

DISSERTATION

THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA STUDENTS DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR OF
ATTENDANCE AT A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA STUDENTS DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR OF ATTENDANCE AT A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

Latin@ is a minority group that has grown rapidly in the last twenty years in the United States. However, Latin@s have low participation in higher education, placing the group in a disadvantaged position compared with other ethnic groups. Therefore, it is important for the United States to educate and appropriately employ this group. This qualitative study used the counter-storytelling methodology to highlight the personal experiences (Creswell, 2008, p. 514) of eight Latina/Chicana students during their first year within a public institution. The main instruments to collect the data were face-to-face interviews and a letter-to-self written by the participants. The analysis was done using a triple framework of Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth.

This study found several common results: Participants were thankful for their families' support during this process in the university. Most participants indicated that there was a lack of information in high schools for minoritized groups, especially with financial aid. Participants also specified having a deep desire to complete their degree, but their financial needs prevented them from totally concentrating on their academic progress. Furthermore, participants expressed their negative experience during their first year in college such as discrimination, microaggressions and oppression by the faculty, administrative staff, and their peers. This study supports former studies where discrimination, oppression, and lack of economic resources prevail in the lives of Latin@ students (Castillo & Hill, 2004; Cavazos, Johnson, & Scott, 2010; Pappamihel & Moreno, 2011; Perez Huber, 2009, 2011). This study also supports the cultural

value that these students bring to universities and negates the predominant assumption that Latin@ families discourage retention, when this study demonstrates the opposite(Aragon, 2014; Yosso, 2005).

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I want to give thanks to God for giving me this opportunity to successfully achieve this dream of my life.

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Thank you, all of you. I love you all.

DEDICATION

For my mother in heaven for all her love and great life education. I am pretty sure she is very proud of my job.

For my loved children Vanessa and Aron, for all their love and support.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

The Latin@ population is an important group that needs to be studied and evaluated within the educational system of this country. This group has grown over the last year in the United States and is projected to represent one in five Americans by 2030. This places the group in a position to play an important role in the economy of this country. Therefore, it is important for the country that this population is educated and properly employed. Unfortunately, this is not reality. Santos Jr. and Cuamea (2010) stated, "Hispanics are now the largest minority group, making up 14.8% of the U.S. population; however, Hispanics as a group have a lower socioeconomic background compared to the total population and are less prepared to compete in the global marketplace" (p. 91).

Compared with other groups, Latin@s have greater financial need in higher education. Castellanos and Jones (2003) said, "Latina/o students in their first year in college tend to experience greater levels of stress associated with financial concerns than White students" (p. 5). Previous research has identified that the economic situation of some Latina students may be one of the strongest barriers for them during their first year. However, apart from the stress resulting from the lack of money to pay for university expenses, Latina students also face other difficult experiences in their first year attending the university. The first year in the university is the main transition for many first-year Latina students to become independent young adults. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the first-year experiences of Latina students in four-year public institution located in a western state.

Some research has examined factors that influence the low number of Latinas achieving a college degree. For example, in a study conducted by Zell (2012) with fifteen community college Latin@ students, the author examined the psychological and affective experiences of Latin@ students, including those that might hinder their higher education goals. Zell's findings indicated: poor K-12 academic preparation, poor guidance, difficulty on standardized testing for admissions, low income, little parental knowledge regarding colleges and how to navigate financial aid, may all be reasons for low numbers of Latinas in higher education (Zell, 2012, p. 168).

The literature on Latina's barriers identified the importance of these students having mentoring, and the impact of families supporting students to finish college. One study suggested the key social support variable was mentoring, with those who graduated perceiving that they received more mentoring than those who dropped out (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Robinson, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011). Additionally, Sy and Romero (2008) indicated that among Latino college students, maintaining strong family relationships while attending college was an important factor that helped them successfully adjust to college life. Moreover, in a study of the influence of academic and social collegiate experiences on Latina students, Strayhorn (2008) found:

Latinos face other challenges that threaten their likelihood for success in college. Still today, many Latino students, especially those who attend predominantly White institutions, report feeling marginalized, alienated, isolated, unsupported, and unwelcomed by their peers and faculty members. (p. 303)

In spite of discrimination and oppression, it is important to highlight the work that Latin@s have to overcome to succeed in college. Cavazos, Johnson, and Scott (2010) investigated challenges and perspectives of eleven Latina college students and confirmed, "Most

participants reported that being focused on their goals helped them to overcome challenges and it gave them more motivation to beat obstacles” (p. 309).

Furthermore, it is relevant to mention the case of Latinas who came to this country at a young age and have to suffer the penalty of not being able to enter higher education because they lack legal documentation to work and study. According to Perez (2009), “The experiences of undocumented Chicana college students reveal much about how racism (and its intersections with other forms of oppression) emerges in the undergraduate careers of this student population” (p. 713). It is no secret that in the last few years, immigration laws against Latin@ in this country have been stronger than at other times. For example, Pappamihel and Moreno (2011) said, “Currently, the United States is facing an anti-immigrant backlash that is not only affecting undocumented Latinos but is spilling over to impact documented Latinos as well” (p. 336). There are many Latin@ students who complete high school and have to live in the shadows because they do not have legal documentation in this country. Passel (2003) stated:

Invisible in these national statistics are an estimated 65,000 students from low-income backgrounds who are ineligible for federal financial aid and most scholarships because they live in the United States without legal authorization from the U.S. government. This situation has decreased the number of young Latinas to be enrolled in higher education. The inability of the United States Congress to pass an immigration reform package has made life more difficult for all Latinos.(p. 336)

Defining Terms for this Study

The term “Latino/a” or “Hispanic” has been a topic discussed by many authors in the past twenty years. This group is composed of people from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South and Central America, and Spain. Many authors in the United States use different terminologies to address Hispanics or Latino/a in their literature. According to Brown, Santiago, and Lopez (2003), the terms “‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ refer to a group of Americans who share a language and common cultural origins, but who come from diverse nations and backgrounds with distinct

histories and socio-economic and political experiences” (p. 41). In addition, Calderon (1992) stated that while “Hispanic” was the most widely used term at the city council level; the term “Latino” was most prevalent at the neighborhood level, in organizations and coalitions comprised primarily of professional and working-class people (p. 42).

For these reasons, it is important to clarify terminology for this study, which were used in the following ways here:

Latina is used when referring only to the female group.

Latin@ is used when referring to both male and female as a group.

Chicana refers to a woman born in the United States with parents or descendants from Mexico.

Hispanic may be used here when discussing the literature citing this term specifically.

Latinas are women who self-identify as Latina or/and come from diverse nations in South America, Central America, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico.

Chicanas are women who self-identify as Chicana or/and women born in the United States with parents or descendants of Mexico.

Latin@ is a term constructed ethnically to include women and men who are Hispanic, Mexican, Spanish speaking or who have emigrated from Latin American countries. (Espino, Leal, and Meier, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Historically, the United States has been a country that has wrestled with social inequalities regarding race, economic status, and gender. Latinas are a paragon of this social condition. This minority group faces many potential inequalities such as: language barriers, economic concerns, classism and oppression, national origin, cultural differences, and gender.

These factors influence the high number of Latina dropouts in high school, and therefore, the lack of representation of Latinas in higher education.

It is well known that Latin@s are the largest minority group in the United States; however, Latin@ students continue to be the least educated major racial or ethnic group in terms of completion of a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2011). While the number of Latina students enrolled in college is increasing, they continue to represent a low number of students who graduate from four-year universities. According to Irizarry and Donaldson (2012), "Nearly 24% of all Latina/o adults in the United States have less than a ninth-grade education; and almost one in four Latina/os aged 16 to 21 is either not enrolled in high school. Consequently, there are fewer than 13% of Latin@ college graduates" (p. 156).

Studies have shown a variety of barriers and constraints faced by Latina students in four-year public institutions and community colleges. Brown, Santiago, and Lopez (2003) stated that many Latin@s in higher education today are first-generation college students, low-income, have less academic high school education than their peers, and enroll in community colleges instead of four-year institutions (p. 41).

Latin@s are part of the fastest growing population of people within the United States; they represent a critical role in the nation's economy. Many Latin@s complete lower levels of education (high school or community college), resulting in less-educated persons in the workforce. In turn, this results in a shortage to satisfy the need for educated workers. Additionally, this problem is compounded when the influence parents have on their children is considered. Latinas not receiving higher education means it is less likely for their children, and subsequent future generations, to pursue higher education as well. As a result, more attention

must be paid to the type of education this group is receiving, and what assets they bring to their education.

Examining the education statistics in Colorado is important to this study because it describes Latin@ student profiles and provides background information about how these students are graduating, or not, in public institutions. According to the United States 2010 census, the distribution of all the Hispanic population in the U.S. broken down by state were as follows: California 27.8%, Texas 18.7%, Florida 8.4%, New York 6.8%, Illinois 4.0%, Arizona 3.8%, New Jersey 3.1%, Colorado 2.1%, and all other states added up to 25.4% (“Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin,” 2010, p. 7). This census shows that Colorado is one of the eight states in the country with the highest Hispanic population. Moreover, *Education News in Colorado* (2013) indicated that in 2012 the overall high school graduation rate for Colorado was 75.4 percent. However, the same source broke down Colorado graduation rates by racial group, which is telling of the state of educational opportunity by race. The percentages were: 57.7 percent of American Indians graduate, 62.5 percent of Hispanic students, 66.2 percent of black students, 70.1 percent of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 80.4 percent of students reporting as two or more races, 82.1 percent of White students, and 82.9 percent of Asian students. Latin@s are the second lowest group, after Native Americans, with the lowest high school graduation rate compared to other ethnic groups in Colorado.

The lack of Latina representation in four-year higher education institutions has turned into an issue of concern in the United States. It has created, for example, more poverty within this group, since they do not have an education to pursue a professional or technical job that affords them to earn a living-wage salary to support their families. The U.S. Department of Labor affirmed, “Employed Latinos are much less likely to have a college degree than are either

Whites or African Americans” (“The Latino Labor Force at the Glance,”2012, p. 1).It is a fact that there is a large number of Latin@s in the United States labor force; however, if they do not have a higher education degree, they will not be able to obtain a job that pays them a living wage to support their families.

Today, a larger population of Latinas is represented in higher education when compared to years ago. According to a study of The Civil Rights Project, in 2010 Latin@s barely increased a bachelor’s degree completion by four percentage points from 1975 compared to 2010 (Gándara Oseguera, Pérez-Huber, Locks, Ee, & Molina, 2013).These low rates of degree completion influences Latinas as they remain underrepresented, corresponding to only 11% of all college students (Santiago, 2007).In spite of what is already known about Latina students in higher education within the literature, a gap still remains in understanding: what the experiences of Latinas in college are, how these experiences may or may not be supported by the family, how the Latinas’ culture may or may not be beneficial during their first year, and how they were prepared or not prepared to attend college. It is important to know the depth of such experiences Latin@ students have during their first year, if so educational institutions could potentially implement strategies that provide high rates of retention of the Latina students in higher education.

Generally speaking, the first year in college is a time of adjustment and transition for any student. According to Tinto (2012):

Students are more likely to succeed in institutions that assess their performance and provide frequent feedback, this is especially true during the first year when students are trying to adjust their behaviors to the new academic and social demands of college life. (p. 7)

For the above reasons, it is necessary to investigate the experiences of Latina students during their first year in college, as it is a critical time for this group of students.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study are represented in Figure 1 below:

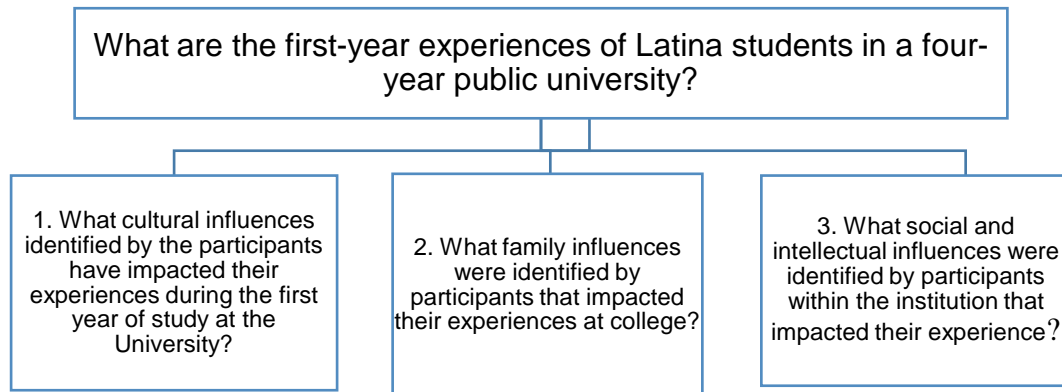


Figure 1. Research questions. This figure illustrates the research questions for this study.

The essential relationship between the word “*experiences*” in the main question and “*influences*” in the sub-questions is because this study seeks to know whether family, cultural and social-intellectual influences are related, and help to understand the experience that the student lives during their first year in college. According to Merriam Webster’s dictionary the word *Influence* is defined as: n. a person or thing that affects someone or something in an important way. The word *Experience* is defined as: n. direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this research was to study first-year experiences of Latina students in a four-year public institution in a western state. Knowing the experiences of Latina students in this institution could give advocacy officers a better idea how to create retention programs and create supportive networks and provide essential tools to help these students successfully negotiate their higher education. Cavazos and Cavazos Jr. (2010) affirmed in their study about understanding Latin@ experiences in high school that they receive a lack of support within systems, low educational expectations, and minimal information about higher education. Such issues "have not been significantly explored or considered in the education system as potential reasons why many Latina/o students drop out of high school or decide not to continue with their education upon high school graduation" (p. 96). For Latinas, their lack of attendance in college is heavily influenced by their largely poor high school experience; that being from a lack of counseling and advising, discrimination from their peers and society, as well as some familial influence that encourages minimal education.

Conceptual Framework

While investigating this topic, various theories such as Latino/a Critical Theory (LatCrit), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) were researched while looking for the best one that suited the research questions presented in this investigation. This study established a triple theoretical framing through Latino/a Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth. The uses of these triple theoretical and analytical frameworks were based on the dominant discourse of race and racism and how this is related to

the experiences of Latina students in this institution. Further definition of each theory is described below.

Latino/a Critical Theory is a theory focusing on the Latin@ community and the barriers of language, immigration, sexuality, and sexism and specific elements impacting socio-cultural advancement, anti-subordination, and community cultivation. Delgado (2002) confirmed, “LatCrit theorize[s] issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (p. 108). According to Valdes (1997), “LatCrit discourse is open to all scholars interested in issues especially relevant to Latino/as and willing to focus on Latino/as concerns and communities” (p. 3).

LatCrit theory has four main principles: (1) The Production of Knowledge: The production of ideas to better understand Latin@’s culture to give an improvement in the social and legal aspects. (2) The Advancement of Transformation, which is the creation of material social change that improves the lives of Latin@ and other subordinated groups. (3) The Expansion and Connection of Struggle(s) constitutes itself as a struggle on behalf of diverse Latin@s, but also toward a material transformation that fosters social justice for all. (4) The Cultivation of Community and Coalition, including actively nurturing a community of scholars who share a similar approach to legal theory, share a similar commitment to collaboration and who are willing to analyze explicitly the Latin@ situation within that larger state of affairs (Valdes, 1997, p. 7). It is imperative to highlight that these four principles of LatCrit theory work together.

Critical Race Theory is employed in this study to anchor issues related to race, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and feminism for the purpose of giving equality to all minority groups, especially in the area of education. Delgado and Stefancic (2006) stated, “CRT built on

feminism's insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination" (p. 2). One of the definitions that best describe CRT as a "framework in higher education is the question of persistence of racism and gendered racism in higher education and offers an approach that values the experiences of those voices least heard in many other educational frameworks" (Smith, Yosso and Solorzano, 2007 p. 562). Moreover, López and Parker (2003) affirmed, "CRT has expanded the direction of critical positions taken in relationship to theories of race and the law...CRT makes an appropriate research lens in education for analyzing racial inequality in the law and society" (p. 151). These authors also added, "Other researchers in education have linked CRT to critical epistemological standpoints to create a more holistic and intersecting framework that incorporates narratives and storytelling of personal/collective memory and experiences" (p. 153). An important theoretical tool of CRT is the notion of how student identities are influenced by their experiences in school (Wolfe, 2011, p. 79).

The education model of CRT is composed of five main principles: (1) Race and racism and their interrelations with other sub-ordination in education. CRT acknowledges that in American higher education, race and racism are imbedded in the structures, practices, and discourses that guide the daily practices of universities. (2) Challenge to dominant ideology, CRT in higher education challenges the traditional claims of universities and reveal how the dominant ideology of color blindness and race neutrality act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society. (3) Commitment to social justice in education, CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination. (4)

Experiential knowledge, this principle exposed that students of color have been viewed as a deficit in formal learning environments. Critical race-gendered epistemologies allow this experiential knowledge to be viewed as a strength and acknowledge that the life experiences of students of color are “uniquely individual while at the same time both collective and connected.”

(5) Interdisciplinary perspectives utilizes the interdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the different forms of discrimination (Perez-Huber, 2011 p. 381; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 275).

The basis of the principles of CRT and LatCrit seek to give Latin@ students equality in higher education and promote the success of these students in college. Although CRT and LatCrit have many similarities, each one of them has something very specific that distinguishes one from the other. However, a combination of these two theories together serves as an ideal framework for this study. Delgado (2002) said, “CRT and LatCrit in education... as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 109).

CRT and LatCrit have a remarkable connection with qualitative studies in education. In (1998), Solorzano used this theory to examine teacher education discourse and skills of children of color and then analyzed the impact of this on Chicano- Chicana students in graduate school and found “Chicano-Chicana endured everyday racism of graduate school, as White European American professors and students made these Chicano Chicana students feel as if they did not deserve to be at elite institutions of graduate study” (as cited in López & Parker, 2003, p. 153).

Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) used CRT and LatCrit framework in a study to demonstrate how the dominant, colorblind narratives regarding teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention promulgated through the research literature fail to adequately speak to the experiences of Latino/a teachers, thus compromising efforts to diversify the profession (p. 157). Moreover, Covarrubias and Lara (2014) used LatCrit and CRT framework to examine the experiences of Mexican-origin migrants in relation to the educational pipeline by employing an intersectional analysis of educational attainment. Part of their conclusion included:

Citizenship status plays a critical role in the educational attainment. For example, 39% of noncitizen Mexican graduates from high school and 14.3% enrolled in college with only 4.7% graduating with a BA. While 58% of U.S born Mexicans graduate from high school and 45.1% enrolled in college, and 11.8 % obtained a BA. (p. 88)

Finally, *Community Cultural Wealth* (CCW) is a concept used together by CRT and LatCrit to challenge the theory of deficit thinking applied to people of color in education in the U.S. According to Yosso (2005):

Deficit thinking is one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools. It takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education. (p. 75)

CCW gives importance and value to the culture of people of color. CCW highlights the benefits and all the cultural wealth of the minority students and how this cultural wealth has been a predominant factor in the education of students of color. Yosso (2005) developed the concept of cultural wealth demarcating six forms of capital that exist within communities of color, and she calls these six forms "community cultural wealth": (1) Aspirational capital: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals. (2)

Linguistic capital: skills learned through language such as, “memorization, dramatic pauses, rhythm, and rhyme” (p. 78). Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills; linguistic capital also refers to the ability to communicate via visual art, music or poetry. (3) Familial capital: the forms of knowledge “nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 79). From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources. (4) Social capital: the “networks of people and community resources” (p. 79) that can help students navigate through social institutions. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions. (5) Navigational capital: a form of capital inclusive of social networks and the resiliency students develop to persist through institutional barriers. (6) Resistant capital: knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality grounded in a history of resistance to subordination by Communities of Color, guided by a motivation to transform oppressive institutions and structures (p. 80-81).

Moreover, Yosso (2005) stated:

These forms of capital draw on the knowledge Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom...community cultural wealth involves a commitment to conduct research, teach and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice. (p.82)

CCW has been a concept that has not been taken into account in the education system of the United States as a way to support and strengthen the culture of students of color.

In recent years, researchers interested in Latin@ and Chican@ studies in education have used CRT, LatCrt, and CCW as a triad framework. For example, Burciaga and Erbsstein (2012) conducted a study about Latin@ Dropouts with *testimonios* of six Latina/o young adults using Community Cultural Wealth. The authors stated, “Findings reveal these young adults to be

contributing community-members who have neither had equitable access to opportunities nor adequate levels of support” (p. 31). In addition, Aragon (2014) [manuscript submitted for publication] in her study “Latina Achievement: Critical Reflections on Parental CCW” used a tripartite framework (CRT, LatCrit and CCW) to analyze issues of race, class, gender, language, culture and immigration by examining the testimonies of six Latina students’ roles in society. According to Aragon (2014), “Latinas in this study are resiliently aspiring higher education as the trenzas (braids) of their parents’ desired community cultural wealth influencing the capital presented in their lived experiences” (p. 26). CCW is the methodology that enhances the culture of students of color. The map of the overall frameworks is shown below in Figure 2.

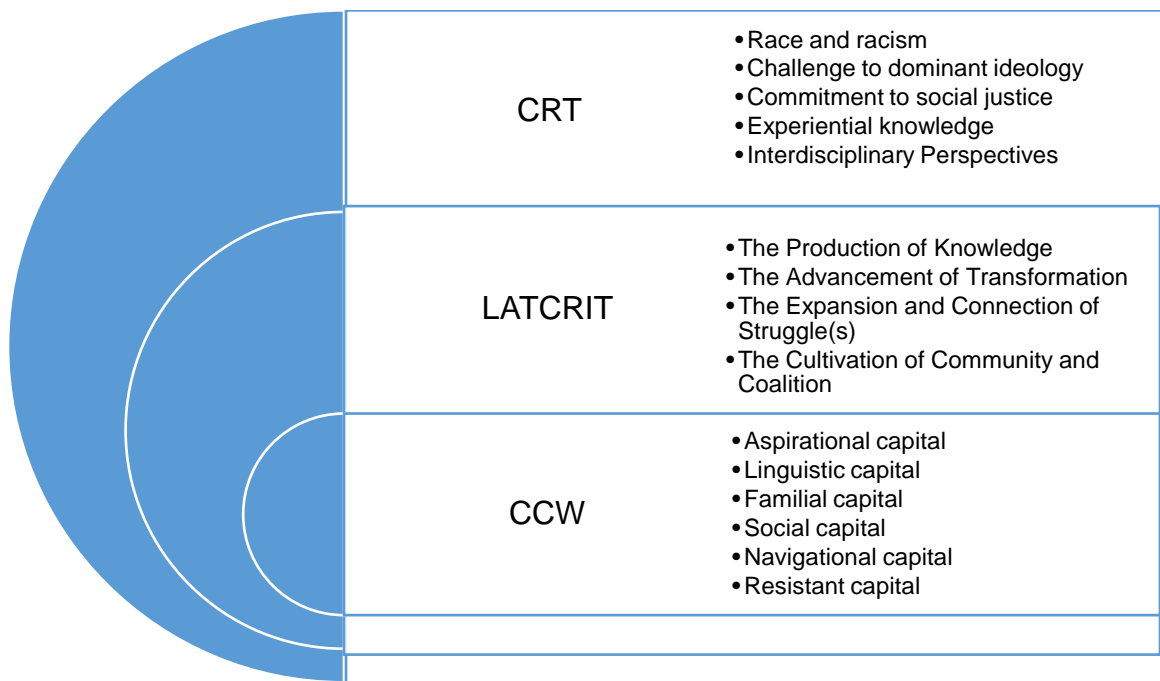


Figure 2. Overall framework for this study. This figure shows the triple theoretical framework used in this study.

Significance of this Study

As the Latin@ minority group grows, their impact in society will also increase. According to Fry and Hugo-Lopez (2012), “Hispanics are the nation’s largest minority group, making up more than 50 million people, or about 16.5% of the U.S.” (p. 1). It is clear that the growth of the Latin@ population cannot be ignored. Different investigations have indicated that “despite their larger numbers in postsecondary institutions, Latinas/os are among the least likely racial and ethnic groups to complete their bachelor’s degrees” (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009, p. 24). As mentioned above in the purpose of this research, Colorado has 2.1% of the U.S. Hispanic population and has the eighth-highest number of Hispanics in the country (“Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin,” 2010, p. 7). Taking into account the growth of this minority group, it is very important to become aware of the educational factors faced by Latinas.

Limitations

The initially desired sample was expected to have more diversity in the participants. However, the lack of representation of Latina students from countries of South America or Central America at this university did not lead to the initially desired sample. The majority of the participants were Latina/Chicana students born in the United States with parents from Mexico. It would have been interesting to have a variety of participants with heritages from different countries of Latin America. Further studies that include these participants could have broader representation and scope.

Researcher's Perspective

As a Ph.D. Latina student in an Interdisciplinary Specialization Program with a focus in Cross Cultural Studies at Colorado State University in the School of Education, I have learned not just about the importance education bestows on people of color, but also the struggles many women of color face in academia. In her study about women of color in academia, Viernes (2002) stated, "I was always singled out when we needed to present research about underserved communities or make statements about the Latino population; otherwise, my research was ignored" (p. 81). Furthermore, Balderrama, Texeira, Thierry, and Valdes (2004) stated, "As in the larger society, academe creates barriers for women of color that prevent them from receiving the same benefits and rewards as White male faculty" (p. 5). Knowing the reality that many women of color are living within academia as shown in the research, and coupled with what I have lived as a Latina, I expected to learn much more by talking to the participants in this study.

As a Latina, my experiences guide my interest to study Latinas. I am from Caracas, Venezuela, but have lived the past sixteen years in the United States. In 1994, I earned a bachelor's degree in Human Resources. In 1996, I earned my second bachelor's degree in Business Administration in Venezuela. When I arrived to the United States in 1998 with my ex-husband and two children, my first goal was to learn how to communicate in English and then to get a degree from a university in this country. My plans changed four months later when I became a single mother. It was not easy to deal with this situation; I did not know the language and had to work cleaning houses to support my children. However, in this dark time of my life, my mother's lessons came to my mind and I decided to continue with my education because I would not let myself down in such a situation. In 2000, I decided to go back to school and take ESL classes; I took two years of classes at the English Intensive Program (EIP), University of

Iowa. In 2004, I began my third bachelor's degree at the University of Iowa because the university did not accept the credits I had from my previous degree in Venezuela. I earned my degree in Latin American studies and Spanish Literature from the University of Iowa in December 2006, and was on the Dean's list.

As a single mother, I want to give the best example to my children, showing them that their mom could do it ...Si se puede. I have no assets or money to leave my children as an inheritance; all I can leave them is a legacy of my example, love for education, and dedication to learn. I decided to study a master's degree in Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Cultures: Major in Spanish, and work on a Women's Studies Certification because I wanted to become a Spanish Instructor and be able to understand students in similar situations. My greatest professional goal is to become an educator, helping others to achieve their goals and dreams. I want to fight oppression that many women of color face, especially Latinas living in this society. I want to guide them through similar educational struggles that I have experienced. I want to help Latin@ families focus on the value of education.

Personal Perspective

I have always been concerned, as a Latina and educator within the educational system, especially about the lack of representation of Latinas in higher education. In the past, I had the opportunity to see statistics of Latinas in education and the low numbers who complete college degrees. Many times, I asked myself what was the reason for this. Then, I had the opportunity to read the theory of Tinto (2012), where he stated that students are more likely to graduate in universities where their performance is evaluated and they are given regular feedback. Also, Tinto specified how important it is to pay attention to students during the first year because this is the year of transition and adjustment in the student's personal, academic, and social life (p.

7).Once I started my doctoral program, I chose to do the dissertation on the experiences of Latinas during their first year in a four-year college. I wanted to contribute, even just a little bit, to understanding the reasons why there is a lack of representation of Latinas in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in this country; “Latinos are now the largest and youngest minority group in the United States and growing rapidly” (Pew Research Center, 2009, p. 1). According to the 2010 Census, “50.5 million (or 16 percent) of the U.S. population were of Hispanic or Latino origin. The Hispanic population increased from 35.3 million in 2000, when this group made up 13 percent of the total population” (p. 2). Moreover, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Chopra (2011) projected that “By the year 2025, roughly one-third of the entire U.S. population will be Latino, and they will represent one-fourth of the public school population in the country” (p. 300). Although the Latin@ minority group has increased in this country, their percentage of enrollment and graduation in education remains low.

According to Pappamihel et al.(2011), “Despite the fact that Latino students are the fastest growing population in our K-12 education, colleges, and universities continue to struggle to retain and graduate Latino students” (p. 332). *The Education Week Journal* (2012) indicated that although more than three-quarters of White and Asian students in the United States earn a high school diploma, the numbers are much more troubling for other ethnic groups, only about half of whom graduate. For example, only 56 percent of Latinos finish high school, 54 percent of African-Americans and 51 percent of Native Americans graduate. On average, only two-thirds of male students earn a diploma, a rate of seven percentage points lower than their female peers. The rates of high school completion for males from historically disadvantaged minority groups consistently falls at or below the 50 percent mark.

The United States Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics indicated that, between 1980 and 2009, the dropout rates from high school were lower for Whites and Blacks than for Hispanics. Also, these statistics indicated the percentage of Hispanics

aged 16–24, who were dropouts, was consistently higher than that of Blacks and Whites throughout the 37-year period of 1972–2009. In other words, Latin@ students have the highest rate of dropouts at the high school level than any other ethnic minority group from 16-24 years old (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This situation limits the ability of these students to attend higher education institutions, as the requirement to be admitted to a college or university is obtaining a high school diploma.

