one another. Van Manen explains that “Relationality refers to our lived relation to other

human beings” (1997, p. 185). Similarity and difference melt together in each human relationship.

There is great value in recognizing mentees’ needs. If mentees see their need for help, mentors may have an easier time to help mentees. Becoming aware of their needs, can help mentees “choose” to listen, as Karina said, to their mentors. On the other hand, if mentees see their mentors just as they see themselves, they might not trust their mentors to give them guidance or to have confidence in them. As Heidegger explains, “By Others we do not mean everyone else but me, those over there against whom the ‘I’ stands out” (1927, p. 154). Those who are also almost like my-self too are the ones with whom a Being can relate and being-with more easily. If this is not possible mentees might not connect with them mentors, but too much proximity can also be alienating.

When Renato was asked if the relationship could work with a mentor who was not a good student, he said “No!” It was a clear and emphatic “No!” Renato was clear and empathic to say that this could not work for him. Again, we are back to the notion of being-in-the-world-with-Others. Mentees needed to see that their mentors are “focused” in school. During the conversations mentees revealed their need to feel that they were “with” someone who made them feel part of what they wanted to be, but also someone who set them apart from what they did not want to be. That is part of the stereotypes Latinas/os are given on TV or the expectation that because they were Latina/o they could not do well in college.

The inclusion of a group can also mean the exclusion of being in another group. This is important for educators and counselors who work so close with students. Setting aside special programs for students, despite how well intended these programs maybe,

can create a sense of heightened isolation. Natalia and all the mentees felt this feeling, and it made them feel uncomfortable. Thus, the joy of being in college could also be tied to the discomfort of feeling even more lonely than before they came to college. So the connection with other students like them can help mentees feel they had a group and they also belonged with Others. Consequently, contradictory feelings can be found in all mentees. Sometimes when being included in a group they wanted to be, other times, feeling isolated because the inclusion reminds them even more of their solitude. In the next section, I discuss these two contradicting and confronting feelings among mentees.

Compliant and resistant. The word resistance comes from the Latin root *re* which means from, and the word *sistere* which means to take a stand (Neufeldt, 1997). Interestingly, this word did not initially mean a violent act as it is usually associated today. Etymologically, to resist means to take a stand from a place, to stand for what one believes, and perhaps, this is what Latina/o students do when they join peer mentoring programs as mentees.

I recall Gabriela's words, "To prove them wrong." Perhaps, mentees along with their peers who act as mentors, they take a stand against the social system in which they find themselves as Latina/o students, which does not validate them in the way they want to be validated. Perhaps, they take a stand as members of a group, as mentees, to show their presence and to reach the goals they have for themselves. This is despite the expectations on them that they may not do well in college. Some may comply and let themselves fall and lose interest in college. While Others, for other Latina/o students, it was the case of all the participants, they were defiant and challenged these assumptions placed upon them. So they choose "To prove them wrong."

What do mentees want to validate? What do mentees stand for within a peer mentoring relationship? Is within the peer mentoring relationship that they want to stand for something they believe? Are the social systems in which Latina/o students find themselves what they want to “resist”?

To validate is to confirm, to authenticate, and to corroborate (Neufeldt, 1997). With the help of peers, Latina/o students in their role of mentees seem to take a stand for who they want to be, and want they want to achieve, which is a college education. This is what the participants stated. Along with their peers, mentees seem to feel corroborated in their desire to succeed by who mentors them. As Karina said, mentees “choose to listen.” They seem to listen to their peers because they hear what they want to hear from those who are like them, but also because they peers are students who are succeeding in their college education, and this makes them closer and believable.

The Challenges Of Interpreting The Peer Mentee Experience

Despite this study achieved to identify the themes that make up the Latina/o peer mentee experience, this was not an easy road. It must be recognized as van Manen (1997) states, that other people may find other themes or interpret the findings of this study somewhat different.

What is to live something? What is lived as peer mentees? What do Latina/o students live or need to live as mentees so they can say this experience helps them? Is the mentee experience something that is lived rather than thought or pondered upon?

During our last group conversation, there were moments when the conversation was carried out entirely by the mentees. At times mentees agreed, at times they disagreed,

but somehow they always came to common points of agreement. One of these instances was the requirements of the mentors must have.