Although the Hispanic population is growing, the number of Latin@ students who are admitted to higher education and obtain a diploma remains low. According to Oseguera et al. (2009), “Despite their larger numbers in postsecondary institutions, Latinas/os are among the least likely racial and ethnic groups to complete their bachelor’s degrees” (p. 24). The American Bar Association (2006) affirmed that for the 2002-03 academic year, White/non-Hispanic College students received 70% of the bachelors of Science degrees conferred in Title IV degree-granting institutions. Black/non-Hispanic students earned 8.7% of the college degrees awarded that year; with comparable rates of 6.3% for Hispanics, 6.2% for Asian/Pacific Islanders and 0.7 for American Indian/Alaska Native.

The lack of education can lead to creating more poverty and social inequality among Latinas. As a result of this situation, many Latinas are still working in low-paying jobs such as factories, cleaning services, and babysitting. Cooper (2011) stated, “National studies show that financial support for students from minority groups such as African-American and Hispanics is important because they don’t have the financial support that is required to prepare for higher education”(p. 1). According to the 2010 census, the percentage below the poverty line for each race was: Whites 9.8%, Asians 12.3%, Hispanics 25.3%, and Blacks 27.6%.

This literature review focuses Latin@ Critical Legal Theory on the experiences of Latina students in four-year public colleges/universities. This literature review includes three sections: the first section is about Latin@ culture, this section contains literature about: (1) norms, values and family expectations in Latin@ culture such as family relationships, and (2) gender differences. The second section in this chapter includes literature related to barriers to participation in higher education, giving emphasis to: (1) Classism and oppression as a stressful factor influencing Latina education, (2) lack of role models, (3) peer influences, (4) academic preparation, (5) first generation, (6) identity denial and internalized racism, and (7) lack of sensitivity and understanding from White educators. Finally, the third section in this chapter is related to retention (1) factors influencing retention, and (2) factors related to degree completion.

Latin@ Culture

Latin@ culture may be seen as having an influence on the low participation rate of Latinas in higher education. The value of the family can be a decisive factor in Latin@ student progress. This review presents some of the cultural issues, norms and values, gender differences, and expectations of the Latina's families.

Familismo is the main value in Latin@' families; the principle of solidarity to the family sometimes makes Latinas feel sorry for their parents and their financial situation. However, this family condition is also a reason of motivation and perseverance for some Latinas to achieve their goal. According to Flores (2009), in a study about Latinas in higher education affirmed through a young Latina interviewed in that study stated, "My witnessing of my parents long, endless, tired and frightened days and nights of illogical raids in the agricultural fields where my mom and dad worked to give us a better life, is what has kept me going" (p. 160). In addition, many seniors in high school have the dilemma of which college to attend because they do not

want to stop living with parents or do not want to go away from them, “For many students and their parents, the ability to attend a college or university while living at home is an important factor in selecting a postsecondary institution” (Desmond & Lopez, 2009, p. 316). Family has a very important value in this culture leading a strong family connection, which may or may not be positive for the participation of the student in college. Desmond and Lopez (2009) further stated, “Living at home during college offers students a way to remain embedded in family networks while defraying a significant amount of college expenses (e.g., rent, food, start-up costs, out-of-state tuition), and this option is quite attractive for Hispanic students” (p. 315).

In a study by Espinoza (2010), it was found that Latin@ families put emphasis in the cultural value of *familismo*, which is based on strong identification and attachment to the family, both immediate and extended, and requires members to prioritize family over individual interests. Espinoza (2010) also affirmed, “Latinas with a strong sense of *familismo* have to spend more time with family and stay close to home, although their obligations to family may conflict with school” (p. 319). Moreover, Perez (2009) provided testimony expressing the importance of cultural meaning and the great support that family and culture provide to Latin@ students. Perez (2009) found that familial, linguistic, social, resistant, navigational, and spiritual forms of capital were rooted in a profound belief that these forms of capital could be utilized to transcend the students’ current circumstances (p. 715). Perez emphasized the importance of CCW in the lives of Latin@ students and added that Latina students utilized various forms of personal, familial, and community resources to move through the navigation of higher education.

On the other hand, one factor that limits Latinas from pursuing higher education may be their familial systems. It may be because some Latinas’ families reflect a patriarchal tradition

where a woman's role is to focus on procreating and caring for the family. Sy and Romero (2008) found that:

Family tradition is one reason why Latinas do not enroll in college. The underlying expectation that Latina youth will leave the family home only when they are ready to get married and care for their own children may lead to conflict for those Latinas who wish to pursue higher education and their career prior to marriage. (p. 216)

Also Latin@ culture believes in the notion of *Marianismo*, the vision of the women portrayed by the Catholic religion as a likeness to the Virgin Mary: pure, and willing to sacrifice for their family. In other words, "Motherhood is an important goal for women in Latin@ culture, and a mother is expected to sacrifice for her children and take care of elderly relatives" (Garcia-Preto, 1998). Although there is a relation between school and family that can be seen as a form of control; however, each family is unique and therefore every family has varying norms, values and expectations for their family's members.

Norms, Values, and Family Expectations

Norms and values in Latin@ culture are heavily dependent on the individual relationship with an individual's family. Many Latinas' parents do not have any formal education and their lack of knowledge about the educational system can detrimentally determine the future of their children. In other words, many Latinas represent the first generation of their families attending college. According to Sy and Romero (2008):

Because Latinas are underrepresented in higher education and because a large percentage of Latinas have parents with little or no college experience, so the young women who do enroll in 4-year programs are further at risk of experiencing conflict between the expectations of their home and school contexts. (p. 214)

In her autobiographic article, Rendon (2002) explained her experience of informing her mother about her decision to enter higher education. Her mother said, "You're crazy. How can you think of going to college if no one in the family has? That is for the rich. Higher education

belonged to the elite. The wealthy and clearly we're not in that group" (p. 317). For example, some Latin@ families may also have unfavorable expectations of education, perhaps because of the lack of knowledge of the system and/or the vision of discrimination that they may have lived. But, most of the Latin@ families are a great tool for the success of these students in college. According to Espinoza (2010), "Latina/o students who placed a great value on their role in the family performed better in school indicating that their connection to family helped them focus on their academics" (p. 319). Finally, Desmond and Turley (2009) stated, "At the attitudinal level, Hispanic adults and adolescents value interdependence, as well as family support and obligations, more so than Whites" (p. 314). Latin@ families are particularly valuable for many students. However, within these values and norms, the difference that may exist in gender can be seen, which may place women in a disadvantaged position in terms of men.

Gender Differences

Gender differences in the Latin@ culture can have great influence on the education of the females. Williams et al. (2002) affirmed, "Family obligations keep Latinas at home, while their brothers are encouraged to work outside the home. The gender structure of the family diminishes opportunities available to Latinas outside the family" (p. 572-573). Furthermore, the authors expressed that one of the disadvantages Latinas face at school is the misconception that their education is a temporary stage to prepare them for marriage and the service sector labor market. They report feeling misunderstood and devalued as students. As graduation time grew closer, the Latinas realized the seriousness of their educational deficits, a pattern not observed with the boys (p. 576).

Latina students do not just face discrimination within the home but also within society. As a purely patriarchal culture, Latina students face more oppression in getting to higher

education. In a study done by Cammarota (2004) with forty Latina students, she stated that “female students...adopt a different orientation to school, in which they perceive the credentials conferred by schools as tickets to a higher status that challenges male domination and offers greater autonomy” (p. 55).

Another important factor is how Latin@ families may perceive girls and boys. In the same study Cammarota (2004) expressed, “Gender dynamics within families placed restrictions that limited their educational potential” (p.56). One of the participants in that study explained, “Our culture-like our parents-they teach us that men are more than women. Like, why do men go out, and I don't go out? Because, he's a man. Why do my brothers do these things, and I don't? Because he's a man....” (p. 63).In addition, Castillo and Hill (2004) affirmed in their study "Predictors of Distress in Chicana College Students" that differences in gender role socialization can lead to different types of expectations from family, "First-generation Chicana students may struggle to fulfill the demands of the traditional role of wife and mother that can at times conflict with their pursuit of a college education” (p. 235).

Gender differences in Latin@ culture may create more stress to Latina students. According to Espinoza (2010),“In their pursuit of higher education Latinas may experience the pressure of fulfilling multiple, and often competing roles within their own culture” (p. 328). It is important to emphasize that Latina students not only have to face gender differences, but also have to face other barriers in the education system to achieve their higher education.

Barriers to Participation in Higher Education

The barriers in this section are classified as socioeconomic status influencing the degree of poverty, lack of role models, peer influences, academic preparation, and educational experience. According to Padilla(1997), “Greater barriers and difficulties experienced by Latinas

can be summarized as language and cultural issues, poverty, immigrant status, prejudice and discrimination, assimilations modes of thinking, lack of political empowerment, deficit thinking about Latina students”(p.181). Valencia (2010), one of the main theorists of deficit thinking, explained this idea in the field of education. According to Valencia, "If I were to compress the construct of deficit thinking into its most condensed meaning, it would be this: Deficit thinking is equivalent to the process of ‘blaming the victim.’ It is a model founded on imputation, not documentation” (p. xiv). He also added that deficit-thinking focuses on how scholars, educators, and policymakers have advanced the deficit-thinking model to explain school failure, particularly among low-socioeconomic status (SES) students of color.

According to Valencia, deficit thinking has been a model of oppression that White educators have used to assess students of color without a previous study of the cultural, linguistic and social differences that may exist in the student. In addition, he affirmed that the main characteristics of deficit thinking not only blames the victim, but further oppresses people of color. He added:

Schooling conditions that play a significant role in shaping and reproducing school failure among students of color are: school segregation, language/cultural exclusion, school financing, teacher–student interactions, teacher certification, curriculum differentiation, special education, gifted/talented education, and the Mexican American teaching force. (p. 2)

Moreover, Terrel (2008) indicated that Latin@ face other challenges that threaten their likelihood for success in college. Currently, many Latin@ students, especially those who attend predominantly White institutions have reported feeling marginalized, alienated, isolated, unsupported, and unwelcomed by their peers and faculty members (p.303). This feeling of marginalization often is marked by the classism and oppression that exists in society.

Classism and Oppression

Financial difficulties in Latinas' families are paramount on a daily basis. Castillo and Hill (2004) found "a significant variable that may contribute to the potential distress that Chicanas may experience in college is low socioeconomic status" (p. 236). In addition to family conditions, many young Latinas cannot afford to support their own education. This may be a significant contributor to deterring Latinas from achieving higher education. Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2011) examined 34 Latin@ students' denial of financial aid and found that undocumented status prevented students from pursuing higher education. This highlights the interlocking relationship between federal immigration and higher education policies. Such policies display classism; they found that many Latin@ students face economic struggles.

For example:

Mario, age 23 describes his decision making process in choosing a transfer institution, 'I went and applied to three universities, and I was accepted to all of them, and I just had to decide according to financial matters.' (p. 111)

Yesenia, age 20, in successfully transferring from a community college to a public 4-year university, explained her litmus test, 'It's always about the money.' (p. 111-112)

Lasley and Pierce (2001) confirmed that economic factors were considered important in some Latinas' education, including:

Failing to realize that for many poor and migrant Latino families, one child going to school may be a financial sacrifice for the entire family. High school and college attendance require money for clothes, school materials, lunch money, and transportation. Paying tuition or living expenses at college is rarely a possibility. (p. 868)

According to Gorski (2012), "Most people in the U.S. believe that poor people are poor because of their own deficiencies rather than opportunity inequalities" (p. 305). However, it is

important to note at this point, how the concept of being poor has led to blaming the individual rather than to analyze what the relevant institutions are doing to help people in need.

The lack of education can be a cause that creates more poverty and social inequality among Latinas. According to Valencia (2010), “The history of deficit thinking in education teems with examples of how macro- and micro-level educational policies/practices fueled by class and racial prejudice kept economically disadvantaged students of color in their place” (p. 37).

As a consequence of this situation, many Latinas are still working in low-paying jobs such as factories, cleaning services, babysitting, etc. In an article by Cooper (2011), he stated, “National studies show that only a small percentage of high school seniors from poor Black or Hispanic families even bother to apply to the country’s best colleges” (p. 1). Also, he mentioned that financial support for students from minority groups such as African-American and Hispanics is important because they don’t have the financial support that is required to prepare for higher education. He added, “The median annual income of all students’ families was \$35,000 and nearly a quarter were living below the federal poverty line” (p. 1).

The lack of economic programs available to help these students plus the hidden racism that exists in society deters students of the educational system and prevents them from obtaining an education. Regarding this, Perez (2011) explained how Chicana students experience subtle and layered forms of racist nativism in public K–12 education. Racist nativism is a conceptual framework that helps researchers understand racialized perceptions of the “native” [Whites] (p. 380). According to Perez, “A racist nativism framework explains how perceived racial differences construct false perceptions of People of Color as ‘nonnative,’ and not belonging to the monolithic ‘American’ identity—an identity that has historically been tied to perceptions and constructions of whiteness” (p. 382).

Furthermore, Gorski (2012) stated:

To believe, for example, that poor people are poor solely because of their own deficiencies, [it means] I must ignore a slew of sociopolitical realities related to poverty and class in the U.S., including inequitable access to schooling and the scarcity of living wage jobs. (p. 307)

Table 1 shows the 2010 census report on the poverty line of four racial groups.

Table 1	
<i>Percentage of Racial Groups Below Poverty Line</i>	
<u>Racial Group Percent</u>	
Whites	9.8
Asians	12.3
Hispanics	25.3
Blacks	27.6

Table 1(source: 2010 Census)

Lack of Role Models

As a consequence, for the lack of Latinas in higher education programs in universities, fewer role models for young Latina students exists. Viernes (2002) wrote:

To be a Latina professor, I conclude, means to be unlike and like me. As Latina professors, we are newcomers to a world defined and controlled by discourses that do not address our realities that do not affirm our intellectual contributions that do not seriously examine our worlds. (p.75)

Moreover, Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2011) conducted a study that examined the retention of non-traditional Latin@ students in a career-based learning community, “The participants also noted that role models provided social support, which contributed to their success” (p. 307). An

extensive representation of role models in the educational system may be a significant way to support Latinas in higher education.

Oseguera et al. (2009) said, “Latina/o faculty and administrator presence on campuses has been proven to have a positive effect on student retention. Latina/o faculty members and administrators are key players in institutional retention efforts because their presence sends a message of inclusivity” (p. 37). Furthermore, they may serve as role models to students who doubt their own ability to succeed in this new environment. The relationship between role models and peer influences can be closely linked in this topic.

Peer Influences

Positive peer influences can be difficult for Latinas to find, which is reflected by the lack of representation of Latinas in higher education. Martinez (2002) stated, “Women of color often feel separate and alone; their sense of isolation is compounded when they have few role models and fewer peers with whom to interact” (p. 252). The influence of peers has been viewed as difficult for Latina students within both secondary and higher education. According to The National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) (2009), “Peer influences are also critical for Latina students; the loss of a peer network can be discouraging and make it even harder to achieve academic goals” (p. 18).

Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, and Bámaca (2006) affirmed, “Researchers have also found that peers play an important role in the academic support of ethnic minority students” (p. 281). Research has shown that college campuses with more diversity are more likely to keep minority students until their graduation. Logerbeam, Sedlacek, and Alatorre (2004) reported in their study about Latin@ student retention, “Latino/a students who perceive their campus as ethnically diverse were more likely to persist in college” (p. 539). Following this statement, the authors

noted that not only do Latin@ students remain enrolled, but it also helps them perform better academically.

Academic Preparation

Academic preparation has been an additional issue faced by Latina students in higher education. According to Crisp and Nora (2010), “Another disturbing figure is the number of Hispanics who enter higher education academically unprepared or underprepared to engage in college level coursework” (p. 176). In addition, Oseguera et al. (2009) stated, “Latina/o students tend to score lower than other ethnic groups on standardized exams” (p. 34). Latin@ students are highly concerned, in part, because they understand the serious implications of their performance, but also because they perceive bias in the exam. For example, a “study of Latina/o and African American high school students’ perceptions of standardized college admissions examinations identified high levels of stress and suspicion of bias associated with these tests” (Walpole, 2005).

According to Abdul-Alim (2011), the academic proficiency rates were dire for African-American and Hispanic students. First, it is important to understand the meaning of the terms *academic proficiency*. According to Northern Michigan University, *academic proficiency* is the measurement of how much progress a student is making toward his or her degree. African-American and Hispanic students had proficiency rates that ranged from 24 percent to as low as 13 percent. Only 15 percent and 19 percent of Black and Hispanic eighth-graders, respectively, were proficient in reading, compared with 43 percent of White students; and only 13 percent and 20 percent of Black and Hispanic eighth-graders were proficient in math, compared with 44 percent of White students. Abdul-Alim (2011) added:

Fifty percent of Black eighth-graders and 40 percent of Hispanic eighth-graders are below basic achievement level in math; this means they still have difficulty doing basic arithmetic. Students doing math at that level will have trouble doing algebra they need to be able to do in college.(p. 1)

Data extracted from the National Report Card shows only a third of the country’s fourth and eighth-graders are proficient in Reading and Math. Table 2 shows academic proficiency rates for African-American, White and Hispanic students in 2011 based on this report card(Gutierrez, 2002 p. 1,048).

Table 2		
<i>Academic Proficiency Rates for Eighth-Graders by Race in 2011</i>		
<u>Race Origin</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>
	<u>8 graders</u>	<u>8 graders</u>
Whites	43	44
African-Americans	15	13
Hispanics	19	20
Table 2 Source: (Gutierrez, 2002 p. 1,048)		

In addition, Gutierrez (2002) explained that, “Beyond the need to support all Latina/os in school, some specific needs warrant particular attention. For example, U.S. mathematics is a subject in which Latinas/os have not traditionally performed well and that has serious life consequences for earning potential” (p.1,048). Historically, Latin@ students struggle in the aforementioned academic areas, but the question about this issue should be: why?

In 2002, the senate passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. This law was initially created to help children with their education and to help to remove the gap that existed between White children and children of underprivileged groups. It has been one of the main interferences of the federal government in education in the history of the United States. This is primarily a systematic system that has been set to fail many students of color and low economic income. According to Darling-Hammond (2007), “Section 9101(25) of NCLB defines a LEP student as one whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may

be sufficient to deny the individual *the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement* on State assessments described” (p. 249). Moreover, Hursh (2007), explained that “NCLB requires that 95% of students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school be assessed through standardized tests aligned with ‘challenging academic standards’ in math and reading” (p. 296). Hursh (2007) also added, “All students (regardless of ability or proficiency, whether they have a disability or recently immigrated to the United States and are English language learners) are expected to be proficient in every subject” (p. 296). This means that a child who does not speak the English language well must work twice as hard, first learning the language and at the same time learning the area evaluated. Finally, Hursh (2007) added, “NCLB, therefore, both directly and indirectly exacerbates racial, ethnic and economic inequality in society” (p.306).

According to Jaen (2013), “One way to see this is to look at the scores of rich and poor students on standardized math and reading tests over the last 50 years. I found that the rich-poor gap in test scores is about 40 percent larger now than it was 30 years ago” (p. 1). In other words, it seems that the educational system is not set up to give support to students of color or students from low-income families. The educational system is geared to support a privileged sector of students, and discriminates even deeper against unprivileged groups.

First Generation

Another factor that may influence the academic preparation of Latina students is that the majority of them represent the first generation of college students in their family. As first generation, the student whose parents or legal guardians have not attended college or often even hold a high school diploma are seen as less. According to Kurotsuchi, Daver, Vogt, and Brown (2007), “First-generation college students tend to be less academically prepared, have lower reading, math, and critical thinking skills, and are more likely to attend high schools with less

rigorous curricula than students who have college attendance in their backgrounds” (p. 405). In addition, first generation students tend to have more disadvantages in academia than those students who are not. Kurotsuchi et al. (2007) added, “First generation students are more likely to have a lower income family and to be from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds, first-generation college students were also more likely to be women, be older, have children, and have lower degree aspirations” (p. 405). This is why it is necessary and important to focus and pay more attention in the experiences of Latinas during their first year at college. Many Latina students from K-12 come from a low-income family and are first generation.

Thayer (2005) stated, “First generation and low income students may be among those at the highest risk for dropping out” (p. 5). Also, he affirmed that Students from first generation and low-income backgrounds are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education and less likely to persist through graduation.

Identity Denial and Internalized Racism

Most evidence compellingly indicates that many ethnic minority groups are facing identity denial and/or internalized racism because of the oppression that exists in American society. In fact, Latinas are bicultural because many of them were born in this country and come from families with another culture. This means they bring their own cultural heritage, but at the same time they belong to another culture by origin of birth.

The fear of not being accepted, and the existing racism, has caused many of these students to have an attitude of rejection to their own culture. Identity denial is, according to Wang, Minervino, and Cheryan (2012), a form of identity miscategorization in which one’s social identity (as American) does not match up with how he/she is perceived by others (as less than fully American). In addition, Cheryan and Monin (2005) stated that although Latinas may

feel, think, and act American because they were born and raised here, they are normally treated and seen as though they are foreigners and do not belong in America to the same degree as other European Americans.

Huynh (2013) affirmed that these microinvalidation experiences send the message that they do not belong or are not fully American; they are labeled a “perpetual foreigner.” Also, he said that identity denial can seem innocuous and insignificant at the time, but repeated exposure to microaggressions hurts mental health because these represent a clash of racial realities between the perpetrator and target, and “they create situations in which targets of microaggressions are unsure of whether or how to respond to the incident” (p. 1). The insinuations or passive attacks that Latinas normally receive are often in the form of subtle questions, such as: “Where are you from? Where are you? Do you speak English?” This happens because Latinas do not have the predominant characteristics of American Whites.

Cheryan et al. (2005) confirmed that questions like “Where are you really from?” and “Do you speak English?” are palpable reminders of identity denial, of the fact that one is being relegated outside one’s in-group because one does not fit the picture. Moreover, Wang et al. (2012) stated, “Having one’s identity denied involves a discrepancy between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others” (p. 601). Many Latinas born in this country suffer this discrepancy to feel “American” because they were born in this country, but are seen by others as being foreign in their own country.

All these types of aggression elsewhere have generated the emergence of internalized racism in ethnic minority groups. According to Bryant (2011), internalized racism is a social psychological process that affects Latinas in a degree of acceptance of the dominant culture’s traditions, beliefs, and rationale for the denigration of people of Latin@ descent. In addition,

Bryant (2011) stated, “It is an experience of self-degradation and self-alienation, which incorporates shame of minority group identity and culture” (p. 692). It is basically the acceptance and empowerment of “whiteness” while denigrating their own roots. Internalized racism is frequently seen in a racial group, such as family members. For example, when members of a group or family discriminate against other members of the same group or family.

There is another “phenomenon” the experts call “defensive othering.” According to Pyke (2010), “The identity work engaged by the subordinated in an attempt to become part of the dominant group or to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with the subordinate groups”. Also, Pyke said that Mexican-Americans use the offensive identities *wetback to* denigrate co-ethnics who are newly immigrated or have not assimilated into the dominant Euro-American culture. These kinds of terms are used to “other” “members within the subordinated group, deeming them inferior in order to mark oneself or one’s co-ethnic peer group as superior”(p. 557). Finally, Pyke affirmed that this is the double bind of oppressed identities, for the subjugated cannot so easily escape their “otherness.” Thus, defensive othering is a form of internalized racism (p. 558). These offensive words just minimize “others” among the same ethnic group making White supremacy in American society prevail.

Another significant concept that has emerged to refer to the minority groups such as Black, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native American who are enrolled in the educational system is the term “minoritized.” This use is, according to Stewart (2013), to the “process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization” that reflects an understanding of “minority” status as that which is socially constructed in specific societal contexts (p. 184). Moreover, Verner, Chappell and Cahnmann-Taylor (2013) stated:

By minoritized youth, we refer to any and all who identify in contextually situated, no dominant communities such as race, class, sexual orientation, language, dis/ability,

religion, and gender. As we identify such contexts, we are aware that minority/majority status is unstable and contingent. (p.243)

Lack of Sensitivity and Understanding from White Educators

Latina students also face a lack of sensitivity and understanding by the White educators about Latin@ students. The educational system plays an important role in the diffraction of Latinas. According to Smith, Altbach, and Lomotey (2002), “Factors influencing the relationship between birth rates and college enrollments fall into two basic categories. The first is economics and the second is the public school system” (p.51). An important factor influencing the lack of participation of Latinas in college and university programs is the social issues within the educational system and the persistence of discreet racism. Pappamihel et al. (2011) stated:

There are few places in society that come closer to personifying dominant culture than a typical 4-year university. Even within the White dominant culture, universities are seen as the Ivory Tower, more White than White. Everywhere members of the minority culture are bombarded with the elite dominant culture represented at the university. For example, in our own field of education, there are few minority students, and they do not have a critical mass in terms of cultural representation. (p.333-334)

The insensitivity of many educators to the cultural differences of these students, in this case Latinas, may result in the unwillingness to support any program that may encourage minorities to pursue higher education. Smith et al. (2002) said, “Departments and programs have in many instances resisted the rigorous enforcement of affirmative action guidelines both for women and for racial groups” (p. 25-26). According to Howard (2006):

We cannot improve the quality of education for any group of racial and cultural ‘others’ in Western nations today without first understanding the extent to which our educational practices and institutions continue to be influenced by colonial beliefs and power. (p. 50)

In addition, Hernandez (2000) stated, “Unfortunately, many school officials still perceive Latin@ students as a model of deficiency; focusing on what they fail to bring to the college experience” (p. 575). For his part, Valencia (2010) affirmed, “How the effects of White racism

by pre-service teachers, as manifested via deficit thinking, influence their attitudes and behavior toward culturally and linguistically different children of color” (p. 126). Generally, teachers do not know how to relate to students of color, or low-income status, let alone implement a culturally appropriate teaching methodology in their classrooms.

Oppression and discrimination within the educational system have been the major impediment for many Latinas’ success in the education field. Villalpando (1996) stated, “Throughout their educational careers, Latinas and Chicanas are subjected to some form of intolerance based on their gender or race or both” (p. 102). Moreover, Lopez (2003) affirmed, “Race and racism are present and prevalent in education and in the research and practice of education” (p. 83). What is more, Perez et al. (2011) stated, “In the field of education, studies have found Latina/o and African American students to be targeted by low expectations, racist and sexist attitudes, and a racially hostile college campus environment, all forms of racial microaggressions” (p. 386). In addition, Lasley and Pierce (2001) said, “Latino students construct paths through the terrain of discrimination and prejudice they encounter in school in more complex and varied ways” (p. 860). According to DeMirjyn (2011), in her study with 12 Chicana/Latina students, she stated:

All the women acknowledge the difficulties in being “the” Chicana or “the” Latina in certain situations both on and off campus. For example, a participant stated she was lucky “I saw the worst cases. People had to go home after their first year”, this participant felt lucky because she was not one of the Chicana/Latina going home after the first year. (p. 81, 87)

DeMirjyn also said, “Historically, campus climate for marginalized populations has been problematic and continues to progress with little improvement” (p. 76). Moreover, there is a conviction that in some Hispanic families’ education and professional success is not important. Zalaquett (2005) stated, “Many in P-12 and higher education still ascribe to the belief that

Latin@ families are not interested in education or that their children do not have the ability to succeed” (p. 35). This belief, that Latino families have no interest in the academic success of their children and that Latin@ students do not have the ability to study, is a clear form of racism and social prejudice that many educators have in K-12 and also in higher education.

The lack of experience or knowledge of White educators working with minority groups has been an important cause of this condition. In addition to this problematic situation in higher education, Jennings and Potter (2002) confirmed:

Research has shown that the majority of teachers in the United States are European American and middle class and that many of these teachers do not see the invisible yet profound social forces at work that bring about inequality among different cultural groups in society and in schools. (p. 458)

Perhaps the lack of experience of White educators in teaching students from other cultures who speak languages other than English, is one of the most crucial flaws in the educational system. In a study by Pappamihel et al. (2011), they found that students were more likely to persist in classes where the professor had created an environment where students felt connected and believed they could succeed (p.340).

Howard (2006) suggested that change begins with White educators to acknowledge and utilize cultural competence with racial, educational equity and school reform. Howard said, “Such cultural responsiveness depends on White educators’ willingness to engage in the process of our own personal and professional growth” (p.123).He added, "Knowledge and competence in dealing with issues of race, transformationist teachers also know that educational equity and school reform, in large part, depend on White educators’ willingness to engage in the process” (p.122). However, Nieto and Bode (2008) said that “teachers are the products of educational systems that have history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy” (p. 6).

Finally, Valencia (2010) argued, "I close this discussion of preservice teacher education and deficit thinking by shifting slightly to a focus not on White students in teacher education programs, but on the predominant deliverers of such training White professors" (p. 130). It is crucial to teach future teachers the importance of knowing other cultures, customs, religions, races and ethnicities.

Enlightening White educators about other cultures, religions, races and ethnicities will help them see the reality lived by these groups and better understand and teach to their prospective students. Howard (2006) stated:

Transformationist White educators know that school reality does not have to be this way. Encouraged by the Education Trust's identification of 4,000 high-performing, high-diversity, high-poverty schools (Education Trust, 2002; Noguera, 2003), the problem lies not in the students themselves, but in our capacity to believe in them. (p.124)

Moreover, Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, and Perkins(2013) stated, "In essence, African American or Hispanic descent inherit a public schooling system that increases the odds of their personal failure due to the collective disregard for the systemic issues of professional dysfunction" (p. 4).Society often blames the student of color for his/her failure in school, but historically this society that blames students of color, has not admitted that the problem lies within the educational system for not eradicating racism and social prejudices that have remained throughout history. Meanwhile, Nieto and Bode (2008) argued about racism and various forms of discrimination that exist in the educational system, saying, "Racism and other forms of discrimination particularly sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and linguicism have a long history in our schools and their effects are widespread and long lasting" (p. 69). This situation of racism and social prejudice against students of color has had negative effects on the retention of Latina students in higher education.