All the participants agreed that mentors needed to be “good” students. And by “good” they meant good grades, and good study skills, and to be reliable and caring. They could not see themselves being-with someone who was not “focused.” When I asked them to explain the notion of “focused,” they said, “Someone who was in school to do well” (Karina). A comment that made everyone nod in agreement. The group conversation reaffirmed my notion of revisiting an experience. The act of revisiting is not only to confirm what has been found, but also to discover something that may have been missed.

I am a counselor, but if I were an educational administrator I might see others aspects of the mentee experience. Likely, I would like to find more educational policies or regulations on how to form a peer mentoring program, rather than to interpret the meaning of an experience from a humanistic standpoint. And while the participants could be the same, likely the conversations might have been guided in other directions and towards other aspects of the mentee experience if I had belonged to another profession. Therefore, it must be recognized that there were challenges to interpreting the mentee experience, as well as mentees struggled to interpret their mentee experience, each individual bringing their own set of values and venues of interpretation.

One of the possibilities that can be mentioned is to go back or revisit a quote by two of the participants. When they were asked, “What is to be peer mentored” or What is to be a peer mentee?,” they said, “It is something you just live.” And the question that came to my mind was: “What is to live something?”

This statement brought me back instantly to the frustrating experience I had with Eduardo and Lauren. They wanted to tell what mentoring had done to them as peer mentees; nonetheless, this did not happen. Certainly, at that time, I had not studied phenomenology, nor had I been trained in phenomenological questions. However, this time I felt better prepared. If mentoring is something you “just” lived, then the role I had to play as a researcher was not to impose what I thought they lived, but rather to find questions to explore their experience and to show how they lived the mentee experience. I was also looking for what happened to them as mentees that led them to the “good” feelings they claimed to have as a result of the mentoring experience.

Van Manen (1997) reminds researchers that an interpretation is only one possible way to make sense of an experience. But he also guides the researcher saying that there must be a “balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole” (1997, p. 31). Thus, the challenge to explain not only came from mentees, it also came from me. As an interpreter I had to balance out not only what I knew or had in common with the mentees, but also what I did not share with them.

The challenge and struggle to interpret the mentee experience were not only in them, but also in me. This also can serve for future mentors, mentees, and supporters of the peer mentoring practice. The help mentees need is not only the needs we see they may have or the needs one foresees for them as college student, but also the needs mentees see and the ones they are willing to recognize. It is important to be cognizant that each individual is at different stages of development so he or she lives life differently. Thus, to help someone one needs to consider what the needs are and how aware a person is of his or her needs. Otherwise, something you “just” lives becomes

what someone else wants that person to live rather than what he or she allows his or herself to live.

The challenge to interpret is not only based on our biases towards one an experience, it is also the challenge to recognize how an experience is lived.

What Counselors Can Learn From This Study

If it is a counselor who has carried out this study, the reader may wonder what other counselors may learn from the experience that has been studied. Especially counselors may want to know what they can do in relation to mentoring, mainly peer mentoring, that can help mentees have a better experience. Moreover, other readers, for instance educators and administrators, may wonder too if something in the counseling profession can help to improve the peer mentoring experience of Latina/o students and other students.

What is in for counseling when helping or supporting peer mentoring? What can be gained or given to counselors who want to embark in the journey of supporting peer mentoring for Latina/o students and other students? What does the counseling profession have to do with the practice of peer mentoring?

If *Dasein* is being in the world, the world needs to be recognized as a place with Others. Heidegger reminds of this in *Being And Time* (1927/2004). This being in the world which he describes as the being of *Dasein* might not always, and rarely can be, easy to come by. Counselors receive training in communication skills, counselors often work with educators, particularly if they are school counselors. Counselors often work closer with educational leaders. In these roles, they have direct contact with those who work directly with students as well as those who create the policies and programs to

guide students in their educational experiences. These opportunities for counselors can connect with the principle of social justice.

Previously, social justice was interpreted as an individual task. However, individuals as part of larger social systems, and the need social change often requires a systemic approach, or at least the recognition that oppression, and prejudice is systemic and institutional (see Lee & Walz, 1998). Counselors can give voice to such conditions. The experiences they listen to, the experiences of oppression they become aware of, in the person of the students they see or talk to can also be interpreted as institutional and systemic conditions that affect individuals, students, and members of minority groups such as Latina/o students.