Retention

Student retention plays an important role in higher education, especially with students of color. As is well known, retention is linked with the persistence of students in finishing their degrees, but the question is: are institutions working towards an efficient retention program to assist Latin@ students? The retention of Latin@ students in higher education has been a serious problem for many universities, and it has left a low number in overall retention of Latin@ students. According to the U.S. Department of Education's 2008 National Center for Education Statistics, "About 62 percent of Hispanic adults over the age of 25 had completed at least high school or the equivalent, and at least 11 percent had completed a bachelor's degree, compared with 27 percent of the total population" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1).

Tinto (2002) noted that students were more likely to persist in classes where the professor had created an environment where students felt connected and believed they could succeed. In addition, Davison and Foster (2001) expressed that many different explanations have been offered "for the relatively small numbers of students of color entering PhD programs; today's sluggish market for college instructors, the high costs of graduate education, limited financial support, and more lucrative opportunities in other professional fields" (p. 549). Oseguera et al. (2009) stated, "Despite their larger numbers in postsecondary institutions, Latinas/os are among the least likely racial and ethnic groups to complete their bachelor's degrees" (p.24). There are a number of reasons that Latin@ retention efforts have had such limited success. For example, Oseguera et al. (2009) said, "Admittedly, our knowledge of retention issues for Latina/o students may be considered broad, but less attention has been paid to efforts that have been specifically advanced to assist students of color and, in particular, Latina/o students" (p. 27). The deficit that

exists in retention programs at universities has had an impact on the reduced retention of Latin@ students in higher education.

Factors Impacting Retention

Many factors can be attributed to the success or failure of retaining students in higher education. For example, Tinto (2012) affirmed, “Private universities graduate 90 percent of their beginning students while public universities graduate fewer than 30 percent” (p. 3). This means that private universities give more attention to students than public universities. Public universities have also registered lower retention numbers, especially with minority students. According to Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2011), “Successful institutions recognize that both staff and faculty are important to building a positive campus climate for diversity. Latino students who perceive a student-centered faculty and have opportunities to interact with faculty are more likely to persist in college” (p.301).

There are a number of reasons that Latin@ retention efforts have had such limited success. It is important to note that many Latinas do not feel accepted in higher education. Cavazos (2010) confirmed, “In fact, Latina/o students reported that they were more likely to experience barriers than their non-minority counterparts” (p. 305). Additionally, Oseguera et al. (2009) said, “Our knowledge of retention issues for Latina/o students may be considered broad, but less attention has been paid to efforts that have been specifically advanced to assist students of color and, in particular, Latina/o students” (p. 27). Finally, Crisp and Nora (2010) found, “A large concentration of Hispanic students and positive interactions between students and faculty were two major reasons contributing to the persistence decisions of four-year Hispanic students” (p. 179). In other words, creating a sense of belonging in the universities and the positive

relationship between students and faculty-staff can have an encouraging impact for Latin@ students to complete their education and result in satisfactory retention rates of these students.

Factors Impacting Degree Completion

Other significant factors impact degree completion for Latina students. Oseguera et al. (2009) pointed out that “regardless of strong academic backgrounds, cultural, and social isolation, negative stereotypes, low expectations from teachers and peers, and non-supportive educational environments can affect Latinas/os’ academic performance and persistence decisions” (p. 37).

Regarding the low expectations from teachers, Aragon et al. (2013) stated, “Previous research shows teachers often have low expectations for students from lower socioeconomic status due to their language and cultural differences” (p. 7). Strayhorn (2008) said, “Factors impacting Latinas’ achieving an advanced degree were low socioeconomic status, lacking a sense of belonging on campus, and strong familial obligations” (p. 302-303). Nevertheless, Alonso (2006) affirmed that providing better preparation in high school could partially solve the retention problem. Hispanics are more likely to attend overpopulated and financially constrained high schools localized in poor urban areas (p. 24). However, Oseguera et al. (2009) argues that the retention problem is much more than adequate preparation, “Students’ academic qualifications are important as unquestionable, yet this phenomenon provides a sobering reminder that retention includes much more than just grades” (p. 35). In accordance with Oseguera et al., Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2011) added, “Institutions and programs that are successfully enrolling and graduating Latino students focus on academic and social integration first by building a positive campus climate, and then by providing academic support programs” (p. 301).

Positive Academic and Cultural Support

The university of the researcher provides a place on campus called the “*Latin@ Center*” where Latin@ can meet and make cultural activities as well as receive academic support. The director of the *Latin@ Center* was interviewed by the researcher, the director explained that one of the major goals of the *Latin@ Center* is to retain as many students they can using programs in the transition of the students from high school or leaving a family to this university. Also, the director stated that in the *Latin@ Center*, they provide an essence of *familia*; in particular, they have a program called *Las amigas (The female friends)*, where Latina students have the opportunity to share their family and academic stories and experiences. Finally, the director explained that Latina students in this university also have the support of the Department of Ethnic Studies. As seen before, one of the main keys to retaining Latin@ students is an environment where students feel they belong and to provide them with programs of social and academic integration.

Summary

Reviewing this literature highlights evidence of different factors influencing Latina students during their first year in universities. The latest statistics from the census (2010) show that 50.5 million (or 16 percent of the total population) Hispanics live in the United States. However, only 6.3 percent of the Hispanic population is enrolled in higher education, and only 56 percent have graduated high school. These are alarming numbers when speaking about a quickly growing population in this country. The different barriers and constraints identified in this literature review represent the main possible causes for why such a low number of Latinas participating in post-secondary education exists. Experts have suggested that financial aid, academic services, curriculum and instruction, and student services could be areas where

colleges and universities may need to work to improve retention of Latinas, particularly in their first year at these universities.

This literature review has identified a significant gap to be investigated, which could make a difference if further researched and put into effect in universities/colleges. This gap is investigating the experiences of Latina students who are in four-year public colleges/universities. For this reason, this study investigated this topic in a four-year public institution in a western state with Latina students in their first year of attendance.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

The focus of this chapter is on the research methodology selected for this study. This study used a qualitative method. Research design, rationale, appropriateness, participants, data collection (interviews, questionnaire, and field notes), data analysis, trustworthiness, and a final summary are all highlighted in this chapter.

Research Design, Rationale and Appropriateness

The interest of this study was in Latina students' experiences during their first year in a four-year institution in a western state. Knowing their experiences provided greater clarity to answer the research questions proposed in this study. This study used the methodology of counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) using personal experience from the life of Latinas in undergraduate programs within this public institution. This was combined within the triple framework of Critical Race Theory, Lat Crit, and Community Cultural Wealth. According to Cuyjet, Howard, and Cooper (2011), "Critical race theorists believe in the role of storytelling to give the oppressed an opportunity to be empowered and heard" (p. 27). "Counter-storytelling emphasizes aspects of the world that have been silenced and provide a competing perception of social life" (Espino et al., 2012, p. 33). According to Solórzano et al. (2002), the best definition for counter-storytelling is:

A method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told, generally, those on the margins of society... The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (p. 32)

Counter-storytelling challenges the dominant discourse of master narrative that justifies the ideology of racism in stories about the low educational achievement of students of color. White privilege is often invisible because it is the norm; White privilege helps maintain racism's

stories as a form of power (Solorzano et al., 2002). Counter-stories have four main functions: (1) Build community among those at the margins of society. (2) Challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems.(3)

Open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the one they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position.(4)

Teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct a not her world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone (Solorzano et al., 2002).

Counter-storytelling gives students of color the opportunity to be the holders and creators of knowledge. According to Delgado (2002), "Students of color often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational setting and this method can assist in the process of counter story such patterns" (p. 106).

There are three types of Counter-Narratives and/or stories: (1) Personal stories or narratives, (2) Other people's stories or narratives, (3) composite stories or narratives. Personal Stories or Narratives refers to autobiographical reflections of the author, referents to racism and sexism. Other People's Stories or Narratives usually offers biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color, again in relation to U.S. institutions and in a socio-historical context. It also referents to racism and sexism as told in a third-person voice. Composite Stories or Narratives draw on various forms of "data" to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color. These stories may offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses because the authors create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination.

(Solorzano et al., 2002). Counter-story uses the concept of theoretical sensitivity, which refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't.

This study used Other People's Stories or Narratives. Through the participants' experiences, the researcher was able to evaluate Latina students' experiences during their first year in a four-year institution. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of Latina students during their first year in a four-year public university.

Participants

Creswell (2009) described a participant as "someone who is critical to study because she/he has experienced a specific issue" (p. 523). The sample for this study is eight students. The participants were women, first-year college students, and self-identified as Latinas or Chicanas. All participants were eighteen years old or older. The sampling procedure was homogeneous sampling, which was chosen because it "selects similar cases to describe a subgroup in depth" (Glesne, 2011, p. 45).

This study did not use males because the particular interest here was on the intersection (a woman's identity as it relates to her gender, race, social class, language, etc.) of several minority groups, such as women who were Latinas. The male experience, although interesting was not part of this study because this was not about comparing these two groups. Adding males while working on the intersectionality component would not serve these purposes. Furthermore, as a woman scholar of color, the researcher was implored to examine female students of color based on their raced, classed, gendered, and socio-cultural experiences (Austin, 1999; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Participants were recruited by contacting the gatekeeper, in this case the director of the Latin@ center at this university, requesting a list of Latina students in their first year. A gatekeeper “is an individual who helps researchers locate people” (Creswell, 2008, p. 218). Then, the students were contacted by e-mail, sending an invitation to take part in this study (see Appendix A). A flyer was placed in both the Latin@ center and Ethnic Studies Department with the characteristics needed to take part in this study. This allowed for any Latina or Chicana student to take part if they so desired. Interested volunteers were then contacted by the researcher via email, which identified the participant's email address. The consent form asked if it was acceptable for the participant to email the researcher and if they consented to being contacted by email. In order to participate, consent was requested, signed and returned to the co-researcher. Participation in this study was voluntary; however, a small incentive of a \$10 gift card was given to participants at the end of the second meeting for their time and collaboration in this study(see Appendix B).

Data Collection

Participants were selected by purposeful sampling; according to Merriam (2002), “a purposeful sample is a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 12). Data collection was classified into three stages. These stages were completed with triangulation through face-to-face interviews, letters to self, and questionnaires. Total approximate time participants were committed in this study was two hours and twenty minutes. Triangulation is the strategy used in qualitative studies that combines multiple sources such as interviews, observations, and documents. Data triangulation is “multiple data collection, sources, investigators, and theoretical perspectives” (Glesne, 2011, p. 49).

Interviews

The first stage of data collection was individual face-to-face interviews. The Researcher met with the participants twice; the first meeting was for the interview and the second meeting was useful to check on the transcription with each participant. For the development and analysis of the data, each of the participants was assigned an alias to protect their identity. The first meeting interview was approximately 45 minutes per participant and the second meeting was about 20 minutes. Open-ended questions were asked of participants and were related to Latina students' experiences, with tentative initial questions to establish a conversation (see Appendix C). Open-ended questions give participants the best voice to express their experiences (Creswell, 2008, p. 225). The interview protocol for this study was semi-structured. Riessman (2008) noted, "The standardized protocol (where question order is invariant) gives way to conversation where interviewees can develop narrative accounts" (p. 23).

In each interview, an audio recorder was used and then each recording was downloaded into the computer to have a better sound quality at the time of transcription. Interviews were recorded with previous consent of each participant and were conducted individually with IRB approval. Interviews occurred in public places, such as local coffee shops or at the library. The recordings were initially kept in the main researcher's computer and then transferred to a single thumb drive with the participant pseudonym and accurate name. The audio file on the computer was then deleted. The copy of the audio recording was transcribed (deleting all personal identifiers). The recordings were kept for further analysis and identified through the pseudonyms. The transcripts with the non-identifying information were kept for research analysis in order to ensure the information was transcribed accurately. Qualitative research relies upon the accuracy of participant words. The recordings stored on the thumb drive were stored in

the Co-PI's locked office. Participants were asked for their consent whether their recordings may be kept for research, teaching, and conference or educational purposes. One purpose for keeping the recordings was to cross-reference the information for future analysis of information to be included in future manuscripts written for journal submissions or for teaching purposes.

The following are the questions the participants answered, providing the depth of information necessary for the researcher to construct the restoried counter narratives:

1. Where you were born/where were you raised?
2. Could you please tell me about your family in general; where were they born, how many persons are in your house, how many brothers and sisters do you have?
3. How was your high school experience?
4. What were your goals in high school with regard to higher education? Did you receive assistance with your elementary and secondary education? If so, did you have family members assist, school officials, and what assistance did they provide?
5. How was your process to apply for financial aid such as through grants, scholarships, and funding? What ways did your family encourage, support, and assist you to receive funding? What was done to support you in this endeavor? If your family did not support, assist, or encourage you, then who did?
6. Did you receive guidance to apply for scholarship or financial aid? How was this experience? How did you navigate this process? Who did you seek assistance from? How did your family encourage, guide, or provide support in this process?
5. How has your social experience on campus been during your first year? Explain.

- a. What assists you to stay resilient in your experience at CSU? Are there specific people in your life who assist you to continue your education (parents, grandparents, etc.)? If so, how and what do they do or say to you?
 - b. Have you received assistance in your experience on this campus to navigate your education? If so, who and how has this occurred? Are there family members who also assist in this navigation?
 - c. What do you aspire to accomplish with your education and why? Who has assisted, encouraged or supported you in this endeavor? Are there family members who assist, encourage or support? Why do you have this aspiration? How do you maintain this aspiration (are there classes or people at CSU who assist with this)? Are there family members who assist you in maintaining your aspirations and if so, how and why?
 - d. What ways do you stay social and connected to your educational experiences? How is this useful to your overall educational goals?
6. How have you felt in general during your first year at this university? Explain.
7. How has your experience here (University) been significant to your academic progress?
8. Have you experienced obstacles to continue with your education? If so, what are these obstacles and how are you navigating them. Provide examples.
- a. Does your family support you during these obstacles and if so, how, and why?
 - b. If you receive support from someone or some place on campus, please describe this and how does this assist you?
9. Do you receive family support to continue your university education? Explain.

10. What words or phrases do you hear from your family in regards to your university education?
11. Is English your native language? If not, what is your native language? How do you value your language and how has this been an asset or hindrance to you in your first year at this institution?
12. How have you felt living without your family?
13. What are the cultural values that you most like?
14. Do you receive support from peers, faculty, and university staff to continue in school? Explain.
15. Have you experienced racism at this university in your classes, on campus or even in the community? If so, please explain.

Letters to Self (Documents)

The second stage of data collection was comprised of a participant-written letter to self with a starter phrase such as: “Dear _____, now that I have been through my first semester of college, I want you to know....” This self-letter only contained a pseudonym previously arranged with the researcher during the interview, took approximately sixty minutes of their time, and was not completed in the presence of the researcher. A questionnaire was provided as a letter-writing guide for participants.

Questionnaire

The questions administered during the first meetings to each participant in this study were related to previous research findings regarding Latinas in higher education, such as: experiences with teachers, peers, and administrative personnel, guidance received regarding college (school/family), and family support. A major goal during interviews was to connect and

build credibility with the participants because this is not an easy topic that one discusses with a stranger, especially if their experience was negative (See Appendix D).

When the participants finished their self-letters, they contacted the researcher by email and agreed to deliver the letters in a public place. They gave it to the researcher in her hands in an envelope given by the researcher during the interview. The letter was:

- a. Asked to be written by the participants on their own time and in their own space without researcher oversight.
- b. The participants were asked to return the letter in an envelope.
- c. Each participant was asked to self-identify with their own choice of a pseudonym.

The pseudonyms were utilized within the data, as well as the written information within the dissertation.

The following are the questions are the questions of the questionnaire given to the participants in the interview as a guide to write their letter. They were asked not to answer question by question and that it must be in a letter format, and the letter must start with: “Dear their name (they had to use their pseudonym), now that I have been through my first semester of college, I want you to know....”

1. Did you know many people during your first week here?
2. How did you feel in your first semester? Have you had a change in how you feel now? If so, why? If not, why?
3. How was your experience with professors and classmates?
4. What was the most you missed from your home/family/culture?
5. How do you navigate your education?
6. What keeps you aspiring in your education?

7. Are you involved socially on campus and if so, what organizations are you involved with and what support do you receive from such involvement?
8. What lessons from your family or/and culture have helped you cope with your experiences here?
9. How is your language part of your experience?
10. Have you experienced positive or negative experiences in your education so far at this university?
11. Have you experienced racism? If so, what does this look like?
12. Today how do you feel as you are aspiring your educational goals?
13. What will you do to continue to reach your goals to stay resilient in your education? What are steps you are taking to continue your education? What have you learned?

Data Analysis Procedures

For the development and analysis of the data, each of the participants was asked to choose an alias to protect their identity. Only the main researcher and researcher's advisor had access to the data. When the digital audio recordings were transcribed, they were kept and used for referencing purposes for future manuscript submissions to journals and educational purposes for up to three years. If the participant decided not to provide consent to keep and retain use of the digital audio recordings, they will be destroyed after three years. Once the data was collected, the main researchers kept the transcripts (with the aliases). Creswell (2012) noted that "researchers need to protect the anonymity of the participants, by assigning numbers or aliases in the process of analyzing and reporting data" (p. 248).

Each face-to-face interview was transcribed verbatim on the same date of the interview, with the intention of keeping the information given by each participant clear. After transcribing the interviews, “preliminary exploratory analysis” was conducted (Creswell, 2008, p. 250). In order to get a general sense of the data, all of the recorded interviews were listened to closely and then the notes taken during the interviews were read and compared to the recorded interviews. Then, each transcription was read several times to become familiar with the transcripts and the data before being codified.

Each interview and letter to self was codified separately, taking into the account the most named themes. Then, a second coding combining these two encodings occurred. Once the two codifications were completed from the interviews and letter to self, a taxonomy was created based on the codes. The taxonomy was enabled seeing new potential codes for a third round of coding. During this analysis, the research sub-questions of this study were investigated: (1) what cultural influences identified by the participants have impacted their experiences during the first year of study at the University? (2) What family influences were identified by participants that have impacted their experiences at college? (3) What social and intellectual influences were identified by participants within the institution that impacted their experience?

For the configuration of the eight counter-stories in this study, the answers of the questions that emerged in the interviews of each participant were used. Additionally, themes from the letter-to-self previously codified were utilized. Finally, the process of reconstructing the eight counter-stories following the sequence of the three sub questions of this study was conducted. “Restorying” is the process of reorganizing the Latinas’ counter-stories into a general type of framework (Creswell, 2012). These eight counter-stories were the result of the combination of all themes to come out from the coding of the interviews and letter-to-self, with

the purpose of generating a story that made sense, was consistent to this study, and accurately represented what participants said.

Trustworthiness

This study developed trustworthiness through the following process: (a) peer debriefing, (b) member-checking; and (c) triangulation. Trustworthiness focuses on the context of data collection and the methods of the generation of data, rather than on its inherent 'truthfulness' (Gibson and Brown, 2009, p. 59).

Peer debriefing.

This study had the help of colleagues and members of this committee to assist in the development of the study, with the aim of improving the accuracy and trustworthiness. According to Merriam (2008), "All graduate students have a peer review process built into their thesis or dissertation committee, as members read comments on the findings...also discussion with colleagues regarding the process of study" (p. 26, 31).

Member checking.

Member checking was used to create greater accuracy of the answers emitted by the participants in the interviews. Each participant's answers and opinions were informally re-checked with the participant after the interview. Both the interviewer and participant listened to the previous interview; and participants were asked "this is what you meant when you said ...?" This was done to have the assurance that what was transcribed was the same as what the participant said during her interview (Merriam, 2002, p. 12). Member check is an important strategy used in this study because it helped to avoid misinterpretation of any information given by the participant.

Triangulation.

Triangulation is strategy used in qualitative studies that combine multiples sources such as interviews, observations, and documents. Data triangulation is “a multiple data collection, sources, investigators, and theoretical perspectives” (Glesne, 2011, p. 49). This study used interviews and letters-to-self (document) to provide more information on the topic studied in this project.

Summary

This chapter was focused on the methodology of this study. This study used the methodology of counter-storytelling, using the personal experiences of Latinas in undergraduate programs within a four-year public university. This methodology was combined with the triple framework of CRT, LatCrit, and CCW to analyze the experiences of Latina students in a four-year university. This chapter incorporated the research design, rationale, and appropriateness as this study sought to understand the experiences of the participants, who were eight Latina/Chicana students in their first year at a four-year public university. Data collection was conducted through interviews, questionnaires, and letters-to-self. The interviews and letters-to-self were codified separately. Then, a second coding, combining these two encodings, occurred. Interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded for relevant themes, according to the main questions of this research. Finally, trustworthiness in this study was established through peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation. Trustworthiness focused on the context of data collection and the methods of the generation of data, rather than on its inherent ‘truthfulness’ (Gibson and Brown, 2009, p. 59).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the findings and data analysis of this study. The eight counter-stories of each participant are presented. Then, the emergent themes from the counter-stories are analyzed in accordance with the triple theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino/a Critical Theory (LatCrit), and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). The final common themes were the main tools utilized to rewrite the story of each one of the participants and subsequently make a general analysis of these eight counter-stories. The common themes were emphasized to answer the central research question of this study as well as the sub questions. Finally, the results of the data analysis helped to answer the three research questions of this study repeated in Figure 3.

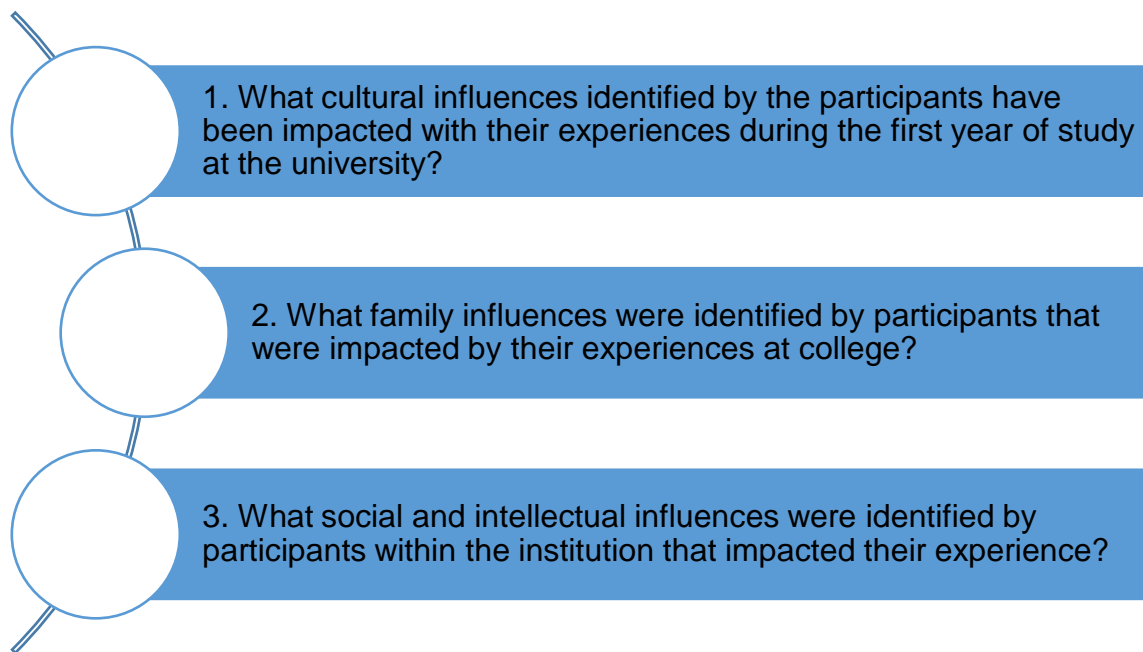


Figure 3. Research questions in this study. This figure shows the research questions for this study.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, this study used the methodology of counter-story. Counter-storytelling challenges the dominant discourse of master narrative that justifies the ideology of racism in stories about the low educational achievement of students of color. White privilege is often invisible because it is the norm; White privilege helps maintain racism's stories as a form of power (Solorzano et al., 2002). There are three types of counter-narratives and/or stories: (1) *personal stories or narratives*, refers to autobiographical reflections of the author, referents to racism and sexism; (2) *other people's stories or narratives*, which usually offers biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color, again in relation to U.S. institutions and in a socio-historical context. It is also a referent to racism and sexism as told in a third-person voice. And, (3) *composite stories or narratives*, which draws on various forms of "data" to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color. These stories may offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses because the authors create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination (Solorzano et al., 2002). Counter-story uses the concept of theoretical sensitivity, which refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which is not pertinent.

The questions that all participants answered during the interviews, structure the counter-stories in this study. Relevant information from the letter of self that each participant wrote was also used to construct the counter-stories from the data presented by the participants. After answers were analyzed and coded, the eight counter-stories were constructed following the sequence of questions. Emergent coded themes are also included within the counter narratives. The counter narratives are constructed through restorying, which is the process of reorganizing

the Latinas' counter-stories into a general type of framework. This framework consists of gathering stories, and analyzing them for key themes of the story, "Restorying is anchored in effective and culturally relevant pedagogy"(Worthy, Consalvo, Bogard, & Russel, 2012, p. 574).

Some of their answers were edited for structural continuity and readability for the reader, but their meanings to answers were kept intact.

The following definitions were important in this study and to better understand the narratives of the participants:

Microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group." Microaggressions in turn have three categories:

Microassaults are explicit behaviors intended to hurt a person of color such as name calling, avoidance, and discrimination.

Microinsults refer to communications conveying a hidden insult demeaning a person's racial heritage.

Microinvalidations are characterized by denial, exclusion, and invisibility of a person of color's thoughts, feelings, and experiences as they relate to his or her ethnic heritage. This form of microaggression involves experiences in which the opinions of professionals of color are typically not taken seriously, especially as they relate to their own ethnic groups (Hernandez, Carranza, and Almeida, 2010).

The following eight counter-stories were the final result of the construction process in the analysis of the narrative of the eight participants. Through the use of the questionnaire in the interviews and self-letter of the participants, their narratives were evaluated and redesigned to bring out the most restated themes. The following are stories of these eight Latinas/Chicanas.

Participants' Counter-Stories

Laura's Counter-Story

I am Laura; I was born in Mexico, Mexico City. I am 19 years old. I came to the United States when I was 2 years old and was raised in Colorado. My parents were born in Mexico. I have one brother and one sister; my brother was born here in the United States. My family is small. I am both a first generation Mexican American and a first generation college student. My parents have a technical education from Mexico. They had a hard time when they moved to this country. I am not like other Latina students because my parents had already saved up money for my education.

I had a really good experience in my high school; I loved it. I went to college early in a suburb of a city in the west. My teachers in high school had a lot of experiences and some of them had doctorates and had been college professors. I graduated with 23 college credits coming to this university. It was really helpful because I was able to get that college experience before coming to this university. My goal since I was in high school has been to become a doctor. Higher education has always been really important to me and my family. I received professional assistance from my high school counselor to apply to different scholarships and different extracurricular programs that would help me to get into college. My family members always helped me, supported me; they were just like my backbone, my support system. I did not get a lot of financial aid just because my parents are financially stable. They run their own business, my parents have a landscaping business, but grants and Financial Aid did help me somewhat, but my parents picked up the majority of the cost. My family's priority is my education. I live with my sister. My sister comes to this university also. She is in her second semester. My motivation is my family. My parents, their main thing for all three of us, for my brother and sister is that they

always told us that school was our number one job as kids. So, they would have us do work and chores and stuff, but they never wanted us to worry about having jobs in high school or thinking about it. So, they always said that they would pay for stuff, like pay for phones or cars as long as we made school our number one focus. My parents sat down with me to complete the applications to provide me with their assistance, especially if I had any questions or if they wanted to give me any ideas for what to write for scholarships. My parents have provided me with strong emotional, financial, and loving support, and my church has been another motivational support to continue with my education. For example, when we would go to church people there would ask my parents "How did they do it?" "How did they get all three kids to go through college and pursue higher education?" And my parents said that this kind of question is a motivation like telling people in our community that they wanted a better life for us.

In addition, my siblings have helped me to navigate into the educational system in this university because my brother is already done with college and my sister is still working on it, they kind of walked me through. They were the ones that told me "Oh, if you take this class, this is what it's like, this is how much books are. This is like the cheap way to get books." And they gave me pointers of different tips for college.

I have many goals; I am planning to do a Medical Brigade to Nicaragua this summer because I am Bilingual. And, I want to go to medical school. My parents always make small jokes like, "Oh when you're gonna be a doctor someday," they say stuff like that, but they say it as they could see me as a doctor and that is motivational.

My experience in college has been good. I count on my family support all the time. I meet new people that are completely different. All my friends are business majors and I am biochemistry major. My first semester was hard because I got really stressed out with all my

classes trying to get good grades. Then I realized that high school and college are not the same because I was used to dedicating so much time to high school and I'd receive an A every time. But, in college, I would try to do the same thing and it was not the same. If I received a C in a class, I would freak out on a test. I had to change up a lot of stuff, like how I studied, how I did stuff. I could not study at home. I have to be at the library to completely focus now, which is weird because in high school I was always at home to study. The first half was kind of hard but now, I took self-initiative to look for study groups. I also worked with tutors. Working with tutors has helped me because, before, I was at home trying to focus on my homework by myself and I got distracted texting people; but now, working with the group and tutors on my homework has helped me a lot. I can just lean over and ask someone, "Hey, how would you do this?" And it was just so much easier. I would get homework done so much faster and then I had to get it done early.