Considering the expression “you know,” can help to illuminate another aspect of the mentee experience. Mentees often said to me, “you know.” Because they knew it was likely that for me as it was for them, because I look Latino, that I also suffered from prejudice and discrimination, and consequently, I may have similar challenges to theirs. And although it may not happen to me that often, as it happens to them, and although I have not been born or raised in a place where those prejudices were present by being present now in the same place and time in which they live, it was likely I also suffer from them. Most often, I knew what they meant, so I knew what they knew. Their “you know” resonated with me, even when it was not as strong or as often as it was for them. This commonality, while limited for me, gave confidence to them that I could understand them and avoided them the need for a long explanation that reminded them of the painful experience to expose their weaknesses and experiences of discrimination. Thus, our

commonalities, made their “you know” known to me, and at times it eased our community on painful experiences.

Counselors who talked to students, who listen to teacher concerns about students, and who are often close to educational administrators, can help understand each other about what students “know.” The frustrations of not achieving educational goals or perhaps the seemingly indifference of some students, or the resistance that some students present may not be intended in the way teachers and administrators interpret them, and here counselors can help with the skills they have.

Counselors are trained to be active listeners, they are trained to work with open ended questions, and they have knowledge of theories of development. They also work closely with all those engaged in the educational experience, including students. This can help them serve as a bridge that connects students through their lived experiences with educators who are often embedded in “content and testing,” and administrators often buried under much “paper work,” which usually limits their time to connect with the very students they want to help. These limitations predispose many educators to fail to understand students, due to the lack of time and communication because of the ongoing and ever increasing amount of administrative work placed on their work loads. Consequently, also doing research that promotes a further understanding of a human experience can suit the good will that educators and educational administrators often profess for their students.

What Phenomenology Could Do That No Other Methodology Can

If asked what phenomenology does opposite to forms of research, one can say that the meaning of an experience can only be uncovered when one is open to find whatever

lies there. Other forms of research may start with a notion of what needs to be proved, and what needs to be tested, while phenomenology is open to find whatever it is that makes an experience be what it is. The openness to the options and the phenomenon that is being studied is wide open in phenomenology. While as Gadamer (1976/1977) states, one cannot rid of prejudices or assumptions, one can make them explicit for the reader to see who interprets the experience and from whom the interpretation comes.

Being a mentee for Latina/o students can be seen in various forms. For those who are not Latinas/os the experience may appear similar, if it is related to some other form of minority status, but for those who share the same ethnic and racial identities the relatedness maybe even closer. However, even when this happens certain distinctions can be found. For me as a Latino born and raised outside of the US the experience of being a Latino is an identity that comes to me as I live in the US. It is not part of my past, and it can be argued that I have not lived or been raised under the same circumstances as those with whom I study the experience of being a mentee as a Latina/o. This difference can be part of the challenge to interpret the mentee experience that I previously discussed. But also there can be some strength in the possibility to see other options for instance the hope and resourcefulness that mentees have to transform their peer-to-peer experience into a mentoring experience.

In Chapter Four, I discussed something that I initially overlooked. The expression “you know.” Mistakenly, initially I assumed that it was some kind of linguistic filler. Later, upon pondering and spending time incubating as Moustakas (1994) calls the process of pondering about the meaning and searching for the thread of themes that

makes the mentee experience of Latina/o students I discovered or uncovered the meaning the participants placed upon this expression.

If this study had been done through another form of analysis or interpretation, but not phenomenology, perhaps only one aspect would have been revealed. Phenomenology is much wider and open to the phenomenon that is being studied. Phenomenology opens to the phenomenon in ways that shows the phenomenon for what it is for those who live the experience that being studied (Becker, 1992; van Manen, 1997).

A revelation that phenomenology provided was the possibility to see the mentee experience as part of the learning experience of Latina/o students outside the classroom. Often, education is interpreted only as what is part of the curriculum, what is intended within a program and a major for the specific training provided within a specialization. However, learning is also something that takes place outside the contents given to students in a classroom. Not seeing the educational experience with all its components, and the experiences lived outside the classroom, which some scholar referred to as co-curricular is to see education as a “banking of knowledge,” which Freire (1970/2002) denounces as a limited and failed education. Furthermore, education is a process that needs to be lived in community, as indicated by various scholars for instance bell hooks who was previously cited.