I love this university; I do not think I could picture myself at another university. However, through my first semester I felt a bit lost. Yet, I have learned so much already, just being here one semester. I have a great group of friends; I have not experienced any obstacles and I have good professors. However, when I have some problem I always call my mom and she says, "It is ok, this is not going to determine the rest of your life." My family is always pushing me to continue because they do not have a college education from this country and they say "She is our first generation in college." I speak two languages; English is my first language and Spanish is my parents' language. Being bilingual in this university has not helped me, but I think for job interviews it will help me.

The most difficult part of my college experience has been living without my family because in a Mexican family, you do not move out until you get married, and like all my

siblings, we all moved out for college. My parents say it was hard, but they also say we had to learn how to do stuff for ourselves. Our mom always babied us, as in kind of spoiled us, so I did not learn how to do laundry, how to cook and stuff like that. However, one thing that I love from my culture is the family value. Family is the main system; I love our traditions like our food. I am Mexican and I think my favorite cultural value is how close knit and tight Mexican families are. I think that is really awesome. Although, I have to say that one thing that my parents did not insinuate to me, as a woman, compared to my cousins' parents who are more traditional, is marriage. Some of my cousins my age are already married and I feel my uncles and aunts kind of put that into them as an ultimate goal; but for my parents, it was higher education. I remember my parents saying, "You cannot get married until you have your PhD." One of my cousins, she is my age, so we are both 19, and she is pregnant right now and already married and all of her siblings have kids. They are about the same age as me; and my siblings, they are all younger than 27 years old and they already have kids and they are married. My cousins have a high school education, but I feel that it may be a cultural thing. Their parents kind of insinuated marriage or put it into their daughters as an ultimate goal; my cousins had to learn how to, cook, clean, take care of kids, and do all of that stuff. My parents never taught us these behaviors or values. They never taught us that marriage was the goal. They stressed to "Go further, go if you want to travel, go travel." It is kind of "learn and just keep going to pursuing education."

In exploring my experience at this university, I really love my time and the experiences here, but I have to say that nothing is perfect. I have experienced not so much racism, but more ignorance; these people coming up to you and just saying "What are you?" Types of remarks like that which are not right, you cannot say "what are you" to someone and just expect them to be "What do you mean? Are you asking about my ethnicity or my race or what?" When I say that I

am from Mexico, and they say "So are you illegal or ..." It is just jumping to an assumption about who I am just because I am directly from Mexico. I was not born here, but I feel they do not intentionally want to be racist towards me, but more so they do not understand and they have not learned exactly what it means or what they are saying, how it feels to be asked those questions. I wish this university had more diversity. I believe there are only 9% Hispanics. [However, this student's data was a bit inaccurate. According to the Institutional Research Fact Book Student Information 2014-2015 the percentage of Hispanic was 17.1%.] I am from a major metropolitan city in the west and I miss that diversity and meeting different people. The first time I knew about the Latin@ center was not until after first semester, and so second semester. I miss being able to speak Spanish. I miss being able to talk to people totally understanding me, my culture and my familial ties. I think this university needs to bring more diversity. I think a thing that they can do is to support the multicultural programs that they have like the Latin@ Center and others. I feel, even if you are not part of that culture, that ethnicity, people should know about it, "Oh, yeah, there are some multicultural centers that you can go to." For example, at the neighboring university that my sister attends, they have event nights with the community. It is very similar to [Latin@ center] here in this university. Many people in our community will be able to know more about Latina culture, especially students and their parents from the high school in the neighborhood. In that way, more students will know about our culture and diversity programs in this university. Moreover, I think a lack of Latina professors in this university makes me feel sad because we do not have positive representation. We are more negatively recognized ...for pursuing higher education. I feel there is a lot of stereotyping still going on with just Mexicans in America in general but, I also feel like that is a motivation for us Latina@ students, to see more diversity on campus because we can say "I should want to be up there; I should want to become

a professor or see more people like that.” This is my thinking and I’ve learned this from my family.

Ava’s Counter-Story

My name is Ava, and I was born and raised in the city where this university is located. My dad was born in Durango, Mexico and mom was born in a neighboring state not too far from this town, but her family is from Chihuahua Mexico. I live with my step-mom, stepsister and dad. My mom lives in Kansas with her boyfriend. I have an older brother and younger stepsister. My parents got married at 16 (laughs) years old, and they both dropped out of school. My mom later went back for her GED, but that didn’t really help and she got pregnant with my brother at 18, and then had me five years later. She didn’t really know how to go about school homework and everything, and the same with my dad. My dad was always working in the construction field. I did not receive any homework or educational support from my parents because they did not know how to navigate the educational system.

I had a hard time in middle school and high school because I was rebellious and had no good friends. So in middle school, I just kind of hung out with the wrong crowd. I still got good grades. I had a temper and I had anger problems, so I always wanted to fight girls. I don’t know, I just would like do stuff behind my parents’ back and then would have to pay the consequences. Then I decided I don’t want to live that life anymore, so I started hanging out with new people, and made my group of friends smaller, and started focusing on myself and who I wanted to be.

My goals in high school were to get good grades, maintain a high GPA, attend all my classes, and do all my homework. My school became my priority during high school, I participated in a program in this university called [Up the Bridge] and this helped me look forward and made me want to pursue my education and move to go to college. I remember one

of my schoolteachers seeing potential in me and saying that I have it in me and I can really make something of myself if I really try. I think that's what gave me motivation to believe in myself that I can do this. I'm very self-disciplined and I'm very motivated to get stuff done, so, that's what I did. My parents think it's so easy, (laughs) to apply for financial aid and scholarships, but it's not because it all depends, it goes back to them, like what they make financially. It affects me, but I would say the programs that I participated in [Up the Bridge] assisted us with seeking financial aid and applying for scholarships. Also, my step-mom took a big role in helping me apply for university assistance. My biological mom's role was to help sort out how to actually get to college and how to pay for it, so she was a big help, too. However, my step-mom would always send me emails and links to certain scholarships that I should look into and maybe apply to. She would just help in any way that I needed help. She would read over my essays or reach out to people that could possibly help me.

My parents and stepmom always believed in me and supported me, even though I thought I wouldn't be able to receive any scholarships. They also agreed that for my first semester in college or for my first year in college that my mom, my actual mom and my dad, would put some money towards my education, but I don't know how because they don't have money. My parents do not understand anything about how the educational system works. I have financial need and my family does not have money enough to help me to continue with my education. My dad has a high expected family contribution (EFC) number on financial aid (FAFSA), so it kind of breaks down some opportunities for me. The expected family contribution (EFC) is a measure of the student family's financial strength and is calculated according to a formula established by law. Student family's taxed and untaxed income, assets, and all the benefits (such as unemployment or Social Security) are all considered in the formula. Also, EFC considers the

family size of the students and the number of family members who will attend college during the year.

I'm lucky that he does make the money that he does because he works very hard and he works long shifts. I'm very thankful for that, but it kind of ruins my opportunities to receive money elsewhere. My real mom always explains to me or tells me multiple times that if I ever need help financially, that she's there to help me because she cares more about my education than anything. However, I don't know how she will help me, because I know that she does not have enough to pay it. My parents just keep encouraging me to try to find money elsewhere, scholarships, grants, but I don't know, it's hard. My parents support me by giving motivation. My dad is always saying, "We're always proud of you, *mi hija*." and my step-mom says, "Keep it up," like, "We believe in you," "We're so proud of your hard work that you put in." My step-mom or my real mom says, "I love you no matter what." "Don't worry about money. We'll, come up with it." I want to make my parents, grandparents, and family proud. I want to be like my older cousins. I have an older cousin who just finished. She just finished her bachelor's so I really look up to her. My other cousin currently is a junior, so he's almost there and he just keeps me going. They are my role models; I always like to listen their stories.

I believe I have more stress than other students because my financial situation holds me back. I am a first generation in college and I want to get a master's degree. A high school teacher helped me to navigate to apply for financial aid. I met up with my old adviser even though I was already graduated from high school. My [Up the Bridge] adviser asked me to go to his office, and I went on my own time, and he walked me through the whole process and helped me so it was like a stress reliever and made it much easier. However, applying for scholarships and talking to financial aid people, it's already to that point where I'm "Leave me alone." You don't

know how it feels. You don't know how it is. I'm easily discouraged, so if I don't get a scholarship, I feel like I should just give up. So then I don't apply for any and then it just creates a fight.

Now that I have spent so much time acquiring financial aid, I realize that my time in college is assisting in my social circle of growth. For example, I have good community with Hispanic peers. I have definitely become more social than usual, just being that I got a new job on campus. So that kind of forced me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to communicate with people I didn't know, and allowed me to meet people within an office that I really wanted to become connected with. So that was a great opportunity for me to meet my friends that I have now, and for me to really understand how lucky I am to be here. But at the same time, within the dorms, I don't really go out of my way to try to talk to other people. I feel like I have a lack of trust in people, just being from my past. I only allow certain people to come in and really get to know me. Otherwise, I keep my brick wall up and I just don't want anything to do with them. For most of the time, I stay in my room and I don't really talk to my hall. Don't get me wrong, I'm friendly, but I'm closed because I don't trust people easily. White students, in particular, have burned me because they have not been nice to me.

To just look forward, and what I want to gain from attending college, and why I'm even attending, is based on looking back on all the life decisions that my parents have chosen or have gone through. I know that I don't want to grow up with any regret, so I know that furthering my education is what's needed today. I just strive and keep looking forward in this university and I ask myself, "Is this where I want to be, and is what I'm going to do in order to be successful? Latin@s on this campus is a small percentage in college. My experience on campus has been good, and I feel pretty good. I hear other people talk about their first year, I hear about how much

stress it brings them and how much they don't like it at times and how they're sleep-deprived; but for me, I honestly don't deal with any of that. I have enjoyed my first year of college. It literally has flown by so fast. I like the multi-cultural programs at this university. I have had a good experience and made connections.

I just want to get my degree because I do not want to fail in any way that I may be stereotyped. I want to overcome the stereotypes that Latinas have, such as getting pregnant, participating in gangs, etc. I have suffered stereotypes before college and in college. People have told me things as: "She is so pretty and in College" "Hot Latina in College" (people are surprised). It's my goal to be set with a bachelor's degree. But, I don't only want to stop there. I believe a bachelor's degree is so common nowadays and I would like to be a Latina, first-generation, that goes a little above and beyond to receive a master's. I don't want to fit any of those stereotypes that I have grown up with, or I have heard or that exist somewhere in my environment. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be the Latina who just gets pregnant at a young age. I don't want to be the Latina who is just known to be, like, angry all the time and fighting and in gangs. I want to show them not to categorize me with that. I'm actually doing something with my life, and I can accomplish just as much as anyone else can.

English is my second language, but I grew up with Spanish as my native language. I forgot Spanish, somehow, just by being at the specific schools that I attended. I know a little bit of Spanish. My grandma struggles with understanding (laughs) me, I still talk to her (laughs) in English. I'm thankful for just accelerating more and more and becoming more advanced with my English. It is just that I know that when you don't speak correctly and accurately in English, people take advantage of you. When you have a thick accent or something, I know people take advantage of you and kind of see less of you. I like to prove them wrong and I like to show them

I speak English that I am just the same. I also wish that I did know Spanish because I would love to be bilingual. I could benefit from it later on in the future, and I would like to communicate more with my family and not make them struggle to speak English when I should be learning how to speak Spanish with them.

I identify as both Latina and Hispanic, and I like my culture and how we have big group gatherings such as for a birthday party, which means everybody attends. I like that because when I hear about other people's stories and what they say, some people don't even hang out and see their extended family or other family as often, but I value family time. I value my family being together whenever something happens. I value that whether it's a big or small gathering, and it creates a trustworthy and *safety-ness* that I have with them too, I think that's big.

When thinking about how I fit into this university, I would say a majority of my friends are Latinas and Latinos, not on purpose, but I feel it's kind of hard to connect with other races first-hand just because we might think of each other as intimidating. We don't want to be the first one to initiate the conversation, but being like that, I have been able to connect with others. I can say that I'm intimidated to talk to White people just because they might think I'm like lesser value than them, so I rather just not deal with them. I have White friends, but it's just like I have very little of them that I can actually say that I associate with them on a daily basis. Whereas like with Hispanics, I can hang out with them. I can go eat with them, I can go to the gym with them, I can play sports with them, and I can do everything with them. It's like that close cultural value. It mostly consists of Hispanics and how we are able to learn what it means to be Hispanic and to go to college and the struggles that we face. I feel I'm more connected with them just being that they can easily relate to me. Whereas, with other people, I don't know their stories and

sometimes I feel like they have it easier than me, so I don't want to make myself feel a little lower than they are.

I believe Hispanics don't feel a part of this university. They just feel they're at this university. I don't know if others feel like this, but I know that there are a very small percentage of us and I know that there are a lot of stereotypes of us. We face more struggles than White students. For example, we struggle financially, but we don't ever hear, or at least I haven't heard any White kids complaining about money, and they usually have their parents paying for their college and Latin@s don't have that opportunity. I feel like I don't want to make myself feel of lesser value; oh, well, I have no money to even pay for college. Therefore, I vent with other Hispanics that are going through the same thing and we discuss answers to such questions as, "How are you paying for school?" "How are you paying?" "Oh, where are you going to live?" like, "cause I don't even know how to make up this money." At the same time, there are many stereotypes in this university, it's kind of a surprise when you see a Hispanic in college sitting next to you, you're like, "Whoa." People might think that of us and I don't want people to think that. I have had people tell me a couple times like, "Wow, she's so pretty and, and in college," "and a Hispanic," like... what? What does that have to do with anything?

I have not received [direct] racism in this university for many reasons. First, I have few conversations with White people; I do not speak Spanish or do not dress in a way that they expect of me. I do not have an accent when I speak English. I try not to give them a reason to discriminate against me. In addition, I feel from the Hispanics that I have met on campus that we all fight against those stereotypes. Equally important, it is pretty sad that I haven't had one Latin@ professor, so I can't say, but I think that if I were to have one, I might feel more at ease,

like I can understand her. I'd just like to be relating, trying to relate as much as I can. I don't know why.

Diana's Counter-Story

My name is Diana; I was born in Los Angeles, California and raised in Denver. We moved to Colorado when I was 3 years old. My mom was born in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico closest to the border with The United States a few hours away from Tijuana. She grew up there, and in her early 20s decided to move to the United States with my brother and sister who are older than me. My dad was born in Nicaragua. My parents got divorced when I was 5 years old, so for most of my life I've been with my mother. I was raised by my mom. I now have more siblings because my mom remarried and altogether I have 4 sisters and 2 brothers. My mom does not have formal education in this country, she got her GED. She got that a few years ago, but she wants to continue on to college, but it's not something that is financially available right now.

I did not like my experience in high school. I had amazing mentors, teachers, and counselors, but I didn't really like the way the school made its students feel. In my school, there was an IB and a traditional program; I chose not to participate in the IB program. For that reason, people assumed I was dumb or not smart enough because smart students joined IB. I didn't want to be what people wanted me to be. I wanted to make my own decisions and that's what I did. I was not accepted in my high school because I was Latina, I felt isolated. However, I got good guidance in high school from a teacher. I am first generation in college. I started learning about college; I didn't know what it was. I just knew people did it and I knew I wanted to go to college and I knew I wanted to get my undergrad. I didn't really know a lot about grad school, so I was in an AVID program, which stands for Advancement via Individual Determination.

I have faced struggles financially because my mom does not have money to pay or help me with money in college. I receive motivation from my mom, but I have to do everything because my mom does not know how to navigate in the educational system. My mother always valued education. My mom would take me anywhere I had to go; she even drove me to the interview for a scholarship. She did all of that stuff, but the whole process and knowing what's going on, figuring out deadlines that was all up to me because as much as my mom wanted to help me, she was unable to help. Instead, she would cheer me on. She always supported me; she just doesn't know much about the details that go into college. I mean, even older generations, it's very different, so she doesn't really know what a personal statement is or something that we've learned throughout when I was in middle school.

However, I have had other people support my college endeavors. My mathematics teacher would tell me about different opportunities for high school, she told me about Moline High School. She really wanted me to go there and I didn't end up going there, but it was for the best. I think she gave me a little interest about what else is available for me, or the opportunities, and things started to change a little bit. I was always interested as a young child to know more. There is nothing stopping me, I want to continue on. Also, my brother is supportive too. If I need school supplies or anything, he's always willing to look for a way to find those. He too started college a few years ago, but financially, it's been hard because he didn't apply for any scholarships, even though I told him about them. He's had to take out a lot of money in loans. Right now it's been hard, but I feel he sacrifices himself for me and even though it's not something I agree with, I think it's going to come around. I think right now, he's still in that stage where he doesn't really know what he wants and I do think he wants to go to college. My brother is 24 years old.

In my freshman and junior year in high school I applied to scholarships, but it was definitely in my senior year when I applied to some scholarships that I wasn't really aware of, and I did apply to FAFSA. We had a future center, which basically had someone there to help us through the whole college process and I did my FAFSA in February. They tried to make us do it early. I was also involved in an organization starting my sophomore year called Girls; I ended up getting a scholarship from them in my senior year. There were times where I wasn't sure about even going to college because the economic crash and when everything is going to hell. My family was affected as well; my mom had to claim bankruptcy. I knew that I loved academics, so after getting those scholarships that was basically my salvation because I wanted the whole college experience. I wanted to be able to stay in the dorms for a year, so that was what helped me the most, plus the help I received from this university. My counselor told me that this university had one of the best financial aid packages in the state. That was a big reason why I wanted to come here; besides, I feel it is a good school.

Coming to this university was good. I had a lot of friends from the AVID program. I did come to the Latin@s Center, they made me feel welcome. There are also other programs in this university that help a lot. Student's Community is basically one of the most diverse halls on campus. They were a big help in making me feel I could see people that I can relate to a little more and that was helpful. I definitely kept myself very closed, and towards the end of the semester, I started to get to know a little bit more people and I started to get more involved. Right now I'm exploring with APACC, the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center. I also got involved with them during the first semester. Moreover, there is a guy at the Latin@s Center very helpful and he is helping me to see other things. I'm not very confident, so he always says, "You need to be, I know, you're a woman, this is not an excuse," "You can do it." He tries to be

motivational about that stuff because he knows. He understands and yes, even though he's a man, I feel like he's just there to support me no matter what. So, I feel he is a great help.

I'm looking into jobs and I haven't had a job for the first year just because it's been difficult to find a job. I asked my mentor about this. I told him about a job I was applying and he told me he was going to talk to some of the people just because he's been here longer and he's contacted me with some other people to interview. He's been a great resource and I've met amazing people because of him. He's always going, "Oh, do you want to network with this person?" Or, "Do you want to meet this other person?"

I love education, so I just felt coming to college, it's a little bit harder because I don't have the background that other students have and I feel that was a lot because of the choices made or the school I went to. My writing skills are not the best, there's just a little bit of a disadvantage even though I'm a hard worker, and I try really hard, and I've had to work so hard to be where I am now. In high school, I took 8 AP classes in total and it's like having to always push myself to be better, not that I don't want to, but it's just I feel I have to work even harder because I haven't been the best student. For example, some classes at this university have been a little hard just because I don't know every professor. Even though, I try to look for them and I've had some amazing ones so far, but it's just been a little difficult in some courses. Also, my class in the political science department here was good. However, I look at other universities and I think their political science departments are amazing. Sometimes it makes me question whether I still want to stay at the university or not.

I want to go to another university that's more ethnically diverse because I feel I'd be more comfortable. I feel my experiences can sometimes be more relatable to some of the Latino students, but even though it's not 100% the case, it just feels that way and it feels California has a

little bit more, higher percentage of Latinos. I think financially it's a little bit of an obstacle because I have to consider going to an out of state university, if I could, I'd go out of state; I would, but I can't. It's too much, and even if I could, I would have to take out loans? I think I have to be responsible, so that's been a little bit of an obstacle in my experience in higher education.

I think my experience here has been significant to my academic progress. The big one has been for me to care about people and learning that people are valuable. I have a very strong bias against gang members. I have negative vibes towards the gang members and that's because of my family's experience. It makes me separate myself a lot from certain Latino groups. So, what happens is that I feel like an outsider even within my own community sometimes. It makes me create a wall between certain people, because I have such a strong negative view about gang members. I want to take the chance to know more gang members and maybe get a different perspective about what their life is, and why they are the way they are, instead of being so mad.

I think college has really helped me in doing that. As a student at this university, I identify myself as a Chicana because I don't feel like I fit into an America, United States, nor do I feel like I fit into Mexican or Nicaraguan culture just because I'm not from either place. I'm from both places, and a lot of times I feel like I really wanted to be open to the Mexican community, but when I went to Mexico once, I was told, "Oh, you're not from here." I wasn't welcomed and from that I grew really angry and just kind of pissed off because "I tried." I really tried to just be myself and tried to be open and you're telling me, I'm not from here, as if I don't know that already? I wasn't born here, but that's still part of who I am. So, I'm up here obviously, and I'm not part of the majority. For all those reasons, I don't feel 100% part of that and sometimes I felt like I have to say Latina just so that I don't start getting asked questions, but for

the most part, I usually say, "Oh, I'm a Chicana." I am bilingual, English and Spanish are both my native languages because I feel I learned them together. They make you pick one, but I can't and that doesn't make sense to me.

Now I'm taking a class and learning about the Spanish colonization and about Latin America, and I'm learning about all the beautiful things from those countries as well. So, I feel like right now, I'm starting to appreciate both languages and even more languages. I'm starting to appreciate Spanish because I realize that there's beauty in the country of Mexico. The cultural values that I most like are the family and community; I think those are really important. I was in a program called Colorado Youth at Risk, and we had a community and something that was so important from this program is that no matter where you go in life, you need a community. You need people to support you. Even though I learned it in the program, it was something I grew up with, I could see it is something that I really value. In effect, my mom always valued language, she said, "If you have kids, they better know Spanish." Spanish is important, why lose it?

On the negative side, I had a bad experience here with a professor and I dropped his class the first day because he called me Maria. He said my name was too hard to say. I value names and I try to remember everyone's name. That's something that I think is important, to pronounce names correctly, and that's something that I didn't value when I was younger until I had this mentor in my life that was like, "Names are so important." I definitely wanted to report it, but I didn't know where and who I would tell about this, I was really bothered by him so I didn't want to talk to him directly. I just dropped his class because that was disrespectful and he would make fun of everyone's name. It wasn't only mine, but I just think that's so wrong because I think everyone's name needs to be respected no matter where they come from. Another thing that has happened in this university is I'm taking a history class, and I don't know if we're going to talk

about Latinos yet because we haven't gotten to certain times. But even when we talk about soldiers and stuff, we haven't really talked about Chicanas or Latinos or Hispanics, so in general that's something that I always realize because of what I've learned in the past. I feel different here on campus but I feel that's because I'm aware of having an accent and people will assume what I am.

Veronica's Counter-Story

My name is Veronica; I was born in El Paso, Texas and lived there until I was 9 years old; then my family moved to Colorado. I have been living in Colorado for about ten years. My dad was born in Michigan, but his family is from Mexico. My mom was born in El Paso and her family is from Mexico too. Both of my parents speak Spanish. I consider myself Latina, but I only speak English, I do not speak Spanish like my parents.

Regarding my family, I only have two younger brothers. My mom had kids before she went back to college. It's kind of hard to explain that part, because she got out of high school and then she waited a couple of years, but then during that time, she ended up having kids. Later on, my mom went to a community college, but I think it was more of an online and community college program. I know that from my dad's family side I'm the first one to go to a state university and stay on campus. Although from my mom's family side, I only have one cousin, who's in college right now, but she's not exactly at a state college. I am the first person to go to a four-year state university.

My high school journey before entering the university was good. I went to Vaseland High School and it was very diverse. Moving there was kind of a culture shock because there were a lot of foreign people from Ethiopia and Nigeria. I was in Texas until I was in third grade. Ever since seventh grade, I wanted to come to this university; once I got to high school, I was always

pushing myself to do my best. Each year my goal was having a 3.5 GPA. I liked doing sports. My teachers were always encouraging me. When I was in my junior year of high school, I went to a technical college part-time; I went for my veterinary assistant certification. It was helpful, because I got to see the different things I'd be studying when I came here, which also pushed me to keep going. All my teachers helped me when it was really tough. They helped me in the long run.

Now, when thinking about how to get to this university, it takes many steps. Financial aid is one of those steps. I get a little confused with the process for financial aid because there's so much to do with the scholarships. My counselor would tell me about these kinds of things, but when it came to filling out the applications, if I had some questions I'd go ask her general questions. My counselor also helped me a lot during this process. Also, my mom knew what she was doing, but when we had to do something new we called FAFSA. My mom helped me a lot with the process to get into college. My family was important in this time of my life. My parents want me to continue with my education.

Now that I am in college, I realize the assistance my mom gave was huge, but being here is difficult. During the first semester, college was a little hard and I was really kind of lost, but I was excited at the same time. I didn't know anyone. I remember I was having lunch one day on my own and I pushed myself to go on, even though, I hate eating by myself. A group of people invited me to eat with them and after that we are really connected, which made me feel better, because I didn't feel so alone. Now, I'm really connected with this group. In addition, I also connect through Latin@s center where they have a tutoring group and we are able to help Hispanic students from elementary schools, tutoring them, I really like that a lot. There is also from Latin@s center, *Las amigas* another group that I really like and I go most of the time.

Joining this group is an indirect kind of influence, because it gives me an outlet to focus on something else. So then when it's time to study again, I am refreshed, it helps. Last semester, I had an agricultural orientation class. One of my professors helped me with the pre-vet club, and assisted me as an advisor to get my classes in order to apply and to be in the vet school. It was helpful to have her and just be able to talk to her, like on a friendly basis. She was really friendly, so that helped. My boyfriend is also in the same major as me and he wants to become a veterinarian. We kind of support each other. During my first semester, I was kind of slacking. I was always thinking about my parents, brothers, and what they have had to do in order for me to come here. It made me feel really guilty that I wasn't doing what I was supposed to do this semester. Now I've been working on it and staying on top of everything.

My parents wanted me to continue my education, because pretty much ever since I was young, I always wanted to become a veterinarian. So, I have known for a long time that I wanted to come to this university. My parents pushed me to just keep going with it. My family does not know how to navigate the educational system and this is why I have to do this all by myself, but I do not want to disappoint my parents.

Breanna's Counter-Story

My name is Breanna; I was born in a large metropolitan city in the west, and my parents moved and I was raised in a suburb of the same western state. I have three brothers, one older and two younger. My mom was born in a warm southern state and my dad was born in my home state. My mom's family is Mexican and they claim roots from Spain, and my dad's family is American. My parents are divorced and my mom raised me; she's been a single parent for all my life. My parents got divorced when I was in the first grade; my dad was diagnosed with severe anxiety depression and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). He lost his job and has been in

and out of mental hospitals forever, until about two years ago. At the present, he's good and he's living with my grandparents.

My high school experience was really well-rounded. I always made a lot of friends, had a lot of acquaintances and got along well with my teachers. My GPA always stayed above 3.5 and I was involved in a lot of clubs. I went to a large high school in my suburb. My counselor from high school was the main person to help me to get ready for college. My mom is a single mom with no money to support my education. My process was very strenuous, because my mom only makes \$29,000 a year, and as we know, it's \$24,000 per year to go to this university. It was up to me to fund it myself. So, starting back about October of my senior year of high school, I applied for about two scholarships a week, because I made it my goal to not have to take out loans or anything like that. It was just a lot of hard work and I applied for the FAFSA. I applied for the program of this university and any other community scholarships that I could find. Also, my boyfriend's mom helped me in this process. My family encourages me to continue, but I have to do the whole process by myself because my mom does not have experience. I am a first-generation college student. My family always wanted me to go to college and they encouraged me to find a way to do that because nobody can help me to pay for it. My parents didn't help me much filling out the applications because they didn't know how to do it. I'm glad that in my high school, my teachers showed me where to go, but for the most part I was able to do it on my own. It made me more independent and for the next three years I will be able to apply for financial aid, and I can do it on my own. During this process my family always encourages.

My grandparents also support me beyond my mom and counselor. They have been my second set of parents on my mom's side. And my grandma is the Hispanic one. I have a step grandpa and he's white, he's German. And my real grandpa lives in California and he is also

Hispanic. They always encourage me to keep going and keep applying, even if I didn't get something and they were always supporting me; For instance, let's say I couldn't feed the horses one night, they went out and fed the horses for me. And they just have my back the whole time.

During my first semester in this university, I was a little nervous before I came here. I didn't know if it was going to be easy to talk to people and find friends, and at this point I found that it was easy. I've been able to network with people and within my classes get people's phone numbers to study for homework and study for tests. Then, outside of class, I just go to clubs and meet people, maybe just hang out with different people during the weekends or go on horseback rides or stuff like that. I have received good support in this university because it has a lot of programs that are very helpful for students. In addition, my department, animal science is one of the best in the country.

I aspire to accomplish with my education to be able to go into the professional workforce. I am ready as I much I can because I don't want to end up working in a grocery store all my life like my mom. I want to work for an organization like the American Quarter Horse Association or the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, maybe within the communications part of it. That's where my Spanish minor comes into it, because I want to mend the bridge between the communication of Latin@s and the majority population. Especially, for example, in the dairy industry, there are a lot of Hispanic workers coming in and they can be taught how to do various jobs. But, often there's nobody there to explain information in their language. One of the main ladies who work at the National Western Stock Show at the rodeo royalty has encouraged me. She's kind of built my character up and shown me how not to be shy, how to communicate with people, older adults. I maintain my aspiration by just continuing to work with people and talk with people, classmates, friends, about just what we're doing, what we're preparing ourselves to

go into. I've joined clubs like the Animal Welfare Club, and Collegiate Horsemen Association. In general, I have felt awesome, I love this college, I love the university, and I love the environment, the people I've met. I love also how, even though there are thousands of kids here, the faculty makes it seem like it is a really small community, whether it's like 20 people in a class or 150.

Above all, I do still face obstacles. I continue to apply for scholarships, and actually, I'm getting some so that I can stay up here. Yet, I face financial complications such as finding a place to live for next year, and I eventually found a place but it is stressful. Definitely, the largest obstacle is the financial aspect and living expenses, which are hard to figure out. In addition to that, it's just keeping grades up in difficult classes, or I may have a hard time with going to the test building or talking to the professors about issues.

Additionally, a word that I always hear from my dad is integrity and perseverance. He likes to really ingrain that in my head. All my family is Christian, so my mom's favorite action is just to pray about something if you're not so sure about it. My family, it's pretty close, and they're all pretty crazy/silly. They get in fights a lot here and there but everybody is really close. My grandma is always ingraining this, family is extremely important, and as long as you have them in your life, then you're good. If I'm ever having trouble at school and I just want to come home for a day, she always says, "*Mi casa es su casa.*" I know that her place is just as much of a home as my house is too.

Equally important, I want to be able to be fluent in Spanish, and of course being born and raised in the English language, that's hard to do. I've been in Spanish classes since the sixth grade; I just lost some memory of it between my junior year and now. Some of my family, if we

go to family reunions, they'll be speaking in Spanish and I'm like, "What are you guys telling secrets over there," because I don't know what they're saying.

One other difficulty I've experienced is listening to people's ignorant racist comments. I have experienced racist comments like: "Look at the Mexican on the road, do you eat tacos and fajitas every day? Are you the construction worker?" When I was younger, my grandma always warned me because I don't look fully Hispanic or Mexican or Spanish as much as my mom and my grandma do. She said that I'm going to run into problems with not looking Mexican because, in work settings, my mom or my grandma hasn't gotten a job because of the way they look. They say, "Well you should know people won't look at you the same as this person." Or something like that. For example, even with rodeo equine as one of my professional goals, I'll face discrimination because the girl chosen over me has blond hair, and the lady who's helped me out in the past really has been a mentor to me, and her daughter had tried out for Ms. Rodeo Colorado, which is what I will do in three years. They're also Hispanic and her name is Maria, and every year they didn't pick her, they picked the blond girl.

Another experience was with my roommate; the first time she introduced me to her family, she said, "Oh well, the Mexican in the corner is my roommate." She didn't say my name, I was like, "Okay, well you should respect me a little more than that." Or just comments here and there. Somebody will say, "Well, aren't you this, aren't you this race." Or, "Aren't you that race?" It's never been blatant racism, but there have been little things here and there. Anyway, I kind of feel "Oh wow." I'm proud of my culture, I'm proud of my diversity, I want to celebrate it. Whenever people say stuff like that, you start to think closer, something is wrong with this, is it weird? But then instantly, I come back and say, "Well, this is me and I'm confident in it and you blend in with everybody else."

Janine's Counter-Story

My name is Janine; I was born in California and was raised there. We moved to the west when I was 12 years old. My dad and my mom were born in California. I have two brothers, an older brother and a younger brother.

My high school experience was definitely interesting. I was the one who was very involved. I did DECA, I did yearbook, and tennis. I definitely wasn't one of the people to go out and like party or anything like that. I stuck to doing my sports and kind of focusing on that, but overall it was a good experience. I always had the goal to go to college. I didn't really know where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do until my senior year of high school. My senior year is when I did DECA, so that's when I really found my love for business marketing. It was kind of my goal once I found that.

Gaining information about college was important so that I could attend college. Yet, the process to apply for financial aid was confusing because there are so many different grants and scholarships and there are so many different things you can do. They don't really do that great of a job explaining it while you're in high school. They're just like, "Oh, yeah, there's free money out there. Go take advantage of it." However, they don't exactly tell you where to look for it, and what places are the best to look for it, and what the best ways are to go about applying for them. My mom does my FAFSA for me every year. That's the Federal something. I don't know. There's something about free money. My mom's help is really awesome because I wouldn't really know what to do if she didn't do it for me. My dad did help me with trying to find good scholarships that I could apply for, because definitely when you do have the advantage of being Latina or Native American or something like that, you have a better shot at receiving certain scholarships. However, this experience was frustrating because when you don't really know what

to look for, a lot of times you waste your time filling out applications and you could literally be picking on a link that has like, hundreds of thousands of people applying for it. You literally almost never have a shot at getting those scholarships. When they say there's tons of free money out there, they don't really give you a way to look for it and the best way to get that free money. So, a lot of times it's just a frustrating process, because you're consistently told, "Mmn, you didn't get it," or "Nope, you didn't qualify," "No, not today," so it's frustrating. Also, I didn't really seek outside assistance from anyone because I'm a very independent person.

I am not first generation. Both of my parents went to college. My dad was the first-generation college student in his family; both of my parents are graduates of UCLA, the University of California-Los Angeles. Also, my older brother is actually graduating this May from the University of Colorado at Boulder. I'm not first generation, but it's definitely interesting because my dad's whole side of the family is still fairly new to college, where my mom's whole side are all graduates of four-year universities.

My parent's concerns basically are things like grades, they always say that grades are the most important thing when you go to school for an education. You're not there for the social scene. You're not there for the things that may seem important. The most important factor is GPA, so they're very encouraging about that and they're always pushing me to be better and to do better in school. So definitely, it's good to have parents who care about my grades. Sometimes people don't have people nagging at them like, "Okay what are your grades? Oh you got a B? Well you can get an A next time." So that's definitely...it's annoying... but it's good too. My parents definitely help me to have them breathing down my back, being like, "How are you doing in school? How's this going?" But honestly, it's not so much them that like, pushed me to continue my education. It's myself and, because again, it's just about what I want and what I

aspire to be, and where I see myself. So that's what really pushes me to keep going, because I'm paying for my own education and my parents aren't paying for it. Everything I do for myself, I pay for. It's not so much other people pushing it. It's myself pushing it, because if I didn't want to be here, then I wouldn't be here, why would I do it for someone else? I do it for myself.

As I reflect on my social experience in college, I can say that it has been pretty good. There are definitely people who come up to me because I am White, but my dad is Hispanic descent and Native American descent and my mom is White. She's very Caucasian [White]. She's European descent. So, I'm very mixed, I look a lot different than what maybe a typical Latina would look like, but I also don't look like the typical, European person. So, a lot of people will come up to me and just say, "Like, no offense or anything, but what exactly are you? You're really pretty, but what are you, because we can't tell." It's definitely interesting too, because, when you aren't necessarily like, the majority, people will sometimes look at you differently and they'll be "Woah." A lot of people joke around with me because I am like, what a lot of people would call very basic. I love my Starbucks and I love dressing comfortable, but still look like I could go and like meet people and not be like, "Oh, awkward. You caught me at a bad time." I'm very preppy, so I definitely get mixed reactions. Overall, once people get to know me, they're "Oh yeah, you're totally cool," and "You're exactly like us, you accept you're tan which we're all jealous of."

At the same time, it definitely bothers me a little bit more now than it used to, because when I was younger I didn't seem to care. I was just like, "Psh. Whatever. We're all friends." When you're younger, you don't really realize those things as much. It's definitely very true, when people say you're taught to discriminate, it's not something that comes natural. It's definitely something that's taught. There are definitely times where I'm just like, "Oh, I wish my

skin was a little bit lighter." I'm definitely one of those people that I'm not out in the sun all the time, I get really pale, so I look like this really awkward color, and it's like weird, because my mom is so European. Her side of the family is all European, like, Scottish, German, and literally as White as you can be. It's weird because, I know that as a race, I'm white, but as far as ethnicity goes, I have the Hispanic in me and then also race-wise. I do have a little bit of the Native American, because of my dad's side of the family and that's where I get all my coloring from.

Sometimes it feels like a backhanded compliment, like, "Oh, like you're pretty, but you're different than all of us." Sometimes it makes me think, "Oh maybe they would think I was prettier if I was whiter." My little brother doesn't look like me at all. He got more of my mom's traits compared to my older brother and me. My older brother and I look more like my dad, so it's definitely interesting because it's just "Oh, well I know that I'm white," and when people get to know me, they see my parents and they're like, "Oh, well you seem..." I'm still White, but I just am tan. I tan very easily, which a lot of people who are Caucasian and European descent, they don't tan easily. They just burn, they turn red over the summer and they're like a lobster. Well that's not me; I just get darker because I have the olive skin. During the summer, I love my color, because I just turn this like ... It sounds really egoistic, but I promise I'm not egoistic at all. I just get this really beautiful skin color when I'm out in the sun and I love my skin tone in the summer because I just think it's absolutely gorgeous. The coloring I get it's beautiful, caramel color and I love it. But, then during the winter, I lose my tan, if I'm not out in the sun a lot, and in this state there's not a lot of sun in the winter. So, I get really pale, then that's when I wish I was definitely just more White, because then I wouldn't be this weird in-between color. I wouldn't be kind of tan, but still really pale at the exact same time.

Regardless, English is my native language and Spanish is my second language. I still have definite issues sometimes with getting conjugations correct. I'm not exactly the most grammatical person all the time, because when you're around native speakers they have their slang and they don't necessarily care about being grammatically correct, just like in English. People who are native English speakers, we all don't speak grammatically correct all the time because it sounds weird, and we're just like, "Mmmn, what are you doing? You don't need to be like, proper." There are plenty of ways to communicate what you're saying without going to the extent of being "Oh, in this case I'm going to use the subjunctive and then the past ...", because you don't need it, and because they know what you're saying.

My family is very fortunate, which is really nice and we don't exactly see a lot of Hispanics or Latinos and Latinas. They're just not in the areas that we are always in, so when we speak in Spanish, a lot of people don't know what we're saying. Especially, because my grandma and grandpa say what they want to say and they don't have filters, they're going to say it, but they're going to say it in Spanish, so that no one knows what they're saying. It's bad, but I think it's hilarious to listen to them, because they will just go off on a rant and it's so funny. I'm very fortunate, I value it very highly because I understand... What's really great is that English is my native language and definitely living in the United States is great to know how to speak the language properly. I don't want to say it hinders you to not know how to speak English, but sometimes people will look at you differently or they're going to say "Mmn, they don't know what they're saying. Why are they here? Where are they even from? If you do not speak correctly." So, I'm very fortunate to have English as my native language, and plus it is such a known language around the world. So, I'm very fortunate for that. I'm also very fortunate to have the opportunity to know a second language, because a lot of people don't have that

opportunity, and some people will brush it off and be "Oh, Spanish." Bull, Spanish is like a leading language in the world. And it helps so much, even in the part-time jobs that I hold and what not.

Overall, I value my Hispanic side of me. In fact, my most favorite Hispanic cultural value is how my dad's side of the family is all Hispanic. I love how much they value family, you can get annoyed with them, and you can want to kill them sometimes and you just want to shake them sometimes, but at the end of the day, you're still family and you should still love each other and really value those relationships.

As I am on this journey to finish my degree, I have found some people at this university that care. My academic advisor has been really super helpful with navigating what I want to do, and what classes I need to take, and where I need to position myself to get to my end result of my diploma. I'm declaring my major at the end of this semester, but I'm also interested in doing a double major in apparel merchandising. I'm trying to figure out if I want to stay in the fashion program, but maybe go a different way than apparel merchandising. I want to do something that I love. I don't want to be stuck doing something where I go to work and say, "Uh, I don't want to go to work today." I want to get up in the morning and be excited to go to work, and be so excited to get dressed and get ready and be excited for whatever I have planned that day, but in general, I want to absolutely love my job.

I'm a transfer student and at the university that I was at prior to this university, I loved it. I loved my friends and loved the experiences I had there and I wouldn't trade it for anything. But I was definitely there for the wrong reasons. I didn't focus on my education. I focused on going out and going to parties, it was out in the Midwest. My GPA did suffer at my last institution; I was not a stellar student by any means of the word. I wouldn't go to classes; I

wouldn't do my homework. I never took the steps that I take here, and I didn't have the initiative that I have here. I didn't care, and since coming to this university, I've had so much more of a drive to do better for myself, so I kind of started over once I transferred. My sorority sisters are a huge support system for me because something that I love about my sorority is our motto to inspire the highest type of womanhood. Each sister is always supporting another, saying like, "Maybe you didn't do so well on this, but we're still behind you," they're always pushing us and we're pushing each other to be better and to do better.

Ines's Counter-Story

My name is Ines; I was born in Texas. I lived in Texas up until I was 10, and then I moved to the west. I have a half-brother, and a half-sister, they still live in Texas with my mom. My mom was born in Mexico and my dad in Puerto Rico. I live with my dad here in Colorado, I'm his only child. My dad went to school in Puerto Rico to a private college there. He was a teacher in Puerto Rico, teaching English to juvenile inmates, and then he moved to the United States. He was teaching Spanish in El Paso, it was like kids coming from the border. I don't know if my mom got a college education; I don't think so, because when I still lived with her, she mostly had odd jobs and things like that. It was not very stable. Right now, she is remarried again and she's a housewife. My two half-siblings have dropped out of high school. I don't live there, I'm not 100% sure what's going on. I talk on the phone with her, but with my siblings, it's kind of online. I get the impression that my mother doesn't think that what I'm doing here is important because I was talking to her the other day and she asked me what I'm doing here and she just responds like, "Oh, okay, I guess nothing important."

But, with my dad, I keep really open communication, he wants to Skype every night and that is the sort of things we do. He asks me how my classes went, which ones I had, and things

like that. I think valuing my language has been kind of a difficult process, because Spanish was my first language, but then I lost it in third grade, mostly because my mother's side of the family made fun of the way I talked, so I just stopped. That was around the time, because I think we started learning English in first or second grade, so by the third grade. Everyone would laugh, but not correct me, so by the time I was fluent in English, I stopped speaking Spanish, because the way the system was in El Paso. It was like you could have bilingual classes or you could have just English. I wasn't bilingual for a while, until I forced my mom to put me in an English only school. I lost Spanish in the third grade, and then when I moved with my dad in the fifth grade, that's when he pressured me to take Spanish back. My mom doesn't know how to speak in English. I mean she can talk to people, order things or go to the bank, but for the most part it's pretty limited.

When I was in the International Baccalaureate program, IB, I guess the demographic for that is a little less diverse from my school. I liked having experiences with different pockets of people. We have a Special Ed program, and we also had a good-sized ESL program with political refugees from other countries. I just thought it was school. I'm really into cultures and languages and things like that; I got to interact with other students. When I was in Texas, being Hispanic wasn't questioned. They just took it for like what it was, but in Colorado, I had to prove it because I have a white skin color and I don't have an accent, and people wouldn't believe me and people would just call me white. I didn't want to be identified that way, because I see myself as like Hispanic and Latina. Sometimes, people would say I'm like Mexican and Puerto Rican, they would say, "Oh, no, you're not Mexican. You're just Puerto Rican," or like they would make decisions about my identity that I didn't really like. Another one that was kind of common is they would call me Cuban, which I thought was like kind of messed up because the stereotype

of Cubans is being more assimilated. So, I think that was probably my biggest issue. It never happened in Texas, it just happened in Colorado.

In addition, I didn't feel that high school counselors were very helpful. When I had questions about how to apply, I was having issues with financial aid, like documentation, things like that, but there was something else to the process different than another university was asking for and I didn't understand it. So, I asked for help, and the person there said that she couldn't help me, that I just had to contact the school. I ended up messing that up and I didn't get a lot of financial aid from that school. It was very difficult, especially at the beginning, because we have a really different kind of financial situation. My dad is disabled, so we don't have a lot of money. When I was applying for myself and some other things, then the school kept asking for more verification, like, "Well, you don't have enough money," it was very difficult. I applied for other scholarships, but it was really hard to find some because I was looking for Hispanic specific ones, but a lot of them were geared towards undocumented, so I couldn't apply.

Now that I am at this university, I have had a good experience. Towards the beginning, I was part of the on-campus Latino@ center, but I'm not part of that anymore, because of a couple different reasons. On the one hand, I felt I didn't really fit in. I found it really kind of offensive, there were comments such as white-washed Mexicans and things that I thought were offensive, so I didn't like using words like "white-washed Mexicans" or they are too, "assimilated" or like "light-skinned." I mean it wasn't said to me directly, but having that sort of attitude of being kind-of accepted. They weren't directed to me, but overhearing the conversation about how reinforced things such as this had already been said to me throughout high school. I heard things such as, I'm not Mexican enough, or like Hispanic enough, because of my skin color, the way I dress or the way I act. I think the problem is that people don't want to think I'm Hispanic, so

there's nothing to discriminate against. On the other hand, I feel like people readily accept me because they think I'm white. But I don't know, it just makes me feel bad because all the connotations people hold with white people are applied to me, like white people are ignorant about this, especially with class, talking about white privilege and things like that and this just makes me feel awful. I'm perceived based on my skin color, and people assume that I don't understand what it's like to be a minority, or like, things like that and I don't know, it kind of detaches me from the struggles the Hispanic or Latino community faces in the non-Hispanic society. Then it makes it seem like I'm part of the oppressors, too, if that makes sense. I think it's just so weird because I did a mini-ethnography project on *Las Amigas*, which is part of the Latin@ center, and a lot of things they're saying is Latina or Hispanic identity trying to be inclusive like, "Oh, you don't need to speak Spanish."

Besides this experience, I have received support at this university. I'm part of the honors program, and the dorms I live in are honors-specific for freshmen. Sometimes, I feel I have to quit school but then I feel if I quit now I won't be able to come back, so this is my one shot, basically. I think everything has its ups and downs. I think the second semester's been a little harder, mostly because I'm taking more credits. Last semester I had 17 and this time I have 19. I think on one hand, it has been difficult keeping up with things, but on the other hand it's really helped me, under pressure, kind of like grow and learn more. I came with a lot of credits from high school; I'm already taking a lot of classes in my major and minor. I do have a work study; I worked last semester and this semester. I already saw my financials for this coming semester, and I'm going to have to take even more loans, but everything's just a matter of paying them off as much as I can.

What I like the most from Hispanic culture is its music, I like *salsa, merengue*. I really like *merengue*. I like all music, each genre, I feel like you learn more about a sub-culture within that, too. I just think it's really interesting, and I like learning the different slang words in different places. Also, the family is really valued, not just the nuclear family but the extended also. I could see that when I was living out with my mother, everyone wants to do a thing together, but I also don't know, because I never felt really connected to that. I never really developed that "Yeah, family." The reason why I moved with my dad was for a custody battle. So, that's why I didn't have any problem leaving my mother, which is like really taboo and really like unheard of in Hispanic culture, which in some ways looks up to the mother figure kind of thing. So, what I did was really taboo by choosing to live with my dad instead of with my mother, breaking a cultural norm there. I think that act in itself explains my experience. And then with my dad's side, the family is dispersed like Puerto Rico, New York, California. My dad has similar experiences with me having a dysfunctional family, having to leave and make it on your own-ish. I value independence more, rather than depending on family members.

Gloria's Counter-Story

My name is Gloria; I was born in Mexico. At the age of seven, I was migrated to the United States with my family. I was raised in a small town, in a western state. I was there for almost seven years. In 2010, we moved to the west. Both of my parents are from Mexico. My mom was never out of this country since she arrived here and my dad spent most of his time growing up between Mexico and the U.S.; he traveled back and forth. I have only a sister, who is younger than me, and lives with my parents in the west; she is in high school.

My high school experience was really good. It was one of the best experiences, mainly because if you don't know the history of my western state, it is very drug and very gang related.

My parents moved me from there to here so that I would get away from that, and I would have an opportunity to go to college. In high school, I had really awesome teachers that saw potential in me and they didn't discriminate against me. So, they allowed me to go to leadership conferences and they supported me in everything that I wanted to do. I also played sports in high school, and I was very active in my community. I had a really good time, because I was very involved. I knew I wanted to go to college. In my junior and senior year, I knew I wanted to go to an Ivy League school. Although that's not where I am today, that's where I was aiming.

I'm a first-generation student in my family. My mom and dad have a technical degree from Mexico, but their education ranked lower, so they don't have the experience with American education. I received support and motivation from my teachers and they said, "You're smart, you can do this. Here are some programs for you." Also, they gave motivation saying something like, "You might want to take this route if you want to go here," "Anything you set your mind you can achieve." It was a very hard process to apply for financial aid, grant and scholarship monies. Even though my teachers were very supportive, I don't think people really knew how to help me. My parents, because they don't know the education system, and my counselors because they didn't know my situation with my immigration status, and they also didn't know a lot of the laws and regulations and support that is available. I relied a lot upon myself to figure it out.

Luckily, at this university in the financial aid office, one of the women that works there was very helpful and helped me in explaining the options that I had and how I could pay for college. Otherwise, I probably would have been at a state college or a community college because I didn't know how I was going to pay for it. I'm a participant for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient. DACA is an American immigration policy that permits undocumented immigrants who entered the country before 16 years old and before June 2007 to

stay in the country. It does not give legal immigration status, but it gives a two-year work permit and exemption from deportation. This policy was implemented by the Obama administration in June 2012. I can work here and reside in the United States, but I wasn't born here, and I don't have any benefits or anything like that, I am undocumented. The Asset Bill is set up so that I get half of my tuition covered, then the rest, it's all merit-based aid that I've received because of my grades in high school. Different organizations have a mission to help undocumented students. One of my scholarships is through one of the immigration law firms in Denver. They gave me a scholarship, and another one is for the first generation here at this university. That's one of the biggest ones, and then the other one is through the Latin@ center, one of the diversity offices here on campus.

My parents worked and so they were never home. So, getting to the university was my initiative and I had to rely on myself. They support me being able to take me to school, having a place for me to do my homework and be safe... they provide an environment basically; I was able to get good grades, and stay focused and be in school. They didn't know there were websites that show you scholarships and they didn't know that there were specific institutions. My high school counselors were really helpful, especially with the Denver scholarship foundation. In Denver, we're lucky to have that... We either have programs or a WSF program (West School Foundation). They help students with the application processes and the financial aid processes. They really helped me to learn how to research things. They didn't really provide me with stuff, but their options were, "you can go look and see what you find." I struggled so much, it was very stressful. I remember I cried many times because I didn't know where, or what I'm going to do. Because my family didn't know, I didn't know and nobody was telling me anything, I felt frustrated and I was lost. I wish I had an older sibling or somebody that can help me.

At the present time, my experience in college has been fine. My parents are very supportive because when I'm not feeling good about exams, they call me and they check up on me to see how I'm doing. They let me know that they're proud of me about everything that I've accomplished, and they let me know that there is nothing to lose. Except if you quit, and then you lose. However, my social experience has been totally different because of my situation, I tend to stay with my ethnicity, I go to Latin@ center a lot, and I go to cultural events that are related to my culture, history, and my background. I think it's because I don't feel comfortable. I always get looks from people, when I attend events that are mainly for White students, I kind of feel a little left out. They just give you a look, or if you attended a sorority or fraternity event and that sorority or fraternity was predominately White, I kind of feel out of place. I feel this way based on a little bit of the things that they say, well they don't mean to be mean and stuff like that, but it just comes out like that. I feel better with people from my own culture, because they're very understanding. Sometimes we'll talk about issues like, "I didn't call my mom and they're like upset, because I need to call her today." My friends that are the same culture as me understand that and they're "Oh yeah, I've been through that, this is how you fix that, or this is how to make it better." White students wouldn't understand, they're like, "Why do you need to call your mom," they wouldn't have that cultural experience or tradition of what my family or Hispanic families are used to doing. So, there is a disconnection there, they're not fully understanding. We don't fully understand one another.

Furthermore, I feel, at first, it's definitely very stressful, because this is a community where you see people who are like you, same social economic status, your same background, and your same ethnicity. Moving to a predominately White campus is hard to get adjusted. I personally never experienced segregation or discrimination, like having a majority and a

minority. But, here on campus you can see that, and it's prevalent. You definitely see how if you're a student of color, teachers treat you differently, or, in comparison than if you're White. I've noticed that White students have had more opportunities for education, to be in private schools in comparison to myself. I struggle more academically than they do, because they had more opportunities, for one-on-one tutoring or better education with more qualified teachers than I had. So, it was definitely tough in that sense.

When I go to talk to professors and kind of ask them about how I can better understand, I feel like they don't take me seriously, mainly the science courses. On the other hand, I also took a sociology course and the professor was very helpful and friendly and she didn't discriminate at all. But, with the STEM areas, like science, math and all that stuff, I feel they don't take me seriously. They take the White students more seriously, and they give them more attention than the students of color. My mentors are diverse, I feel comfortable because, they're different, and they're not the White middle class.

My major is Biochemistry, I want to go to medical school, and I want to do that because my dad has been my biggest motivation, he's given me everything, but then at the same time his health has deteriorated a lot. So, I want to give back to him. Other parents and people in our community are really struggling with health issues. By becoming a doctor, and being able to go back to my community and help them, I want to help everybody along the way, but primarily Hispanics-Latinos, people that are low income that are from Mexico or may not come from Mexico, but just identify as that, and they are struggling.

My identity is important to me. I identify myself as human, but ...culturally my identity, I feel I am a Latina. I feel one of the obstacles I have is being separated from my family, because I know that they're struggling and they need help, and they need me to be there at times, and I'm

not there. So, it puts a lot of pressure on me to be in school. I did a lot of the translations for them like paperwork, paying bills, and figuring things out. Now, all they have is my sister, but my sister is at school all the time, and she wasn't really taking this role of responsibilities, so she doesn't know how to be responsible. I feel if I'm not there, people are going to take advantage of them because my parents don't speak English. I feel like I need to be there. My parents don't really know that they will face such obstacles; they say, "Oh, okay, well just focus on your stuff." But then they continue to need me, and they don't realize that ...I am responsible for my parent's financials, just trying to find a job and help support my family. I go to the mental health clinic on campus because as a young woman I feel I have a lot of responsibility on me.

As I think of my overall experience on campus, I feel that it has been good; however, one experience here on campus was really bad. My car got side swiped in the parking lot, and I called the police to make a report. When they came to see the damage, instead of being helpful, and trying to figure out what had happened, they accused me of driving drunk, and then hitting my car, and then trying to cover it up. I was really taken aback. But, when the officer was talking to me, he was trying to get a conversation, just, at first. But, he kept on saying a lot of "Oh" like, references to me being from Mexico, and references to me being Hispanic. Because of what I mentioned about wanting to go to med school, he asked if I was from outside of the country; he said, "Oh, where in Mexico"? He automatically assumed that I was going to go there, instead of elsewhere. I could decide to go to Europe or Cuba, but he said Mexico. This is why when I see representation of Latinos on campus it makes me more self-conscious, especially because I have to really learn this and try harder than the rest so that I can prove myself. There was one time we did have one of the professors that work in the lab and he was Hispanic, and I felt pride, and

remember how I felt at that moment. I was like "Oh, this is really cool," there's people out there that look like me, that are, like, doing great things. It's not just, the White group of professors.

However, I think the main problem here is a combination of the social environment and definitely the financial aspect, because as a woman, it's not like you can get a job working in construction over the summer and make a lot of money like a man would. That's one of the things. Also, with family you have responsibility and you're expected to stay and help. Academically, you definitely feel pressure by, not only just like men being smarter than you on campus, but also the teachers and the professors are mainly men. It doesn't boost my confidence all the way. I think lack of support once you are in higher education is the main reason Latinas drop out of school. Finally, I think obstacles for Latinas in higher education vary from financial to support. There aren't really any programs out there that are being made especially or specifically to help Latinas, and when there, it feels like they're targeting us, and we're doing something wrong so they need to come in and help us. So, there is an imbalance of trying to bring equity, but not like targeting people.

These eight counter-stories were the final result of restorying what originated from the answers given by the participants during the interviews and letter of self. The eight counter-stories are analyzed in the next section by the main themes.

Analysis of the Themes Emergent from the Counter-Stories

The counter-stories of the eight participants in this study were based in their family, academic and social experiences. Their stories started with them in the last two years of high school, where participants usually began the process of searching for colleges, costs, scholarships and financial aid, and their stories ended after the first year of college. Participants

identified themselves as Latinas, Chicanas, Indian, Mexican, and mixed with white and Puerto Rican in their first and second semester at the university.

Each participant alleged to have a strong relationship with their family and the support received by *la familia*. Four of them are bilingual (they speak English and Spanish fluently) and they believe it is a great asset in their educational background. The other four stated that they only speak English. Two of these participants who only speak English said they are not interested to learn how to speak Spanish, and the other two said that they are working very hard to learn this language because it is a very important piece of the culture. Also, six of the participants said they are first-generation in college. Finally, seven of them stated that they have struggles financially.

The main themes will be quickly listed here, and then an in-depth discussion about these themes will follow. The financial part is a remarkable theme in this study; only one participant stated that her financial obligations for her education were met. Racism, discrimination or ignorance is one of the largest negative factors in the college experiences of these eight participants. Finally, all participants spoke about the programs in this institution that have been very important in their transition and adaptation during the first year. Additionally, family support was one of the most prevalent themes during the interview. Each participant thought their family was the main motivation to continue with their education and being in college was a product of the sacrifices of their parents. Even though their financial experiences are not the best, *la familia* plays an important role in their educational success.

During the process of codifying the themes, there were many common themes highlighted from the interviews and the letter that they wrote separately. A letter to self, as explained in chapter three and also at the beginning of this chapter, was a letter that the

participants were asked to write. Then the combination of common themes from the letter to self and interviews developed into new common themes of each story.