Phenomenology invites us to reveal a phenomenon for what it is, rather than to prove, to test, to classify or to taxonomized (van Manen, 1997). This study has shown an experience in various perspectives. The four existentials, which are lived space, lived time, live communality, and lived body are not divided and treated separately; they are embedded in how the experiences mentees shared were interpreted. To think that being in

a peer mentoring relationship as a mentee who feels he is being helped represents a mental aspect. Failure to see that the help mentees recognize and praise, as well as the construction of personal spaces can be seen when physically the members of *La Familia* did not have a set place for meeting. However, there was a recreation of the spaces they used to meet, allowing them to own those spaces and those times as part of their lived experience.

Moreover, as the section on technology showed, and as Heidegger interpreted such experience; the use of technology has nothing to do with technology. It has to do with the experience that is being lived or is facilitated to be lived. In this case it was the possibility to feel as a mentee, to act as a mentee, to be helped as a mentee that technology in its various forms and devices that allowed Latina/o students to be in their role as mentees even when they physically they were not with their mentors physically, even when they did not share a common space, or when they could not be united physically, but their sense of community remains or was recreated through the use of technology.

What phenomenology has done for this study is to show the experience of Latina/o students, as peer mentees in higher education, with the openness that the participants of this study could describe. The ability of the researcher to weave threads of meaning, so the lessons learned can also be opened up to the invitation that carries the possibility to pursue further investigation. The last words are an invitation to investigate that not all that helps can help, and what helps needs to be shown as it is lived, how it happens, so Others--for instance college students--can increase their opportunity to have a good experience. Peer mentoring helps, and it helps above all, because it offers the help

that the participants of this experience need to be cognizant of that each participant lives his or her needs differently, despite the similarities with their peers and mentors.

Phenomenology allowed this discovery to come out, in van Manen's words:

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings, and since to *know* the world in profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching--questioning--theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world to become more fully part of, or better, to *become* the world" (1997, p. 5)

The world of those we study with, as Heidegger states, is to be-in-the-world-with-Others, always!

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION

L. Angelo Gomez
1101Q Hornbake Library
Office of Multi-ethnic Student Education (OMSE)
College Park, MD 20742
angelog@umd.edu

Dear potential participant:

My name is Angelo Gomez and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education Program at the University of Maryland. I want to invite you to participate in a study on the Latina/o student's experience as former mentee of La Familia Peer Mentoring Program.

As a former member of this peer mentoring program, you were referred to me by the coordinator of this group as a mentee who has had a good experience through peer mentoring. I am doing research on the mentee experience. My study requires from you to participate in a set of 3 conversations, and also a reflection journal. 2 conversations will be one on one with me, and one will be a group conversation. All conversations will be at a private place on campus and time of mutual convenience.

None of the details you share in the conversations will ever be shared with team leaders or other peers from the program. I trust that you have much to offer to help in the learning about this experience for future students who are potential mentees. If you have any questions please, call me at 202.302.7916 or email me at angelog@umd.edu. I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, and you entail no commitment with this initial contact.

Let me know if you are interested in participating by email or phone. Thank you very much for your interest.

Sincerely,

Angelo Gomez
Ph.D. Candidate University of Maryland

APPENDIX B: PHONE CALL FOLLOW UP TRANSCRIPT

Hi! My name is Angelo Gomez. I have been previously involved in La Familia Peer Mentoring Program as part of the advisory board. Although I am not in charge of this group as a team leader or a peer mentor, I would like to invite you to be part of a research study for my dissertation thesis. I am studying the experience of peer mentees.

This study may help future peer mentees by allowing us to learn about your experiences as a peer mentee. The commitment for this study would be to have a set of 2 conversations with me and 1 group conversation to learn what means to be in peer mentoring program for Latina/o students who act as mentees. The time and places can be of mutual agreement and will take around 1 and 1 ½ hours each. Not more than 1 conversation will take place per week. A journal reflection will be asked from you as well.

I would like you to be part of these conversations. Please, let me know if you would like to join us. There is no sanction or any effect whether you join us or not, but it would be greatly appreciate if you are willing to talk with me about your experiences as mentee.

If you want more information we can talk more in person before you decide whether to join me You can meet with me in person at the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education, located at 1101 Hornbake Library. Also, you can talk with the main investigator of this research project Dr. Francine Hultgren, who can be reached at fh@umd.edu. Thank you for your time, help, and interest.