Theoretical Framework

To construct the analysis and answer the central and sub research questions of this study, the triple theoretical framing through Latino/a Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth were used. The uses of these triple theoretical and analytical frameworks were based on the dominant discourses of race and racism and how this is related to the experiences of Latina students in this institution. Each of these theories is briefly discussed below to refresh the reader on the details of each theory provided in chapter one.

Latino/a Critical Theory. A theory focusing on the Latin@ community and the barriers of language, immigration, sexuality, and sexism and specific elements impacting socio-cultural advancement, anti-subordination, and community cultivation. Delgado (2002) confirmed “LatCrit theorize[s] issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (p. 108).

LatCrit theory has four main principles: (1) the production of knowledge: the production of ideas to better understand Latin@’s culture to give an improvement in the social and legal aspects; (2) the advancement of transformation, which is the creation of material social change that improves the lives of Latin@ and other subordinated groups; (3) the expansion and connection of struggle(s) constitutes itself as a struggle on behalf of diverse Latin@s, but also toward a material transformation that fosters social justice for all. And lastly, (4) the cultivation of community and coalition, including actively nurturing a community of scholars who share a similar approach to legal theory, share a similar commitment to collaboration and who are

willing to analyze explicitly the Latin@ situation within that larger state of affairs (Valdes, 1997, p. 7).

Critical Race Theory. Employed in this study to anchor issues related to race, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and feminism for the purpose of giving equality to all minority groups, especially in the area of education. Delgado and Stefancic (2006) stated, “CRT built on feminism’s insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination” (p. 2). One of the definitions that better describes CRT is that it "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (Yosso, et al., 2001, p. 2).

The model in education of CRT is composed of five main principles: (1) Race and racism and their interrelations with other sub-ordination in education. (2) Challenge to dominant ideology, CRT reveals how the dominant ideology of color blindness and race neutrality act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society. (3) Commitment to social justice in education, CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination. (4) Experiential knowledge is important, this principle challenges and exposes students of color having been viewed by majoritarian populations in institutions as having a deficit in formal learning environments. (5) Interdisciplinary perspectives utilizes the interdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the different forms of discrimination (Perez, 2011, p. 381; Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 275).

Delgado said (2002), “CRT and LatCrit are used in education as a theoretical framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 109).

Community Cultural Wealth. A concept used together by CRT and LatCrit to challenge the theory of deficit thinking applied to people of color in education in the U.S. According to Yosso (2005):

Deficit thinking is one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools. It takes the position that minoritized students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. (p. 75)

CCW gives importance and value to the culture of people of color. CCW highlights the benefits and all the cultural wealth of the minority students, and how this cultural wealth has been a predominant factor in the education of students of color. Yosso (2005) developed the concept of cultural wealth, demarcating six forms of capital that exist within communities of color, and she calls these six forms “community cultural wealth”: (1) Aspirational capital: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real and perceived barriers. (2) Linguistic capital: skills learned through language such as, “memorization, dramatic pauses, rhythm, and rhyme” (p. 78). Students of color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills; Linguistic capital also refers to the ability to communicate via visual art, music or poetry. (3) Familial capital: the forms of knowledge “nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 79). From these kinship ties, the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to community is learned and its resources. (4) Social capital: the “networks of people and community resources” (p. 79) that can

help students navigate through social institutions. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. (5) Navigational capital: a form of capital inclusive of social networks and the resiliency students develop to persist through institutional barriers. (6) Resistant capital: knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality grounded in a history of resistance to subordination by communities of color, guided by a motivation to transform oppressive institutions and structures (p. 80-81). Yosso (2005) stated:

These forms of capital draw on the knowledge Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom...community cultural wealth involves a commitment to conduct research, teach and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice. (p.82)

CCW has been a concept that has not been taken into account in the educational system of the United States as a way to support and strengthen the culture of students of color. Each one of these theories has a direct correlation with the Latinas' experiences in this study, and they also help to answer the questions in this study.

Themes

The next part of this analysis will examine the common themes answering the sub research questions. Each of the research questions were answered using the literature and theoretical framework as well as quotations from the participants. The interviews and letter-to-self data were coded and subsequently developed into themes. According to Creswell (2012), themes are several codes put together to get a common idea. These themes are seen as a "family." They are reduced into five to seven "families" and are used to write a final narrative or counter-story (p. 184). The themes in this analysis were used to answer, and took into consideration, the major research questions of this study. The results are shown in Table 3.

Question One: Cultural Influences

The first question that this study sought to answer was what cultural influences identified by the participants impacted their experiences during the first year of study at the University?

Table 3		
<i>Themes and Major Research Questions</i>		
<u>Themes</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Research Questions</u>
Connections, Language, and <i>La Familia</i> as a Culture Value	All participants	Q. 1
Family Support	All participants	Q. 2
Financial Background	All participants, except Laura	Q. 2
First Generation	All participants, except Janine and Ines	Q. 2
Microaggression Discrimination, Ignorance, or Racism	All participants	Q. 3
Identity Denial	Janine, Ines, and Ava	Q. 3

The six forms of capital show the benefits and the significance that Latin@ cultural wealth gives to the students and how Latin@ cultural wealth plays an important role in the education of Latina students.

The cultural influences identified by the participants in this study were: (a) *connections* that participants have with other Latin@ students on campus; (b) *Language* values, four of the participants were bilingual, two participants want to become bilingual and two participants do not want to learn Spanish; and (c) *La familia* is a big cultural influence for all the participants.

Below, the first theme in this segment is presented using the concept of community cultural wealth based in its six forms of capital. This concept applies to each theme in this section and it is relevant in answering the first question of this study.

Connections. The sense of community for these participants has been one of the mainstays in their experience in college. All participants affirmed that the connections made with other Latin@ students or Latin@ groups on campus during their first year have been very important for them. It helped them have a sense of family and to not feel isolated from their culture. Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, and Bámaca (2006) affirmed, “Researchers have also found that peers play an important role in the academic support of ethnic minority students” (p. 281). Here are two examples from participants:

Gloria: I tend to stay with my ethnicity, I go to [the] Latin@ center a lot and I go to cultural events related to my culture, my history and background.

Diana: I think everyone wants to be a little bit closer to people they can relate to.

Peers were definitely important to these Latina students, not just for emotional support, but also they could share many of their related experiences with each other. Social capital states that peers can offer emotional and instructional support to Latina students during their experience navigating through society’s institutions. In addition, LatCrit states that community and coalition give Latinas students the sense to cooperate with each other through the social problems within the institution (Valdes, 1997). This sense of cooperation can help students to navigate through social institutions and gain a sense of *familiarismo*. The sense of *familiarismo* and belonging often helps students to continue their educational goal, as they feel the support of this group or community, even though they are away from their real family.

The next two themes in this cultural section are *language* and *Lafamilia*. All of the participants expressed the importance of these two themes in their counter-stories. These themes

were analyzed through the mirror of community cultural wealth and its forms of capital as linguistic, aspirational and familial.

Language. Speaking a language is one of the cultural factors that may congeal a cultural group, as the participants in the interviews reflected this. Four participants expressed proudly being bilingual and how this is a great asset in their educational background, while the other four participants stated that they only speak English. Two participants said that they are working very hard to learn this language because, to them, it is a very important piece of the culture and for their professional future. Meanwhile, two of the participants who only speak English affirmed that they are not interested in learning Spanish because they are afraid to be discriminated against or to have an accent.

Four quotes from the participants are presented below to better show how language becomes an important cultural value for the participants, or how language can be a factor in discrimination:

Diana: I am starting to appreciate Spanish because I realize that there is beauty also [to] speak both languages; [and they] have been positive in my life and my experience in this university.

Breanna did not speak Spanish, but she was working hard to learn it:

I want to be fluent in Spanish because when we go to family reunions, they'll be speaking in Spanish and I don't know what they are saying. It wouldn't have been if my grandma would've taught my mom, but she didn't so it was lost between my mom and me. Which is why I want to minor in Spanish to be able to build myself back up with my culture and then I can teach my future kids and future generations to keep our culture strong".

Janine also stated:

I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to know a second language, because a lot of people don't have the opportunity and some people will brush it off and [say], "Oh Spanish." Bull, Spanish is like a leading language in the world.

Linguistic capital comprises important skills that Latin@s are able to bring to college and society in general. Students with these skills can develop through good communication practices in both languages. However, many institutions with the purpose to serve them and society more broadly often ignore the concept of community cultural wealth related to linguistic capital (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012). Likely, this is a reason why a few of the participants expressed not wanting to speak Spanish, as these cultural contributions are not taken into consideration in society and even less by institutions. Many times, this cultural value of being bilingual is actually seen to enhance social repression and an easy way to be exposed to discrimination, as Ava related in her counter-story. She said:

English is my native language, even though I grew up with Spanish as my first language. My grandma struggles with understanding me, I still talk to her in English. All my family is bilingual, but I think I'm thankful for just accelerating more and more and becoming more advanced with my English. Just being that I know that, when you don't know, people take advantage of you. Or when you have a thick accent, I know people take advantage of you and kind of see you less, so I like to prove them wrong and I like to show them, I speak English and I am just the same as you. I would like to communicate with my family and not make them struggle to speak English when I should be learning how to speak Spanish with them.

In Ava's case, it is clear that social oppression and this new form of racism has influenced her to assimilate into another culture, forgetting her own language. This is also a good example of deculturalization (spring, 2013) and losing identity; she wants to fit into another culture so that she does not feel the social oppression in the institution she attends.

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002):

Cultural assimilation may take place including learning English at the expense of losing Spanish and becoming an individual "American" success story by loosening or cutting family and community ties. Therefore, according to cultural deficit storytelling, a successful student of color is an assimilated student of color. Given the current rhetoric of "at-risk" and the resurrection of terms such as disadvantaged, it is clear that just as insidiously as racism has changed forms. (p. 31)

It seems that assimilation to this culture is the only way for Latina students to succeed in this society. Based on the participants' answers, many Latina students suffer this social oppression and racism in the educational institutions when they decided to continue with their own cultural values. They are seen or evaluated as disadvantaged students. Instead, they should be seen and assessed as students with a cultural wealth, or students who bring other important skills such as being able to speak two languages.

La Familia. The last theme in this section is *La familia*. Six quotes are presented here that emerged from the counter-stories. These examples exemplify the cultural value expressed by the participants regarding their families and how this feeling of being part of the Latino family makes them stronger for any other circumstance that may occur in the university.

During the interviews, all the participants expressed their deep admiration for the cultural concept of family that Latin@s have; and most important, how this concept has helped them to get a better experience during their first year in college. All participants provided details about the value of their family:

Gloria: The cultural value that I most like is the unity. Being together and achieving goals together and celebrating together. It definitely helps when there is an issue and I need support, they are going to be genuine about how they support you.

Janine: My favorite value is since my dad's side of the family all is Hispanic; I love how much they value family. I really love that my dad's side of the family has really engraved the importance of family to me.

Laura: Well... I'm Mexican, I think my favorite culture of values is how close knit and tight Mexican families are.

Veronica: Family is my favorite part of being Latina; because you know Hispanic families are [the] first kind of deal. I always keep that with me because over the time you have friends but family is forever. Even if you're arguing or something, but they're always there for you.

Breanna: My grandma is always ingraining this to you, family is extremely important and as long as you have them, then you're good.

All participants said they have a family that always is willing to support them no matter the conditions. For all the participants, the concept of family extends from parents and siblings to grandparents and cousins, who leave them a feeling of emotional greatness and support. According to Espinoza (2010), the cultural value of *familismo* is based on strong identification and attachment to the family, both immediate and extended. It requires members to prioritize family over individual interests. Equally important, Espinoza affirmed that Latina/o students who give great value to their role in the family, most of the time, performed better in school. This demonstrates that participants' connection to their family helped them focus on their academics (p. 319). The familial capital states that through these kinship ties, Latinas learn how significant a healthy connection with their family and the sense of community as a source of support is for their education experience. *La familia* has a very significant value in this culture, leading to a strong family connection, which has been a positive fact for the participants during their first year in college.

As can be seen, the cultural influences identified by the participants such as connections, language, and *la familia*, have positively impacted them during their first year of study in this university.

Question Two: Family Influences

The second question of this study was about the impacts of family influences identified by participants. Each theme was analyzed using the framework of community cultural wealth and literature about Latina family, as well Lat Crit and CRT as reference and support.

The common themes that emerged in this section were: (a) Family support received during this time; (b) Financial situations are one of the most prevalent factors during the interviews; and (c) First-generation to attend university.

Family support. All participants affirmed they receive support from their families in one way or another. Based on the counter-stories, participants' parents largely did not have the formal education or skill to help their daughters apply to college or fill out applications for scholarships. However, their parents made every effort to be present and support their daughters in this process, often becoming their role model and an inspiration to pursue their college goals. Several participants also stated that *la familia* was one of their main motivations to stay in college, and because of their family, they were determined to achieve their goal to graduate and be the first person in their family with a university degree. Some of the many expressions given by participants about family support in their first year at college is discussed below. Perez (2009) accentuated the significance of community cultural wealth in the lives of Latin@ students and added that Latina students employ various forms of personal, familial, and community assets to navigate through higher education.

Family support can mean many forms of help from the family in general, or even from a single member. For example, Veronica expressed her happiness for all the support her mom gave to her by helping to fill out loan and scholarship applications. She also said that her family was her biggest motivation. Moreover, Diana said that her brother was very supportive because if she needed school supplies or anything, he was always willing to look for a way to find them. She also said her mom was a big support to her. In addition, Ava saw her family support because her parents continually text her every day, and her dad always says, "We are proud of you, *mi hija*, we believe in you, we're so proud of your hard work that you put in." Finally, Janine said her older brother was always encouraging to her. He told her: "you know I believe in you, I believe you can do anything you want." In general, her extended family was also very supportive and

they always wanted to hear about how she was doing in school. They said they were very proud of her.

All participants recognized the work that their parents and family did to support their education. Community cultural wealth and aspirational capital reinforce what the participants stated about the support received from their parents and *la familia*. All participants were greatly connected in their experiences to this form of capital. Yosso (2005) stated that aspirational capital is the ability to have Latin@ families to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even when they are facing struggles. Aspirational capital, in other words, is evidenced in Latin@ parents who permit themselves and their children to dream of possibilities of a better future beyond their present circumstances, for these participants it was by gaining an education goal. All parents, despite not having the money to support their daughters and no knowledge about the educational system in this country, still possessed the human and moral wealth to not let their daughter's dreams decay.

Financial situation. All participants in this study, except Laura, complained about their financial circumstances and how the process to apply for financial aid was difficult. They expressed all the struggles they faced to pay for college because their parents did not have the money to support them. Laura was an unusual case because her parents own their business, and they have been saving money for her education since she was a child. Below are some of the experiences of the participants:

Laura: My parents have already saved up money. They run their own business. How much we're paying for college isn't as much as it is for my other friends.

Financial struggles in Latinas' families are the principal problem for many of the participants in this study. Lack of money and how to afford the cost of their education has created a feeling of hopelessness and concern among participants. As Castillo and Hill (2004)

affirmed, low socioeconomic status in Latina students may give them tremendous distress during their experience in college (p. 236). Here are some examples extracted from the participants' counter-stories:

Ava: Financial aid was the difficult part. Money holds me back. Money stresses me out more than the schoolwork; I am unsure of how every year I'm going to pay for it. I don't really qualify for many scholarships because I am not considered need based due my dad's income. This [is] my only struggle and sometimes I wonder what am I going to do? I think about money most of the time, it distracts me from actually paying attention in school.

Ines: It was very difficult especially at the beginning because we have different kind of financial situation because my dad's disabled and we don't have a lot of money there. I have taken a lot of loans.

Gloria: It was very hard, even though they were very supportive but they didn't know how to help me because my immigration situation. I don't have any benefit. My high school counselor was very helpful, especially Denver scholarship foundation. I struggled so much, it was very stressful. I cried many times because I didn't know where to go because my family didn't know, I didn't know. I received the help of the asset bill and then this university helped me with half of my tuition.

Breanna: My process was very strenuous because my mom only makes \$29,000 a year and as we know its \$24,000 to go this university. I applied for about two scholarships a week. It was a lot hard to work and apply for the FAFSA. My counselor guided me to the website. My family didn't know how to help me finding money for my education.

Diana: I struggled a lot because I didn't know how to apply neither my mom. She doesn't really know what a personal statement is. There was time where I wasn't sure about even going to college. The economic crash affected my family as well, my mom did her bankruptcy. My salvation was I ended up getting a scholarship, it was \$10,000 but, only for this year.

Janine: The process to apply for financial aid was confusing, there are so many different scholarships and grants and many things to do. They don't really do a great job explaining it while you're in high school. They just said 'there is free money out there, but they don't exactly tell you were to look for it.' I didn't receive a good guidance in my high school. My dad helped me with that. You have to meet the requirement to be eligible to win a scholarship and it was honestly the biggest thing, finding that.

Veronica: I get a little confused because there are so much to do. My mom always helped me with the applications and everything. I had a good experience working with financial aid.

As seen above, all participants expressed their financial crisis and lack of financial aid to continue with their education. All participants have the potential to succeed at getting their college degree. However, many of them do not have the economic resources to do it. According to Gorski (2012), it is a common misperception that “many people in the U.S. believe that poor people are poor because of their own deficiencies rather than opportunity inequalities” (p. 305). It is clear that all participants have a deep desire to study, but the economic factor puts them at a disadvantage to other students who either already have resources or the knowledge to apply for scholarships and financial aids. Education is a challenge for students with no economic resources within a bigger crisis of increasing tuition and declining financial aid for those students. In other words, it is not simply that Latin@ students bring deficiencies from home; there is a lack of equal opportunities in a system that denies many Latinas the opportunity to continue with their education. These few particular Latina students in the study had the “good fortune” of having a good counselor that helped them during the process. But, what happens with the rest of Latinas who did not have a good counselor to help them navigate the financial aid process? It is not sympathy that Latin@ students need, but an equal opportunity educational system that supports minority groups with effective financial programs to beneficiate these students. According to Valencia (2010), “The history of deficit thinking in education illustrate with examples of how macro- and micro level educational policies/practices fueled by class and racial prejudice kept economically disadvantaged students of color in their place” (p. 37). A quote from Gloria’s counter-story perfectly fits this discussion:

I think obstacles for Latinas in higher education vary from financial to support. There aren’t really any programs out there that are being made especially or specifically to help Latinas, and when they are, it feels like they’re targeting us, and we’re doing something wrong so they need to come in and help us. So, there is an imbalance of trying to bring equity, but not like targeting people.

The lack of economic programs available to help these students, plus the hidden racism that exists in society, deters students of the educational system and prevents them from obtaining an education. For example, the national No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was passed in 2002. The main purpose of this law was to promote educational support for children and to help remove the gap that existed between White children and children from minority groups. However, experts in this field have concluded the law has been counterproductive, for example Hursh et al. (2007) said, “NCLB, therefore, both directly and indirectly has intensified racial, ethnic and economic inequality in society” (p. 306). The educational system is not created to support and benefit students of color or students from low-income families. Throughout the history of this country, the educational system through such policies as NCLB and other practices has been aimed at supporting a privileged sector of students, and discriminates and marginalizes against students from minority groups, like in the case of the Latina students in this study.

First generation. Six of the participants self-identified as the first generation of their family in college. Janine and Ines stated that their parents have a degree from a university. Being first generation often means that students don’t have someone in their life who can help and guide them with regard to higher education. This is especially true while adapting to their first year at college. According to the answers given by the participant’s during the interviews, this has been the case for them as well. However, being first generation gives the participant’s motivation to continue their education, although, they also reported the need and desire to have a person that can guide them in this period of transition to college. It seems, according to their counter-stories, that they get great satisfaction in trying to become the first person in their family to get a university degree. Veronica, for example, said, “From my whole family I’m the first to

go a state university and stay on campus.” Moreover, Breanna stated, “Since I’ll be first generation to graduate from university, it’s motivation to keep going.” Gloria said:

I struggled so much, because nobody was telling me so I felt, I was lost. I wish I had an older sibling or somebody that can help me, because I am the first person in my family in college. I want to be a role model for my little sister and encourage her to do anything that she wants to do.

According to Thayer (2005), “First-generation students have limited access to get information about the college experience, from relatives. They likely do not know of time management, college cost, and all the bureaucratic operations of higher education” (p. 4).

As seen above, the six participants showed mix feelings regarding being first generation. On one hand, they were very excited to become the first person in their families to attend college. On the other hand, they expressed stress from writing many essays and filling out every possible application to get financial aid or scholarships while not having someone to help or orient them through this experience. Kurotsuchi et al. (2007) stated that most of the time, first-generation students come from a lower-income family and from racial/ethnic minority groups. It should be noted that in spite of the fact that these participants are first-generation students at the university, their parents and family have supported them through the educational process. This support is not likely within the educational system itself, but in helping them with the path to higher education. Quotes from the counter stories corroborate how CCW aspirational, social and navigational capital fits this statement.

Ava: I did not receive any educational support from my parents because they did not know how to navigate the educational system. However, my step-mom would always send me emails and links to certain scholarships that I should look into and maybe apply to. She would read over my essays or reach out to people that could possibly help me.

Diana: My mom would take me anywhere I had to go; she even drove me to the interview for a scholarship. In high school, I took 8 AP classes in total and it's like having to always push myself to be better.

Veronica: My mom helped me a lot with the process to get into college. My family was important in this time of my life. My parents want me to continue with my education.
Breanna: [I took the initiative to know this lady as a way of navigation in her field] One of the main ladies who work at the National Western Stock Show at the rodeo royalty has encouraged me. She's kind of built my character up and shown me how not to be shy, how to communicate with people, older adults.

CCW, social capital refers to the networks of people and community resources that help students navigate through social institutions, while navigational capital is the social networks and resiliency students develop to persist through institutional barriers. Aspirational capital on the other hand essentially denotes the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real and perceived barriers (Yosso 2005). These participants and their families have proved once again that the theory of CCW has been critical to the success of Latin@s in higher education in a society that only offers barriers and educational inequalities. Students like these participants who are paragons of the success of CCW are important in that they provide models for breaking the vicious cycle that plagues first generation students: First generation students have more struggles during their process to access higher education, this may lead them to abandon their studies, leading to another generation of people who cannot offer guidance to the next generation (Thayer 2000). CCW provides the motivation and support for parents and community, which is vital to breaking this cycle while aiding these students through an institutional barrier filled process.

Question Three: Social and Intellectual Influences

This section illustrates how the participants expressed how social and intellectual (academic) influences impacted their first-year experiences. The themes identified by the participants in this section were: (a) *microaggression, microinsults, discrimination, racism or ignorance* and (b) *identity denial*.

The social oppression within the education system expressed by the participants has had influences on their sense of identity. They do not have the physical characteristics and behavior of most White students at this university. According to Cheryan and Monin (2005), “Individuals from any racial group who are seen as less prototypically American than Whites because of their appearance, behavior, or attitudes also have to contend with exclusion from the American in-group” (p. 717). White not labeling it as such, participants stated that they receive microinsults. Microinsults are verbal communications of an unseen insult that is shameful to a person’s racial heritage (Hernandez et al., 2010). People cannot see or touch the subtle discrimination that exists in the educational system, but it is there, very subtly hurting many young people from ethnic groups in this country.

With this in mind, the counter-stories were coded and these recurring themes were found: microaggression, discrimination, racism or ignorance, and identity denial. They are important themes to be discussed in this study because they reflect the social and intellectual influences lived by participants, and also how each one of these themes has impacted their experience during their first year within the institution.

Microaggression, discrimination, racism and/or ignorance. Most of the participants complained about microaggression, discrimination, racism or ignorance received during their first year in college by friends, teachers or staff in general. For example, five participants said they received discrimination and racism and two other participants stated that many people do not have the intention of microassault or discriminate against them, but they think that these people are ignorant with their racial comments. Even if some participants think it is ignorance, what is clear is that these comments have influenced all participants and have affected their experience in this institution. According to Perez et al. (2011), “In the field of education, studies

have found Latina/o students are seen as of low expectations and a racially intimidating college campus environment” (p. 386). Perez et al. defined this as “all forms of racial microaggressions” (p. 386). In the meantime, Nieto and Bode (2008), discussed racism and various forms of discrimination that exist in the educational system, “Racism and other forms of discrimination particularly sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and linguicism have a long history in our schools and their effects are widespread and long lasting” (p. 69). Racism and social prejudice against Latinas has been in the educational system for a long time and it has had negative effects on the retention of Latina students in higher education.

These comments have negative psychological consequences for some of the participants, for example, the denial of their own cultural identity. As was explained by Bryant (2011) in his study about Internalized Racism's, “Identity denial is an experience of self-degradation and self-alienation, which incorporates shame of minority group identity and culture” (p. 692). More importantly, as Hernandez et al. (2010) explained, is “how experiences of racial microaggressions within academic and social spaces impact life on campus in general as well as the academic performance and social interactions of the participating students” (p. 203).

A few examples from participants that exemplify the different forms of racism and microaggression received by them follow:

Ava: When you have a thick accent or something I know people take advantage of you and kind of see less of you.

Diana: I was not accepted in my high school because I was Latina, I felt isolated.

Breanna: My roommate the first time she introduced me to her family said: ‘Oh the Mexican in the corner is my roommate.’ She didn’t say my name. Also comments like somebody ‘Aren’t you illegal, right?’ It has never been blatantly out there to show racism, but there have been little things here and there. My friends make jokes about ‘Oh let’s beaner this car, or look at that Mexican on the road.’ They ask me ‘Do your family eat tacos everyday’. Also they ask me “are your family construction workers?” And then they look at me and say ‘Oh, sorry I didn’t mean to say that.

Gloria: When I go to talk to professors and ask them about how I can better understand, I feel like they don't take me seriously mainly the science courses. Because I also take a sociology course and the professor is very helpful and friendly. She doesn't, discriminate against you at all. But with the STEM areas, like science, math and all that stuff, I feel they don't take me seriously because the way I look. Hispanic or Brown, they take the White students more seriously and they give them more attention than the students of color.

The first and third principles in CRT support the findings of this section. CRT acknowledges that in American higher education, race and racism are imbedded in the structures, practices, and discourses that guide the daily practices of universities. In addition, the third principle of CRT states that it has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination(Perez, 2011, p. 381; Solórzano et al., 2005, p. 275). On the other hand, the above quotes from the participants are perfect examples of microassaults and microinsults. According to Hernandez et al. (2010),microassaults are defined as explicit behaviors intending to hurt a person of color such as name calling, avoidance, and discrimination. Microinsults refer to communications conveying a hidden insult demeaning a person's racial heritage.

Lastly, the comments of Janine and Laura are presented. They said that many people do not have the intention of microassault or discriminating against them, and they think that these people are mainly just ignorant:

Janine: I have never experienced racism, which I'm very fortunate to have able to say that. However, people here ask me 'what exactly are you? But they ask me that for curiosity, honestly because they don't know. People look at me they said 'you look different and weird', but once they get to know me they say 'oh yeah, you are cool, you're totally White like us.' Or they can say 'You are pretty, but you are different than all of us.' I am White; I do not know why people around me say I'm Brown, when they say that my answer is 'I'm White just like you.' I think my friends are kind of ignorant.

This quote contains many forms of racism that deserves deconstruction in order to get a better analysis. First, despite the fact that Janine thinks she has never experienced racism, sadly,

she has, but she may not be able to recognize it. According to Hernandez et al. (2010), in previous studies, it emerged that racial microaggressions could be seen as relatively subtle manifestations of bias, or could be considered to be ill defined and vague. In other words, it is possible that Janine does not see this form of racism because it seems to be so subtle, and perhaps because it is her friends who are saying it. Second, there are commentaries or passive attacks that Latinas frequently receive within delicate questions such as: “Where are you from? Where are you? Do you speak English?” But, in Janine’s case, the question was “what exactly are you?” This kind of microaggression occurs because Latinas do not have the predominant features characteristic of White Americans and ethnicity may not be easy to determine. Cheryan et al. (2005) confirmed that questions like “Where are you really from?” are palpable reminders of identity denial; of the fact that one is being relegated outside one’s in-group because one does not fit the picture. Third, another portion of Janine’s quote is referencing how people talk to her about the way she physically looks: “People look at me they said: you look different and weird’, but once they get to know me they say ‘oh yeah, you are cool, you’re totally White like us.” From the quote, it seems that to her friends to be Latina is to be “weird” and the only way to be “cool” is being White. These kinds of comments send the message that White is the color for “cool people” and to look like a Latina, or anything non-white, is not cool and weird. White dominance is the norm and the expressed here as normal, neutral and nature, which is the epistemological underpinnings in our society (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

According to Huynh (2013), microinvalidation experiences send the message that minorities do not belong or are not fully American. Likewise, students who feel their identity is questioned most of the time respond by using an identity affirmation skill, such showing their knowledge of popular American culture, and are charming more in American practices to

emphasize their American identity. Finally, it is clear she tried to assert her American identity when she answered “I’m White just like you.” This is known by experts as *identity assertion*. *Identity assertion* is, according to Cheryan et al. (2005), a process by which one proves to others that one belongs in the in-group. Moreover, Delgado (2002) said, “CRT and LatCrit in education is a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 109).

Many students from minority groups in this country may not see or perceive racism, discrimination or microaggression in their campus. Some, like Laura, think it is more ignorance than racism:

I have only experienced, not so much racism, but like more ignorance, when somebody asks me ‘what are you?’ my answer is ‘what do you mean, are you asking me about my race or ethnicity?’ Also, when I say I am from Mexico people say ‘are you illegal?’ and stuff like that; they just jump to assumptions, but I feel like that’s not intentionally. They’re not intentionally wanting to be racist towards me but they don’t understand, they haven’t learned exactly like what it means or what they’re saying, how it feels like to be asked those questions.

Under those circumstances, many students are not able to see the different ways of discrimination that exist in their campus. Lasley and Pierce (2001) said, “Latino students construct paths through the terrain of discrimination and prejudice they encounter in school in more complex and varied ways” (p. 860). However, the question is: were these students sufficiently educated to see or recognize racism or microaggression comments at this university, or if perhaps this system has been created to microinvalidate and discriminate against students of color? According to Solorzano (2000), “Students of color must be taught to recognize these microaggressions and construct their future by taking appropriate action at each instance of recognition” (p. 61). All these microaggressions and discriminations have negative psychological

impacts in students of color, such as rejection of their own identity and culture. The following section details a little more how the microaggressions have affected the participants throughout their lives and especially in their first year of college experience.

Identity denial. Identity denial has been a lived conflict for many Latin@s in this country, as a manner of protection against the oppression they feel when they have to navigate between two cultures within society. Below, there are relevant quotes from the participants that expose these ethnic and cultural conflicts:

Janine: It's just weird because I know as a race I'm White, but as far as, ethnicity goes I have the Hispanic in me for my dad side. What's really great that English is my native language and definitely being in the United States, I don't want to say it hinders you to not know English, but it in a way kind of does because people will look at you differently or they're going to be, " they don't know what they're saying. Why are they here? Where are they even from?

Ava: My first language when I was little, was Spanish, but now it's English. I think I'm thankful for just accelerating more and more and becoming more advanced with my English. I know when you don't speak correct English people take advantage of you. I haven't experienced racism because it could be from me not speaking Spanish.

According to Anzaldúa (1987), the Mestiza identity can take on many unique forms, as it was developed to manage two cultures that are always in direct conflict with one another. She described the conflict and tension generated by the polarities experienced when one is torn between ethnic culture and the demands of the Anglo world, such as that which resides within educational institutions. This double nature of identity in the border culture means learning two ways of thinking, speaking, and sometimes two distinct languages. This is the double standard that many Latin@ students need to negotiate to not feel social oppression. Mainly, one of the first cultural values that they have to sacrifice is to refuse to speak Spanish. Speaking Spanish or having an accent is likely seen as shameful because it is not the dominant language.

Moreover, Ines explained how she lost her native language [Spanish]. However, her case is another kind of racism that is different from Ava and Janine because it was her own family [mother's Spanish-speaking side] who embarrassed and oppressed her:

Valuing my language has been kind of a difficult process because Spanish was my first language, but then I lost it in third grade, mostly because my mother's side of the family made fun of the way I talked.

Ines suffered internal racism among her own family. Minoritized groups may also discriminate against someone who doesn't fit within that group fully enough. In other words, Ines was Latina for the Whites and too White for the Latina group, making her an outcast everywhere. According to Bryan (2011):

Internalizing racism is a social psychological process that affects Latin@ as a group and individually with variations of its impact that are based on several factors, which may include but are not limited to an awareness of a self and group identity that is based on traditional and contemporary Latin@-centered world views, philosophies, cosmologies, and achievements. (p. 691)

In addition, internalized racism is manifested by embracing Whiteness with the devaluation of the Latin@. It is an experience of self-degradation and self-alienation, which incorporates shame of Latin@ identity and culture. Also, this is a pain suffered by individuals who are battling with their own internalized racism or their experiences with the internalized racism of others in their racial group, such as family members (Bryan, 2010; Pyke, 2010). Finally, Ines stopped speaking Spanish for a long time because of the shame of being mocked by her family. Pyke (2010) stated, "We can begin to talk about internalized oppression at the moment that the oppressed accept the identities imposed on them by oppressors" (p. 557). In accordance with Pyke, Ines began to be oppressed by her own family at the moment when she felt shame speaking Spanish and stopped doing it.

Equally important, some participants during the interviews said they were White or thought of their skin color as White. This is a psychological conditioning to feel safe within the White society. This can be the cumulative effect of a lifetime of microaggressions. According to Perez (2011), “In later work, psychiatrist Chester Pierce developed the term *racial microaggressions* to describe the consistent and subtle forms of racism that had negative cumulative effects on the mind and body over time” (p. 386). In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence. (Pierce, 1995, p. 281). For example, this quote by Janine demonstrates this effect:

I wish I was definitely just more White because then I wouldn't be this weird in-between color. I wouldn't be kind of tan. I definitely consider race-wise to be White, when people ask, I just say ‘yes, I am White’.

However, it is also clear from their stories that they struggle within academia to have a lighter skin color and how they avoid the use of Spanish because they do not want to have any kind of evidence that makes them seem Latina. The institutional and societal oppression exists because the dominant color is White and the language of the dominant color is English, and anything else is ‘weird’ or an ‘outsider’.

Moreover, Janine, Ines, and Ava have had to negotiate much of their culture within the academic environment in order to survive. That is, they had to ignore or conceal important parts of their roots for fear of being rejected. They must separate parts of who they are to live another part in the educational environment. Espinoza (2010) called these kinds of negotiations as “the separators,” which Latinas/Chicanas have to manage the cultural ambiguities of their family and academic contexts by adapting to role behaviors differently in each environment as a result of their high levels of biculturalism. Latinas/Chicanas enjoy their culture and *familia*. For example,

Ava said during her interview that she wished to be bilingual and be able to communicate with her family. Janine, as well, showed her pride explaining that having a second language not just helped her in a potential occupation, but it also shows her diversity.

Ava: I also wish that I did know Spanish. I would love to be bilingual, being that I could benefit from it later on in the future and I would like to communicate more with my family and not making them struggle to talk English when I should be learning how to talk Spanish with them.

Janine: I'm also very fortunate to have the opportunity to know a second language, because a lot of people don't have that opportunity, and some people will brush it off and be "Oh, Spanish." It only helps me, because it not only betters my Spanish, but it shows my diversity.

Participants, however, have a separator between *la familia* and the Anglo educative environment. Janine, Ines, and Ava, were self-considered Latina and through their counter-stories they expressed their pride in being part of the Latin@ culture, but they also admitted to have influence from the Anglo culture.

Personal Reflection

In addition, it is important to point out my feelings of these eight participants in this study. Interviewing each of them was an enriching experience for me personally, not only professionally, but also humanly. In each one of them, I could see the sadness, anger and low self-esteem that they bring with themselves. According to Huynh (2010), "American identity denial has important inference for the wellbeing of ethnic minorities who experience it." The main denominator of these feelings was their skin color, cultural aspects like speaking Spanish, and socioeconomic status. I, as a Spanish instructor for many years in this country, felt immensely sad when two of my participants said, "I forgot to speak Spanish because I did not want to have any accent because I do not want people see me as less."

I had to stop the recording two or three times during my interview with Ava because she was angry, and a couple of times she cried while she was telling me her story. Also, Ines, cried when she was narrating how her mom and her family laughed at her when she spoke Spanish. Wang et al. (2012) stated that having one's identity denied involves a discrepancy between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others, and he said that this discrepancy may affect the individual who is suffering it. Most importantly, he mentioned that when the individual is self-stereotyping, or perceiving oneself as similar to other Americans, it may explain negative emotions in response to having that definition denied by others (p. 603).

Another interview that touched my heart was with Janine. During the interview, she contradicted herself frequently about her skin color. However, I could see in her eyes she had the sadness and frustration of not being White, not because she wanted to be White, but because it was the color of her friends. Cheryan et al. (2005) said that "individuals from any racial group who are seen as less prototypically American than Whites because of their appearance have to contend with exclusion from the American in-group" (p. 717). Sometimes she stated that to be dark was really "cool" but then it was "weird". She said her skin color was caramel [which I understand as brown], but then she said she check-marked 'White'. There is clearly an internal contradiction about her skin color, which makes her have this identity conflict.

Summary

In the final analysis, this study shows the experiences of Latina students during their first year of attendance at a four-year university. This chapter contained a presentation of the eight participants' counter-stories and these stories were analyzed to find common themes. The analysis was performed through the lens of the triple theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino/a Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit), and Community Cultural Wealth

(CCW). Through the analysis of the eight stories, the three main questions of this study were answered.

In general, cultural influences play an important role in these Latina's experiences in college. The participants determined that *connections* with other Latin@ students and groups during their first year were very significant. Sharing with Latin@ students on campus gave them a sense of family and belonging. Moreover, another cultural influence identified was the *language*. Although only four participants indicated they were proud of being bilingual, two other participants are working to become bilingual because they felt it was a skill that would benefit their education. The remaining two participants said they were afraid to speak Spanish because they could be discriminated against both on and off campus.

Participants expressed that one important cultural value they had was *la Familia*. This concept of *familia* was the engine that made them determined to overcome any obstacle in college. These cultural influences had a positive effect on these participants' first year of study in this university.

Family support seemed to be the main influence leading participants to be in college. All participants stated that education was very important for their family. *La familia* is the main motivation that this group of young ladies had to reach their goal and graduate from college, and be the first person in their family with a degree. Parents of these girls became their role models and a great inspiration for their daughters to continue their education. According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital is the aptitude that Latin@ families have to preserve hopes and dreams, even if they are facing struggles.

However, the *financial situation* was seen as the main obstacle for participants in this study. Lack of orientation to navigate scholarships and other financial aid to pay for college was

the major struggle lived by the participants. Despite that, becoming the first person in their family to get a college degree was something that filled them with happiness. It was also an added stressor, especially in their first year.

Finally, all participants showed some discomfort about the *microaggression*, *discrimination*, *racism or ignorance* received during their first year in college by friends, teachers or staff in general at this university. According to Lopez (2003), “Race and racism are present and prevalent in education and in the research and practice of education” (p. 83). The social and the academic oppression they must face and the double standards that they must create to survive in the educational community have prejudiced them and left negative psychological consequences in some of the participants. Delgado et al. (2002) stated that “CRT and LatCrit theorists acknowledge that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and their potential to emancipate and empower” (p.109). This was most visibly manifested by the denial of participants own cultural identity feeling ashamed of the color of their skin and in some cases refusing to speak the Spanish language for fear of being rejected. *Identity denial* has been a way of protection against the oppression and discrimination, especially when they have had to navigate between two cultures within society. *Identity denial* was an internal battle that many participants have experienced during their first year in college.

Moreover, many of the participants have had to negotiate this double standard in order to not feel the social oppression that exists within the education system. According to Delgado CRT and LatCrit provide significance to the creation of culturally and linguistically relevant ways of knowing and understanding and to the importance of rethinking the traditional notion of what counts as knowledge (p. 109).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a general summary of what was learned from chapter one through four of this study. It will then offer a discussion of the findings, and then include possible topics or contributions for further study.

General Summary

Latin@ is a minoritized group in the United States that should be studied more in the academy. This is a rapidly growing group in this country, but it has low participation in higher education. Santos Jr. and Cuamea (2010) stated that the Latin@ population is the largest minority group in the United States according to the last census 2010. Latin@ population growth has increased dramatically over the last two decades; yet this group, and particularly Latinas, do not have proportional representation in higher education. Espinoza (2010) affirmed, “The Latina population in the United States remains severely underrepresented in higher education at every level” (p. 318).

Previous research about Latin@s in higher education shows some of the barriers and struggles facing Latin@s in academia. For example, Zell (2012) found: poor guidance in high school to apply for financial aid, difficulty on standardized testing for admissions in universities, low income, and parents having limited knowledge about the education system may all be reasons for low numbers of Latinas in higher education (p. 168). Also, racism and discrimination have been found to be another key factor influencing the lack of Latin@ students in college, as indicated by Lopez (2003), “Race and racism are present and prevalent in education and in the research and practice of education” (p. 83). Seeing this group, with accelerating population growth and a low number of students in higher education, it is vital to study the underlying reasons causing this lack of Latin@ representation in higher education.

The first year in college is a time of adjustment and transformation for any student, and especially for Latinas. It is the main transition from high school to college, not to mention the other facts related to this group of students. Rendon (2005) said:

Transforming the first-year experience requires moving beyond "simply offering services" to "include a social justice agenda that challenges existing structures and those they privilege, favoring democratic structural changes where power and privilege are shared among different constituencies. (p. 481)

Another major demand and obstacle is financial. Castellanos and Jones (2003) said, "Latina/o students in their first year in college tend to experience greater levels of stress associated with financial concerns than White students" (p. 5). Many Latina students in college are first generation and come from low-income families, which can create even more stress and financial burden during their first year. These facts might determine whether a student is in danger of leaving school before completing their degree.

Therefore, this study focused on investigating the first-year experiences of Latina students in a four-year public institution in a western state. The central research question for this study was narrowed down by examining these three research questions:

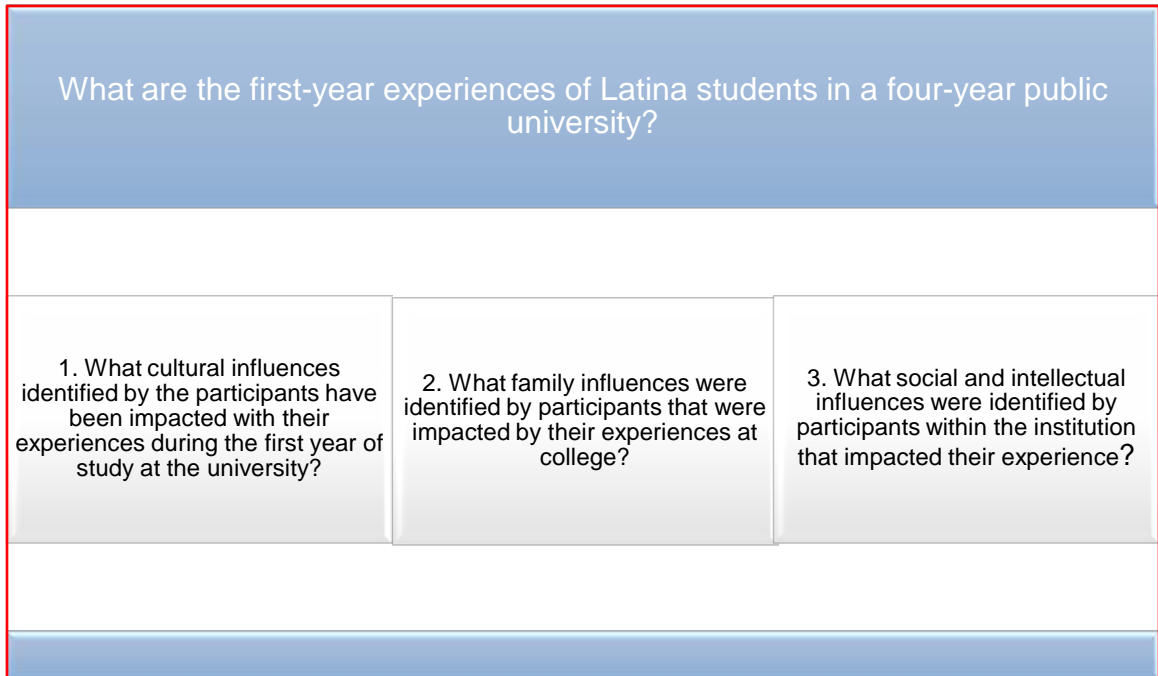


Figure 4. Research questions in this study. This figure illustrates the central question in this study and the three research questions.

Chapter two established the literature review taken into consideration for this study, and examined the following topics. First, a depth of information related to Latin@ Culture on norms, values, family expectations such as family relationships, and gender differences was reviewed. The second section in this chapter included literature related to barriers to participation in higher education, giving emphasis to: (1) classism and racism and other oppressions as a stressful factor influencing Latina education, (2) lack of role models, (3) peer influences, (4) academic preparation, (5) first-generation, (6) identity denial and internalized racism, and (7) lack of sensitivity and understanding from White educators. The third section of the chapter was related to factors influencing retention and factors related to degree completion.

This study established a triple theoretical framing through Latino/a Critical Theory (LatCrit), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). The most important principals and forms for each one of these theories are given in Figure 5.

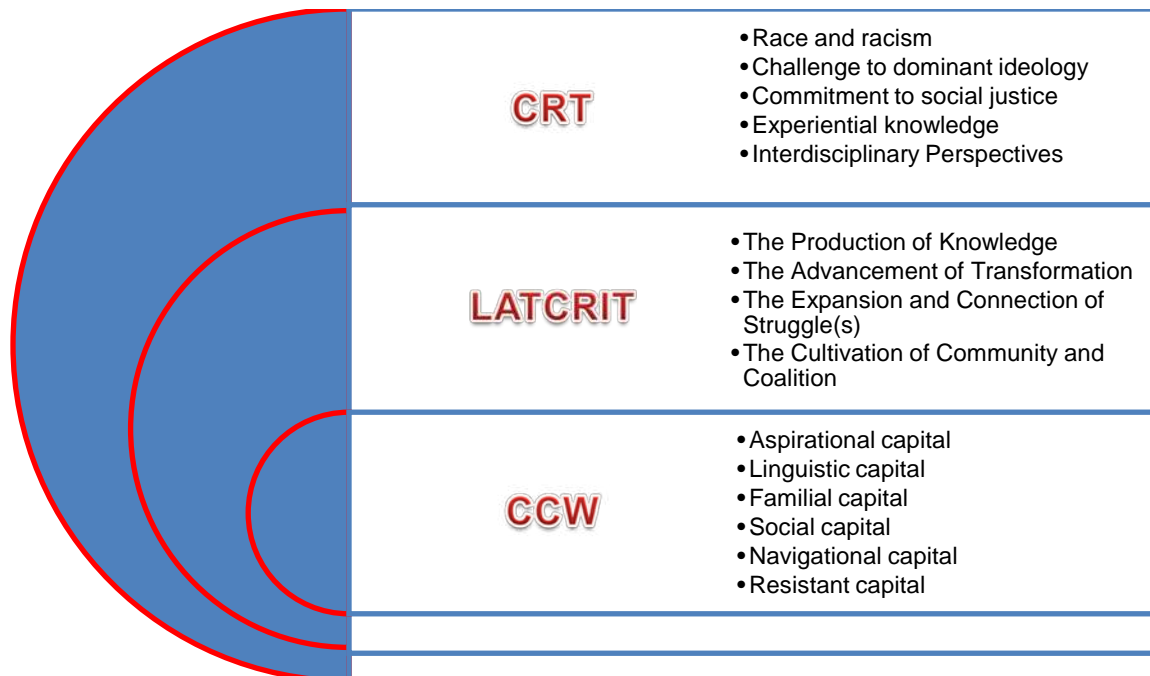


Figure 5: Definitions of CRT, LatCRIT, and CCW. This figure defines the three main theories used in this study.

Critical Race Theory is related to race, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and feminism for the purpose of giving equality to all minority groups, especially in the area of education. “Yosso et al.(2001) said “CRT challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 2). The model of CRT in education is composed of five central values: (1) race and racism and their interrelations with other sub-ordination in education. (2) Challenge to dominant ideology, CRT reveals how the dominant ideology of color blindness and race neutrality act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society. (3) Commitment to social justice in education, CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination. (4) Experiential knowledge is important, this principle challenges and exposes students of color having been viewed by majoritarian

populations in institutions as having a deficit in formal learning environments. (5)

Interdisciplinary perspectives utilizes the interdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the different forms of discrimination (Perez-Huber, 2011, p. 381; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 275).

Latino/a Critical Theory is concentrated on the Latin@ community as well as on barriers of language, immigration, sexuality, and sexism and specific elements impacting socio-cultural advancement, anti-subordination, and community cultivation. LatCrit has four principal ideologies: (1) the production of knowledge, the production of ideas to better understand Latin@'s culture to give an improvement in the social and legal aspects; (2) the advancement of transformation, which is the creation of material social change that improves the lives of Latin@ and other subordinated groups; (3) the expansion and connection of struggle(s) constitutes itself as a struggle on behalf of diverse Latin@, but also toward a material transformation that fosters social justice for all. And lastly, (4) the cultivation of community and coalition, including actively nurturing a community of scholars who share a similar approach to legal theory, share a similar commitment to collaboration and who are willing to analyze explicitly the Latin@ situation within that larger state of affairs (Valdes, 1997, p. 7).

Community Cultural Wealth highlights the benefits and all the cultural wealth of minority students, and how this cultural wealth has been a predominant factor in the education of students of color. Yosso (2005) established the idea of cultural wealth, defining six forms of capital that exist within communities of color, and she calls these six forms "community cultural wealth": (1) *Aspirational capital*: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real and perceived barriers. (2) *Linguistic capital*: skills learned through language such as,

“memorization, dramatic pauses, rhythm, and rhyme” (p. 78). Students of color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills; Linguistic capital also refers to the ability to communicate via visual art, music or poetry. (3) *Familial capital*: the forms of knowledge “nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 79). From these kinship ties, the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to community is learned and its resources. (4) *Social capital*: the “networks of people and community resources” (p. 79) that can help students navigate through social institutions. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions. (5) *Navigational capital*: a form of capital inclusive of social networks and the resiliency students develop to persist through institutional barriers. (6) *Resistant capital*: knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality grounded in a history of resistance to subordination by communities of color, guided by a motivation to transform oppressive institutions and structures (p. 80-81).

The use of these triple theoretical and analytical frameworks were centered mainly on the dominant discourse of race and racism, and how this is related to the experiences of Latina students during their first year in this institution.

The methodology of this study was introduced in chapter three. The methodology for this study was counter-storytelling, by giving voice to the personal experiences of eight Latinas in their first year of a four-year public university. Counter-storytelling emphasizes aspects of the world that have been silenced and provide “competing perception of social life” (Espinoza et al., 2012). Counter-Narrative stories are classified in three types:

- Personal stories or narratives
- Other people’s stories or narratives

- Composite stories or narratives. (Solorzano et al., 2002)

Purposeful sampling was used because specific participants were sought. According to Merriam (2002), “A purpose sample is a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 12). The participants were eight Latina/Chicana students in their first year at a four-year public university. All of them attended the same university. Males were not included in this study because it was focused on the intersection of a woman's identity as it relates to her gender, race, social class, language, etc. Gender group experiences were not intended to be compared, so male experiences were not considered relevant in this study.

The research questions were answered by combining the methodology with the triple framework (CRT, LatCrit, and CCW) to analyze the experiences of Latina students during their first year in a four-year university. Data was collected in three stages: (1) interviews, (2) questionnaires, and (3) letters-to-self. During the interviews, open-ended questions related to Latina student experiences were asked to create a conversation. Open-ended questions give participants the best voice to express their experiences (Creswell, 2008, p. 225). Participants said during the interviews they felt comfortable answering the questions to me because I am Latina, and I was able to understand their points and many cultural aspects. The interviews were professionally transcribed by a transcription service.

The questions were associated to prior research findings about Latinas in higher education, such as: experiences with teachers, peers, and administrative personnel, guidance received regarding college (school/family), and family support. The following stage was the questionnaires given to the participants during the meeting. The next stage of data collection included a participant-written letter to self with a starter phrase such as: “Dear _____, now that I have been through my first semester of college, I want you to know....” This self-

letter was only signed with a pseudonym previously chosen by participants during the interview. Creswell (2012) stated that, “Researchers need to protect the anonymity of the participants, by assigning numbers or aliases in the process of analyzing and reporting data” (p. 248).

For the development and analysis of the data, interviews and letters-to-self were codified separately. A second round of coding was conducted on the interviews with the most repetitive themes, and the combination of the second coding plus coding the letter-to-self gave the final encoding. The research questions were answered from the resulting themes developed after encoding the interviews and letters-to-self. Trustworthiness was established through peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation.

Chapter four presented the eight counter-stories of the participants. This chapter mainly focused on the findings and data analysis of the experiences of these Latinas during their first year in a four-year university in a western state. The interviews were coded and themes were developed according to strict criteria to answer each of the research questions in accordance to the triple theoretical framework presented above.

Findings in this study were divided into sub-categories to answer the sub-questions of this study. Findings are summarized in Figure 6below.

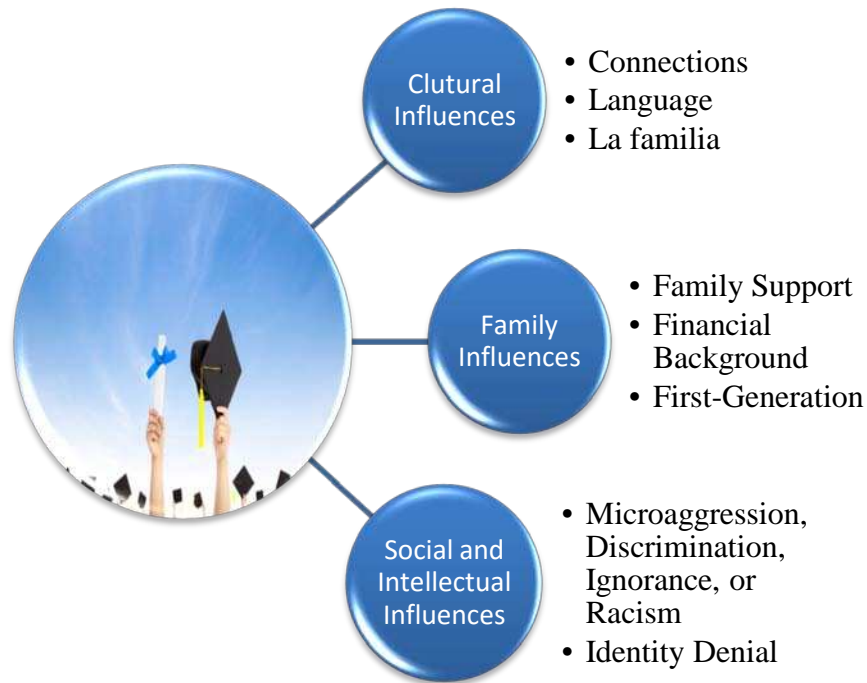


Figure 6. Main themes found in study.

The eight participants indicated many similarities through their counter-stories. They were very thankful for their families' support. Likewise, many participants said they were living the experience of *familismo* with other Latin@ students in this university and showed pride for their culture. Additionally, a group of participants complained of the lack of information that exists in high schools for minoritized groups regarding financial aid and preparation for higher education. However, the other group of participants also suggest that counselors were helpful and there were resources available, but the task was still daunting.

The themes that were found indicate that Latinas have a deep desire to complete their degree and their families are willing to support them with their education; but they face obstacles, especially financial need, that prevent them from fully focusing on their academic progress.

A major negative experience faced by the eight students was discrimination, microaggressions and oppression in the academic setting, and also by their friends. The

oppression that exists in this environment may make these young ladies experience feelings of lacking any value or appreciating who they really are. Above all, they feel they have to hide their own roots to survive in this society; they have to use a double identity. According to Lyubansky and Eidelson (2004), “Du Bois placed the origin of ‘double consciousnesses in a repressive White culture, which forced Blacks to see themselves through the eyes of the dominant White society... (Rath, 1997)”(p. 3). Returning to the discourse of Du Bois about double consciousness, but this time talking about Latinos, the participants in this study felt that even if they had been born in this country, they are not seen as Americans, but as Mexican. This social oppression makes them hide their beliefs and culture in order to not suffer the rejection of this society.

In other words, they must navigate “three worlds” in the society. The participants are living three worlds through their racialized, genderized, and classist experiences. According to Roberts (1993) “women of color experience various forms of oppression simultaneously, as a complex interaction of race, gender, and class that is more than the sum of its parts.” As students in the university this oppression has a vast influence in their lives because it gives them a sense of not belonging to any “world”.

Discussion of the Findings

Former research has found different causes for the lack of Latinas in higher education. Those studies focus on: lack of financial resources, cultural value of *familismo*, poor college preparation, difficulty making academic and social adjustments and Latin@ students as a model of deficiency (Castillo et al., 2004; Espinoza et al., 2010; Hernandez, 2000; Oseguera et al., 2009). The purpose of the study was to offer an opportunity to eight Latina students to narrate

their counter-story experiences during their first year in a four-year university. Counter-storytelling gives students of color the opportunity to be the owner and author of knowledge.

Research Question One

What cultural influences impacted participants' experiences during the first year of study at the University? Answer: This study revealed the following themes: *Connection, language, and La familia* and cultural values were the main influence for participants during the first year in this university. These findings matched previous and similar studies. For example, Perez-Huber (2011) related in her study that a participant said that "she was treated different than other children in her class because she was a [native Spanish speaker]" (p.392). Other similar studies related to language and family include Desmond and Lopez (2009), Espinoza, (2010), and Sy (2006).

Participants in this study said that Latin@ culture and their families made a positive difference in their lives during their first year. They expressed how the *connections* with members of the Latin@ community in this university created a sense of *familismo* for all of them. This can be seen as navigational capital in the CCW model, a form of capital that is wide-ranging through social networks that students develop to persist through institutional barriers (Yosso, 2005). To be connected with peers gave the participants positive emotional reinforcement that they were not alone. Past studies have also found that peers facilitate in the academic support of students of color (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, and Bámaca, 2006). Navigational capital has been beneficial for participants to be where they are now because they counted on their parents, brothers, and family members to navigate during their educational process and obtain their higher education.