Angelo

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE AND LETTER OF DISMISSAL

L. Angelo Gomez
1101Q Hornbake Library
Office of Multi-ethnic Student Education (OMSE)
College Park, MD 20742
angelog@umd.edu

Dear peer mentee,

You have been selected to be part of my study on the Latina/o peer mentee experience. This study requires that you can join me for a set of two conversations that may take between 1 and 1 ½ hours, a reflection journal, plus a group conversation.

We can meet either in one of OMSE's offices as well as a room in the education building. We can choose whatever location that fits better your schedule. The confidentiality of the conversations with me will be paramount. Although our conversations will be audio taped and then transcribed, be assured that no document or recoding with your name or any other identifying clue (e.g., name, location of events, identifiable experiences) will be shared publicly. Moreover, all the information that you provide will be used in a general way to avoid any identification of the participants. In order to process the data obtained through our conversations you will be given an alias name and all documents will be protected in a safe and locked place where only my dissertation advisor and I will have access to it. Also, all devices that contain your information and recordings will be password protected.

Please, let me know as soon as possible either by email at angelog@umd.edu or phone at 202.302.7916 that you accept to participate in this study.

Thank you very much for your help and assistance.

Sincerely,

Angelo Gomez

L. Angelo Gomez
1101Q Hornbake Library
Office of Multi-ethnic Student Education (OMSE)
College Park, MD 20742
angelog@umd.edu

Dear peer mentee,

We regret to inform you that you have not been selected for this study. I want to thank you for your interest and desire to participate in it. We have only planned for 6 students to join this research project. Sadly, we have already found the students we need for this study. Nonetheless, I want to recognize and appreciate you for taking the time to consider being part of this study.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email at angelog@umd.edu or phone at 202.302.7916 if you have any question.

Sincerely,

Angelo Gomez

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Initials _____ **Date** _____

Project Title	The lived experience of Latina/o peer mentees
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Angelo Gomez under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you were identified as a former mentee of <i>La Familia</i> Peer Mentoring Program. The purpose of this research project is to understand through the mentees' perspective how a peer mentoring is experienced, particularly for Latina/o students.
Procedures	The procedures of this study require the participation of 3 conversations and a reflection journal. The first two sets of conversation will be one on one with the student researcher, Angelo Gomez. There will be a final group conversation, but before that a written journal response will be required from all participants. The participants who accept to engage in conversations with the student researcher will have that their conversations will be audio taped and transcribed. These conversations will take place at a private office on campus, and during business hours (8:30 AM to 5 PM) on week days only. The conversations will last between 1 - 1 and 1/2 hours.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	We hope that you do not experience any discomfort when discussing your experiences as mentee, and because we focus on what makes your peer mentoring experience a successful experience, we hope that you will enjoy the conversation meetings. But in the event that you experience any discomfort, you will not be asked to proceed or go further into any uncomfortable memory. Furthermore, you have the right to stop the conversation at any time, and not answer any question that may cause discomfort. You can stop participation at any time. Thus, we do not expect that this study in any way can present a risk to any student and allow students to freely participation in it through the length of the study.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits associated with this study for the participants. The only benefits that may result out of it is the opportunity to share your good peer mentee experiences that will be translated into a text that can guide future Latina/o students and supporters of this helping approach. Although, we hope that by self-reflecting on what made up a good peer mentoring experience, you can enjoy the opportunity to express in your own terms what makes such a good experience for you as a Latina/o student. Thus, we hope that in the future through this study other people and students might benefit from the knowledge gained and this can help improve the

	understanding of the peer mentee experience for Latina/o students in a public institution of higher education.
Confidentiality	<p>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by giving you an alias name; the recording of the conversations will be kept confidential for 5 years; no other person but the student investigator, Angelo Gomez, and the leading researcher, Dr. Francine Hultgren, will have direct access to any information you may share with us; tapes and transcripts will be kept in the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education in a locked cabinet, plus all data in computers will be protected by a password, and no information that you share during and after the duration of the research will be share with any identifiable trait of you to any <i>La Familia</i> team leaders or members of any student group. If there is any information that you want us to keep private inform us to do so, unless it is against the federal, state law or the University of Maryland regulations and agreements.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives 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.</p>
Medical Treatment	The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the 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.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>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.</p> <p>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, Dr. Francien Hultgren by email fh@umd.edu or phone at 301.405.4562 or the student co-researcher Angelo Gomez by email at angelog@umd.edu or phone at 301.4057171 or 202.302.7916</p>

Participant Rights	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 0101 Lee Building College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
Statement of Consent	<p>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.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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