Meanwhile, six participants saw the Spanish language as an asset in their college experience. While the other two participants saw being bilingual as a way to be discriminated against on campus. The findings of this study related with the two participants who saw being bilingual as a detriment fits with Valencia (2010), sometimes students of color view the White educational system displaying their experience through a lens of deficit thinking theory. Deficit thinking theory has been a model of oppression used to evaluate students of color without a previous study of the cultural, linguistic and social differences that may exist in the student. Participants who were afraid to speak Spanish stated that speaking only English protected them against being seen different than other students and it also discouraged them from having an accent. The assimilation to the White culture may be perceived as the only way for some Latina students to succeed in this society. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), cultural assimilation may take place by learning English at the expense of losing Spanish, as was seen in this study. One of the participants, Janine stated: “What's really great is that English is my native language, because people will look at you differently or they're going to be, ‘Mmn, they don't know what they're saying’.” Another participant Ava said: “My first language when I was little was Spanish, but now it's English. I'm thankful for just accelerating more and more and becoming more advanced with my English. Just being that I know that, (sighs) when you don't know how to speak English people take advantage of you.” However, it should be noted that this study found a contradiction between the participants. There were two participants who were against speaking Spanish, while six participants said that having two languages was a great advantage for them.

Last, the findings indicated that *La familia* as a cultural value was the most important concept that facilitated participants to have a healthier experience during their first year in

college. The findings in this study regarding *La familia* as a cultural value and good influence for Latina students are totally different than the findings in the study done by Sy and Romero (2008), where they stated that “Family tradition is one reason why Latinas do not enroll in college. The underlying expectation that Latina youth will leave the family home only when they are ready to get married and care for their own children” (p. 215). In this current study, participants expressed their most deep gratitude to their families and indicated that the most important thing for their families was their education. According to Yosso (2005), CCW aspirational capital is the ability of Latin@ families to maintain hopes and dreams for their children’s future despite real and perceived barriers. Aspirational capital allows parents and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances. In addition, most participants expressed that their main motivation was to get their college degree because of their families, as a way to thank their families for all their cultural values that have been the driving force for them to go ahead with their education.

Research Question Two

What family influences impacted their experiences at college? Answer: *Family support, financial situation, and first generation* were the main findings in this section. According to Sy and Romero (2008), “Latinas are underrepresented in higher education because many of the Latinas’ parents do not have college experience, and Latinas who do enroll in four-year programs are more at risk of experiencing conflict between the expectations of their home and school” (2015). However, this study found that Latinas’ parents—even though many of them do not have formal education or the ability to help their daughters to apply to college and all the paperwork that it represents—did everything possible to support their daughters in this process to go to college. Some quotes that best exemplify this section are repeated here:

Diana: My mom drove me to the interviews for the scholarship. She did all of that stuff, because my mom wanted to help me.

Viviana: My mom was a big help with my process to apply to scholarships. She was with me even though she did not understand what I was doing.

Ava: My stepmom would always send me email links to certain scholarships that I should look into and maybe apply to.

Breanna: My mom and grandparents always were encouraging me to keep going and keep applying even if I didn't get something and they were always supporting me. They just have my back the whole time.

Gloria: I knew that even if I couldn't get like the financial aid, my parents were going to do everything they could to have the money saved up so that I could go to college. They were either going to start working like two or three jobs.

Latinas' parents became a role model and an inspiration for their daughters to pursue their college goals. This seems to contrast with Rendon's (2002) experience when telling her mother about her decision to enter higher education, when her mother said that she was crazy and college was for the rich and elite. In this study, participants said that their parents were very proud that their daughter wanted to attend college, and their family's support reinforced their commitment to pursue their college degree. This matches Espinoza (2010), who said that Latina/o students who place high value in family make better grades in school because their good connection to family helped them focus on their academics. Even though many parents do not have the money or know how to support their daughters' education or navigate the educational system, they keep the dream, aspiration, and the hope of seeing their daughter's graduate with a bachelor's degree.

Six of the participants in this study were first generation students. Moreover, participants affirmed that being the first generation in college made them more motivated to get a degree, especially because they wanted their parents and family to be proud of them. In previous research about first-generation students, Kurotsuchi et al. (2007) stated that first-generation

students are more probable to come from a lower-income family, to be from racial/ethnic minoritized backgrounds, to be women, and have lower degree aspirations. In this study, findings indicated that these first-generation participants did come from a low-income family, were women, and did come from a minoritized group. However, all the participants in this study demonstrated through their stories to have a high level of motivation to continue their education.

Here is what they expressed:

Ava: I'm going to stay in school because I know that if I don't, I'm going to later regret it.

Brenna: I want to be able to go into the professional workforce as ready as possibly because I don't want to end up working in a grocery store all my life like my mom.

Gloria: I want to go to medical school. My dad has been my biggest motivation, he's given me everything, but then at the same time his health has deteriorated a lot. So, I want to give back to him and other parents and the people in our community that are really struggling with health issues by being becoming a doctor and being able to go back to my community and help my community.

Laura: my main goal is to go to medical school and become a doctor.

According to Zalaquett (2005), many educators in P-12 and higher education maintain the belief that Latin@s families are not interested in the education of their children, and Latino students do not have the ability to succeed in higher education. The findings in this study indicate the opposite; all the participants' families supported their daughters to continue with their education and they were highly invested by valuing, emotionally supporting, and providing motivational aspiration in their daughter's education. Gloria, one of the participants, affirmed that her parents always said, "Keep trying don't give up. It doesn't matter if you barely make it through the end, as long as you make it." Similarly, Laura, another participant, said, "My parents always remind of me of that, people are watching to see if you're like moving forward and if you're where your priorities are set, it gives me a lot of motivation." Despite their family support

and the skills to succeed in higher education, the largest barrier that may prevent them from completing their goal and completing their degree is their financial situation. The findings indicated that seven of the participants faced financial struggles because their parents cannot afford the cost. According to Castillo and Hill (2004), low socioeconomic status is an important cause that may contribute to the possible suffering that Chicanas and Latinas experience in college. However, in accordance with the findings in this study, participants showed the interest to continue with their education, they had their families' support in many ways, they have the skills to succeed in higher education, but they do not have the money to pay for their education.

This is a problem for not only this group of students, but also many students who struggle under the crippling weight of educational costs. According to Engberg and Allen (2011), "For low-income students, however, acquiring the knowledge and understanding of the financial aid process can be a daunting process, creating a formidable barrier to postsecondary enrollment" (p. 788). The lack of good and efficient financial educational politics is affecting students from low income and the educational system as a whole. Brown, Santiago and Lopez (2003) affirmed that many Latino families do not know the actual cost of a college education or the sources of financial aid. Similarly, about increasing college tuition and student-aid programs that do not keep pace with rising prices reinforces the impression that a college education is beyond their financial grasp (p.42). Supporting this group of students is needed not only for the educational system, but for the larger society and country as well. Today Latin@ are the largest minority group in this country and must be educated if an educated total populace is desired in the future.

It is also imperative to look at the larger systemic reasons for why their families are still living under the poverty line. Gorski (2012) stated that the belief that poor people are poor only because they have insufficiency is not seeing the sociopolitical realities associated to poverty and

class in this country, as well as the unfair access to education and the shortage of living wage jobs for many families, especially from minoritized groups. Generally speaking, the findings in this study confirmed the urgent need for students of color to have financial support, but for this to happen the educational system must implement economic programs to address this crisis in order to have an equal education system for all students with financial aid. Covarrubias and Lara (2014) expressed that LatCrit evolved as a branch of CRT, a movement focused on transforming inequitable relationships grounded in race, racism and power; it emphasizes issues particularly affecting the Latina/o population” (p.79). In addition, Solórzano et al. (2005) affirmed that CRT in education explores the ways in which “race-neutral” laws and institutional structures, practices, and policies perpetuate racial/ethnic educational inequality (p.274).

Research Question Three

What social and intellectual influences within the institution impacted their experience?

Answer: The participants provided an array of answers to this question by identifying experiences they had as it related to: microaggression, discrimination, racism and/or ignorance, and identity denial as main social and intellectual influences in their first year of experience at the university.

The findings in this study fit with the literature reviewed about identity denial because many Latina students were born or came in this country at an early age to live in the USA, but they are not perceived by the majoritarian populations as full citizens of this country. They receive a permanent message of not belonging to this country, which has created a certain identity denial in the participants. Identity denial is, according to Wang et al. (2012) and Huynh (2013), a form of miscategorization of the individual because she/he does not match up with the feature of the predominant White group, and they are labeled as a perpetual foreigner.

Participants said they received questions like: Where are you from? Which, Cheryan et al. (2005) said that such questions like “where are you really from?” and/or “Do you speak English?” is a clear reminder of identity denial. Having this kind of identity denial, participants are basically living a social incongruity, because they think as an American and they are Americans, but they are seen as foreigners in their own country. According to Wang et al. (2012), “People having one’s identity denied comprise a discrepancy between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others” (p. 601). Below, is a perfect example from the study that exemplifies the participants’ deculturalization and loss of identity, Diana said:

I identify myself as a Chicana because I don't feel like I fit into an American, nor do I feel like I fit into Mexican or Nicaraguan just because I'm not from either place. I'm from both places and a lot of times I feel like I really wanted to be open to the Mexican community, but when I went to Mexico once, I was told, "Oh, you're not from here," I wasn't welcomed and from that I grew really angry and just kind of pissed off because "I tried."

Moreover, these kinds of messages, or passive attacks, that were frequently received by this group of young ladies during their first year in college are well known as *Microinvalidations* that, according to Hernandez et al. (2010), is the act to exclude, deny, or make invisible to a person because of her/his skin color or ethnicity, heritage, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. As a consequence of this microinvalidation, some participants have had a negative social and academic experience during their first year in college, such as self-degradation and self-denial. In accordance with Bryant (2011), identity denial is an experience that integrates shame of minority identity and own culture.

The first element in the model of CRT is *the centrality of race and racism*, which can help us to understand how the procedures and structures among the educational system are inserted and how this controls the daily practices into the educational institutions in this country. According to Solórzano et al. (2005), “In American higher education race and racism are central

constructs but also intersect with other components of one's identity, such as language, generation status, gender, sexuality, and class" (p.274). On the other hand, LatCrit also challenges the dominant notions of colorblindness and defines how these forms place students of color in a disadvantaged position in the educational system.

Delgado (2002) stated, "LatCrit is a theory that has a tradition of offering a strong gender analysis so that it "can address the concerns of Latinas in light of both our internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized us" (p. 108). Delgado also established that these two theories CRT and LatCrit "in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p.109).

Many participants expressed their disdain, discomfort, and distress in receiving microaggressions during their first year at college. Hernandez et al. (2010) affirmed that these racial experiences have an impact within academic and social spaces in college, affecting not just the academic performance, but also the social interactions of the students of color. Moreover, CRT recognizes that in higher education in the U.S., race and racism exists in the constitution, practices, and discourses that control procedures of universities. However, previous research about microaggression stated that this is a subtle form of oppression and racism into the educational system, such that many students cannot perceive the magnitude of the meanings when they face microaggressions.

This difficulty in perceiving this oppression and racism was exemplified by two participants who said that there was not racism on campus, but it was more ignorance. Hernandez et al. (2010) affirmed that racial microaggressions could be seen as a relatively subtle

demonstration of prejudice or it may be considered to be poorly defined and unclear. This is why Solorzano (2000) stated that many students of color must be taught to distinguish microaggressions in academic and social spaces and take the right action at each occasion of detection.

Findings indicated the struggles lived by the participants and the negative influences these microaggressions have marked in their academic and social experience in their first year within their university. Examples include the avoidance of using Spanish for fear of having an accent when speaking English, or to want to have a white-complexioned skin color. It seems that the oppression that these eight students have lived has affected their social and academic experience.

Significance: Implications for Action

This study was conducted under the triple theoretical framework through Latino/a Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth. The use of the triple theoretical and analytical frameworks were centered mainly on evaluating how the dominant discourse of race and racism are specific discriminations affecting participants in areas such as: language, classism, gender, and culture. On the other hand, cultural wealth is seen as an asset related to the experiences of Latina students in this institution. According to Aragon (2013), CRT, LatCRT and CCW are used to interpret Latina student reflections and perceptions about parental inspiration, guidance, and learning to pursue academic achievement and higher education (p.8).

Despite the Latin@ population rapidly growing in this country, it is no secret that Latin@s are underrepresented in higher education. According to Oseguera et al. (2009), Latinas/os are the least likely racial and ethnic group to complete bachelor's degrees. Based on

previous research, there have been many and diverse reasons for Latin@s not to complete higher education. As Padilla stated (1997), barriers and difficulties experienced by Latinas can be condensed in their higher education experiences, such as: language and cultural issues, poverty, immigrant status, prejudice and discrimination, assimilations modes of thinking, lack of political empowerment, and deficit thinking about Latina students. For example, historically, Latin@s have been viewed through a deficit thinking theory lens in educational institutions. Nieto and Bode (2012) summed up deficit thinking like this:

Deficit theories assume that some children, because of genetic, cultural, or experiential differences, are inferior to other children—that is, that they have deficits that must be overcome if they are to learn. There are many obvious problems with such hypotheses, one being that they place complete responsibility for children's failure on their homes and families, effectively absolving schools and society from responsibility. Whether the focus is on the individual or the community, the result remains largely the same: blaming the victims of poor schooling rather than looking in a more systematic way at the role played by the schools in which they learn (or fail to learn) and by the society at large. (p. 16)

This view has created more social oppression for many Latin@ students. Rather, the low-income that many Latin@ families face could be the biggest factor for this low number of Latinos in higher education. Taking into account that Latin@ are seen with the theory of deficit thinking, it is the same as blaming Latin@ students for not having a diploma from higher education, or not having the money to afford the cost of their education, and blame them for being who they are and where they are from. Valencia (2010), defined deficit thinking as a model of oppression that White educators and the educational system uses to evaluate students of color without any study of the cultural, linguistic and social differences that may exist in the student.

The findings in this study demonstrated that Latina students and their families give high value to education and their stories counter the deficit-thinking theory that has existed for years in this educational system. The cultural wealth that these young ladies bring to college empowers

Latin@ families and creates a new way to not only see Latina students and their families, but it is also a new way for many educators to understand the cultural, linguistic, aspirational, and familial wealth these students bring to the educational system as an asset and not as a deficit.

Another important implication of the findings in this study is that the educational system must cease the economic repression against Latinas and disseminate effective financial programs to help Latinas, and anyone else who can't afford educational costs, to complete their higher education.

The suggested recommendations would help for a better future for Latinas in a four-year college. These include: universities must hire more Latin@ professors and administrative personnel to work on campuses. In this way many Latin@ students will see more role models which they can follow and identify and connect to. This would give students a feeling inclusion and not isolation.

Financial aid should be increased in the amounts of grants and scholarships available for Latin@ students to stay and complete their higher education programs at a faster rate. Financial aid programs may specifically support Latin@ students in need. It needs to hire more bilingual financial aid advisers. Bilingual financial aid advisers should be in contact not only with the student but also with their parents. In other words, the main purpose should be to involve the family and the student in this process and give a voice to many parents who do not speak English. Seven of the participants in this study affirmed to have financial need.

The majority of Latin@ students enrolled in higher education are first generation. Universities should offer orientation programs for Latin@ families and students to provide important information about the expectations that college has for its students to succeed. What changes the students are going to experience during his/her time in college, benefit to gain a

college degree, etc. These programs must be in Spanish at the beginning of the Latin@ students' orientation into their degree program; this would be an inclusive practice for the students' family and orient everyone into the college experience. Additional intermittent meetings for the family may be provided as the Latin@ students enter their second, third, and fourth years of higher education. Such communication would assist in the retention of these students. Perhaps such programming may be administered from the university cultural centers, so that students are well acquainted with such services from the very first day they enter their higher education programs.

Mandatory classes or workshops are also suggested for all faculties and administrative personnel, where they would learn basic concepts such as: microaggression, microinvalidation, microinsults as it relates to students of color, particularly the Latin@ community. Learning the respectful ways to correctly state Spanish names is one way to avoid microaggressions. It seems that sometimes professors or administrative personnel believe that everyone in the Latin@ culture is named "Maria or Juan". Diana stated:

One of my professors called me Maria because my name was too hard to say. Names are so important, of course, if you can't say my name I'm not going to make a huge deal because you're trying. I just dropped his class because that was disrespectful, and he would make fun of everyone's name

In addition, these classes or workshops must be oriented to teach an inclusion culture, where Latin@ students' community cultural wealth, skills, talents, and culture are respected and encouraged. Yosso (2005) affirmed, "These experiences expose the racism underlying cultural deficit theorizing and reveal the need to restructure U.S. social institutions around those knowledge, skills, abilities and networks—the community cultural wealth—possessed and utilized by People of Color" (p. 82). Additionally, workshops could be conducted where faculty and administrative personnel learn about white supremacy and white privilege, in this manner they would be able to see not only the benefits and privileges of being White, but how racism is a

grave problem that remains in our society. One of the main problems of White supremacy is the lack of knowledge many White people have about the differences that the racial populaces face in this country.

If universities want to increase Latin@ enrollment, retention, and the successful number of graduates, then the above suggestions would be very beneficial to any higher education institution, Latin@ student and their families.

Finally, this study has an important contribution to the literature because it not only has demonstrated once again the social injustices that this group continues to live in this country and how racism continues to have deep roots within our educational system, but also because it is a fact that Latin@s as a larger minority group in this country needs to be educated. This study supports previous studies where discrimination, oppression, and lack of economic resources prevail in the lives of Latin@ students (Castillo& Hill, 2004; Cavazos, Johnson, & Scott,2010; Pappamihel & Moreno, 2011; Perez Huber, 2009, 2011). This study also supports the cultural value that brings these students to the universities and refutes the prevailing assumption that Latin@ families discourage retention, when this study demonstrates the opposite(Aragon, 2014; Yosso, 2005).

Taking full awareness of the importance to educate this group will result in a country with better-trained and prepared professionals, which will help to development a better social, political and economic society. It is vital to learn everything possible about this group and take action for Latin@ students and seek measures to eradicate oppression and discrimination in our classrooms, communities, and higher education institutions. It must be the ideal for the higher education system to ensure that these students have an education free of discrimination, oppression and exclusion.

Researcher Implications

In my experience working with this group of eight Latinas, I have corroborated the importance of education for the Latin@ community. Most important, without parents' support, these young women would not be where they are professionally. Parents of these participants are looking for a better life for their daughters without social and cultural prejudices, stereotypes, discrimination and racism, which perhaps many of them did not get to experience in their own lives.

As a Latina and educator in this country, I felt immense joy after completing this study, seeing how these young ladies and their families have fought to get ahead and overcome the barriers that the social and educational system places in their professional paths. I am glad to see how the cultural wealth of this group has helped them overcome any adversity. However, as an educator, I know there are many positive experiences in the education field, but I am also concerned that our education system is still working with people who knowingly or unknowingly, overtly or covertly, oppress and discriminate based on their attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and values.

On the other hand, I also learned through this study that the Latina participants persevere through a "*si se puede*" (*yes we can*) disposition and this fact was demonstrated by each of their counter stories. All of them have lived struggles, but they also have kept indomitable spirits of arriving at the university with many impediments, yet continue to work hard to achieve their goals. I am impressed and inspired by their determined desire to obtain their degrees in spite of their educational racialized obstructions. I learned that all these young ladies and their families have worked very hard to achieve and surpass all the injustices and discriminations that were

observed along their paths. All of them are clear examples of the love they have for education. They also emanate the value that the Latin@ family has for the education of their children.

Possible Contributions of this Study

The results of this study may serve as a guide for young Latinas who have participated in this study, and it can serve a possible guide for educators and administrators of this university. It may also help community colleges and social programs to re-study and re-establish their course of action in supporting minority groups in their first year of college. This study may provide ideas to Universities about how to offer better experiences for minority students, especially those in their freshman year, with the aim of increasing retention. According to Tinto (1975), “The failure to define dropout adequately can have significant impact upon questions of policy in higher education. From the institutional perspective, administrators may be unable to identify target populations requiring specific forms of assistance” (p. 90). It is very important for agencies to know the reality that some citizens are living, and thus make the appropriate corrective action to remedy this situation that is ultimately a problem for the entire country.

This study also hopes to inform people who do not know about Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), so that instead of seeing the Latin@ student with the theory of deficit thinking, the student is seen through this new CCW theory(Aragon, 2014; Perez-Huber, 2011; Valencia 2010; Yosso, 2005).It is hoped Latin@ student’s testimony and cultural wealth is valued within educational institutions. If the educational system does not change its negative perspective and lack of support for Latin@ students in a four-year institution of higher education, this group will have less opportunity for a solid education that may provide opportunities to grow and show the value, respect, and wealth that they can add to this society. Such levels of education not only have the potential to increase Latin@ earning, but there is opportunity for greater cultural and

social understanding at the college level. While key points need to be addressed at the university level, it is also helpful to take a look at the community cultural wealth and what it can do to support a change in the current paradigm.

Potential Topics for Further Study

Further studies could have broader representation of participants. For example, perhaps nine Latina students: three of them with Cuban or the Caribbean heritage, three with Central American heritage, and three with Mexican heritage. The main focus of this future study must be to make comparisons of the economic and cultural situations of these three groups divided geographically. Additionally, studies could also analyze how the financial aid system is effectively helping, or not, the Latin@ population to maintain their goal of completing a higher education degree. In addition, it will be very important if there is a study that only focuses on financial resources to help Latina students from when they are in high school until they reach higher education. One of the main findings in this study was the lack of economic resources that participants experience trying to complete their higher education. This is why it is highly recommended that futures studies investigate more about financial resources available for Latinas in this country.

These studies would be very important for the literature of Latinas because it could, for example, show if the three groups of Latinas geographically divided face the same struggles or have more benefit than others. Whatever the case may be, it would-be beneficial to evaluate and suggest improvements for the other groups. Investigating financial aid programs to help Latinas would be a great contribution to this group of students to complete their higher education degree.

Both studies should take into account that, although there is possible oppression and marginalization against this group of students because of their low income, culture or origin, the

cultural wealth and families of these students must be valued and respected within the education of this country.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Individual Interviews Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: The experiences of Latina students during their first year of attendance at a four-year university

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Antonette Aragon, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Education;
antonette.aragon@colostate.edu; 970-491-5208

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Nereida Perdigon, Doctoral candidate; School of Education; nereida.perdigon@colostate.edu;
319-400-5251

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You have been invited to this study because you are a Latin-American woman and/or Chicana, are at least 18-years-old, and you are a student in your first year at the university.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

This research is done by Nereida Perdigon for her PhD program. The faculty who will oversee the work of Nereida is composed of: Dr. Antonette Aragon, advisor; Dr. Suzanne Kent; Dr. Gene Gloeckner; and Dr. Sharon Anderson.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The main purpose of this study is to identify the experiences of Latina students during their first year of attendance at a four-year university.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

This interview is going to take place in a public place that is convenient for you (e.g., a coffee shop, or the library). You will participate in an interview (60 minutes); follow-up discussion to confirm any questions we may have regarding your comments (20 minutes), and will complete a short writing task at home (60 minutes) that you will return to the researcher in a pre-stamped envelope that will be provided to you. Your total time commitment will be 2 hours and 20 minutes.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview where you will talk about your life, family and experiences in your university. It will be a free conversation between us; there are no rights or wrong answers. I will ask questions regarding your life, culture and education experiences. You do not have to answer any question that you would not like to answer. After the interview, we will meet a second time so that I can clarify and confirm your comments from the interview. With your permission, the interview will be digitally audio recorded and stored on a thumb drive. You will also be asked to write a brief letter to yourself describing your experiences as a freshman Latina (regarding the topics we discussed in the first interview). You will write this letter on your own time and you will be provided with a pre-stamped envelope so you can send it to the co-principal investigator. To maintain your confidential identity, I will ask that you decide upon the use of a pseudonym that only you and I will know instead of your real name. The pseudonym will be used within the study without ever identifying your accurate name for confidentiality.

IS THERE ANY REASON WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You should only participate in this research if you self-identify as Latina/Chicana, are a first-year CSU student, and are at least 18-years-old.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential or unknown risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There may be no direct benefit to you associated with your participation in this research. This study may help to find possible alternatives for Latinas to achieve an education. Knowing the possible causes will be easier to support this group of women to reach their professional career, which will provide a better life in the future, not only for themselves, but also for their family and society in general.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to take part in this study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty. Taking part in the study is your choice. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question if you are not comfortable answering.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We will use pseudonyms in our reports. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep

your name and other identifying information private. Only the main researcher (Dr. Antonette Aragon) and co-researcher (Nereida Perdigon) will know the participant's names, other members of the research team will not know the participant names. We may be asked to share the research files with the CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethics committee for auditing purposes.

WILL I RECEIVE COMPENSATION?

You will receive a \$10 gift card as a thank you for your participation. Your identity/record of receiving compensation (NOT your data) may be made available to CSU officials for financial audits.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the co-investigator, Nereida Perdigon, at (319) 400-5251 or by email. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact *the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu*; at 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Audio Taping

The researchers would like to digitally audio record your participation in the interview to be sure that your comments can be transcribed accurately. Only the researchers will have access to the audiotapes, and they will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. Do you give your permission for us to digitally audio record the discussion?

I give the researchers permission to digitally audio record my participation in the interview.

YES

NO

Use of Direct Quotes

In addition to your digital audio recorded information, it is common for researchers to utilize direct quotes from interviews, letters, or other collected data from participants. Such quoted information is used for educational purposes, such as manuscripts written for journal articles, presentations at conferences or teaching purposes. If you provide consent for this, we will only use your pseudonyms as an identifier. Please let us know if you would like your comments to remain confidential or attributed to you. Please initial next to your choice below.

- I give permission for comments I have made to be shared using my exact words and to include my (pseudonym). _____ (initials)

- You can use my data for research and publishing, but do NOT associate my (name/position/title) with direct quotes. _____ (initials)

Please initial by each research activity listed below that you are volunteering to participate in.

- Researchers can contact you to participate in an interview ____ (initials)
- I will participate in a follow up interview to confirm accurate information from the first interview (initials)____
- I will write a letter providing information related to this research ____ (initials)

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated above and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER



Latina/Chicana Study

THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA STUDENTS DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR OF
ATTENDANCE AT A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

Who: Latina/Chicana

What: Latina/Chicana study

Where: Colorado State University

When: Spring 2015

Time Commitment: 2.5 hours

\$10 gift card for your participation

If you identify yourself as a Latina or Chicana, are at least 18-years-old, and are attending your first year at CSU, your participation in this research is desired!

You will participate in two interviews and complete a brief letter explaining your experiences. If you're interested in being in this study and want to share your experiences for the purpose of this research, please contact me for more information:

neraida.perdigon@colostate.edu Principal Investigador

Antonette.Aragon@colostate.edu Adviser

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (QUESTIONNAIRE)

Questions to develop the interviews with the participants that are open-ended for responses from participants.

1. Where you were born/where were you raised?
2. Could you please tell me about your family in general; where were they born, how many persons are in your house, how many brothers and sisters do you have?
3. How was your high school experience?
4. What were your goals in high school with regard to higher education? Did you receive assistance with your elementary and secondary education? If so, did you have family members assist, school officials, and what assistance did they provide?
5. How was your process to apply for financial aid such as through grants, scholarships, and funding? What ways did your family encourage, support, and assist you to receive funding? What was done to support you in this endeavor? If your family did not support, assist, or encourage you, than who did?
6. Did you receive guidance to apply for scholarship or financial aid? How was this experience? How did you navigate this process? Who did you seek assistance from? How did your family encourage, guide, or provide support in this process?
5. How has your social experience on campus been during your first year? Explain.
 - a. What assists you to stay resilient in your experience at CSU? Are there specific people in your life who assist you to continue your education (parents, grandparents, etc.)? If so, how and what do they do or say to you?

- b. Have you received assistance in your experience on this campus to navigate your education? If so, who and how has this occurred? Are there family members who also assist in this navigation?
- c. What do you aspire to accomplish with your education and why? Who has assisted, encouraged or supported you in this endeavor? Are there family members who assist, encourage or support? Why do you have this aspiration? How do you maintain this aspiration (are there classes or people at CSU who assist with this)? Are there family members who assist you in maintaining your aspirations and if so, how and why?
- d. What ways do you stay social and connected to your educational experiences? How is this useful to your overall educational goals?
6. How have you felt in general during your first year at this university? Explain.
7. How has your experience here (University) been significant to your academic progress?
8. Have you experienced obstacles to continue with your education? If so, what are these obstacles and how are you navigating them. Provide examples.
- c. Does your family support you during these obstacles and if so, how, and why?
- d. If you receive support from someone or some place on campus, please describe this and how does this assist you?
9. Do you receive family support to continue your university education? Explain.
10. What words or phrases do you hear from your family in regards to your university education?

11. Is English your native language? If not, what is your native language? How do you value your language and how has this been an asset or hindrance to you in your first year at CSU?

12. How have you felt living without your family?

13. What are the cultural values that you most like?

14. Do you receive support from peers, faculty, and university staff to continue in school? Explain.

15. Have you experienced racism at CSU in your classes, on campus or even in the community? If so, please explain.

APPENDIX D: LETTER-TO-SELF (QUESTIONNAIRE)

Please use these questions as a guide to write your letter of self. Please do not answer question by question. It must be a letter format. For example, starts your letter: “Dear **your name (please use your pseudonym)**, now that I have been through my first semester of college, I want you to know....”

1. Did you know many people during your first week here?
2. How did you feel in your first semester? Have you had a change in how you feel now?
If so, why? If not, why?
3. How was your experience with professors and classmates?
4. What was the most you missed from your home/family/culture?
5. How do you navigate your education?
6. What keeps you aspiring in your education?
7. Are you involved socially on campus and if so, what organizations are you involved with and what support do you receive from such involvement?
8. What lessons from your family or/and culture have helped you cope with your experiences here?
9. How is your language part of your experience?
10. Have you experienced positive or negative experiences in your education so far at CSU?
11. Have you experienced racism? If so, what does this look like?
12. Today how do you feel as you are aspiring your educational goals?
13. What will you do to continue to reach your goals to stay resilient in your education?
14. What are steps you are taking to continue your education?

15. What have you learned?