

Spring 3-20-2017

Understanding Latina Doctoral Student Experiences: Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success

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Understanding Latina Doctoral Student Experiences:
Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success

By
Omayra Arocho

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy

Seton Hall University

2017

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

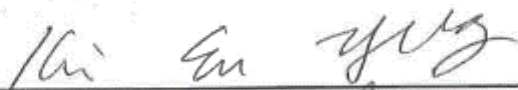
APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Omayra Arocho, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ph.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2017**.

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Abstract

Latinas currently attain the lowest number of terminal degrees in the United States when compared to White, African American, and Asian American women. While Latina doctoral students share common struggles with other minority/female doctoral students, the unique cultural expectations associated with their racial/ethnic and gender related identities conflict with traditional American educational values in important ways and may be a contributing factor to their significant underrepresentation among women who have earned doctoral degrees in the U.S. Latina doctoral students experience cultural incongruity as they realize that the intrinsic principles that contribute to their ethnic identity are incompatible with those deemed necessary to assume an academic or scholar identity. Latinas who attempt to maintain their ethnic identity in academia often experience guilt, confusion and frustration as they move fluidly between two realities with no solid footing in either. This study explores the personal and academic experiences of Latina doctoral students and how they define and negotiate a balance between ethnic and academic identities. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) as theoretical perspectives, particular attention was paid to how the intersection of race, culture and gender influenced the experiences of Latina doctoral students, and how institutional norms and policies contribute to racial, ethnic, and gender oppression.

Keywords: Latina, doctoral student, gender, culture, race, intersectionality

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for his abundant blessings and for the many individuals he has placed in my path, too many to name, who have contributed to the woman I am today and the woman of purpose I hope to become.

I am indebted to my parents, *mis queridos viejos*, for all of the sacrifices they have made for me and for my wonderful siblings, Linda, Ivan, Junno, Frankie and Lourdes. Thank you for all of your love, prayers and for cheering me on, particularly, during the most trying times. This is our achievement.

To my rock, Daniel Aparicio, thank you for showering me with unconditional love. Your support, selflessness, patience and faith in me carried me through. *Te amo*.

To my second family in the states, Evelyn, Gerard, Sara and Lauren Lacagnino; Abuelos Adolfo and Noelia Molinary; Sr. and Sra. Matute, Bellita and Jorge Franco, Francisco and Antonio Vega, thank you for blessing my life with your presence, love and encouragement throughout the years.

To Dr. Kim, thank you for your mentorship, sisterhood and guidance. To Dr. Sattin-Bajaj, thank you for believing in my work and my potential as a scholar. To Dr. González, I cannot thank you enough for the work you have done to give voice to Latina doctoral students and for inspiring me to, hopefully, do the same. Your work inspired and saved me during a critical point in my process; for that, I will always be grateful.

To my hermanas, Mayra Colón, Lucy Vazquez, Diana Minakakis, Jeannette Diaz, Iris Quiñones-Ramos, Ligia Alberto, Christina Tapia, Franchesca Guzman, Maria Del Cid, Dr. Jessica Accurso Salguero, Dr. Sofia B. Pertúz, Dr. Carolina Hernandez, my LUNA sister scholars, Dr. Christiana Awosan, Dr. Ana Hernandez, Dr. Rebecca Campón,

Dr. Lauren McFadden, Dr. Cheryl Notari, Dr. Grace May, Dr. Lourdes Mitchel and Dr. Barbara Strobert, I cannot begin to express my gratitude for all that you have done to lift me up and support other Latinas. *¡Pa'lante!*

To Dr. David Abalos, Dr. Michael Osnato and Dr. Gerard Babo, thank you for your mentorship and for encouraging me to pursue this goal.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest and sincerest gratitude to the amazing Latina women in this study who shared their time and *testimonios* to give voice to those who may feel silenced or marginalized within their culture and/or doctoral process.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Joseph DePierro and Noelia Molinary, two phenomenal individuals who were my champions and taught me to fight for my goals until the very end.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research on doctoral education in the United States report an alarming rate of attrition, estimating approximately 57 percent of students leave before completing their doctoral degrees (Sowell, Zhang, Redd, & King, 2008). While astounding, the issue of doctoral attrition is no secret in higher education; rather, it is unacknowledged. “For large segments of the country’s faculty members and administrators, the problem does not exist because the problem—and the student who leaves—is largely invisible” (Lovitts, 2001, p. 1).

Golde (2005) highlights three key reasons for studying doctoral student attrition. First, little is known about why students leave their doctoral studies; more research is needed to understand patterns and reasons for leaving (Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). Studying doctoral attrition may also assist institutions with accountability and assessment of institutional practices. Consistent problems with doctoral student retention could be a consequence of fundamental issues stemming from the institution, department or discipline (Golde, 2005). Lastly, there are economic and emotional costs of attrition. A study conducted by the University of Notre Dame found that if it reduced doctoral attrition by 10%, it would save one million dollars a year in stipends alone (Smallwood, 2004). In addition to the institutional costs is the sense of loss for individuals who depart before completing their program.

Background

Existing literature regarding the experiences of doctoral students and factors influencing their departure is limited and mostly outdated (e.g. Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Clewell, 1987; Goodchild, Green, Katz, & Kluever, 1997; Tinto, 1993). More recent research on doctoral student attrition reports various challenges including insufficient

knowledge of program requirements, a mismatch between student expectations and a career in academia, lack of financial aid, lack of mentoring, feelings of isolation, and a poor fit between the student and departmental climate (e.g., Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Weidman & Stein, 2003).

Further examination of doctoral student experiences has found even higher attrition rates among minority students, females, students who lack financial aid and those who lack meaningful connections with faculty and peers (Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Women, for example, are 16% less likely to complete their doctoral degree programs than men while racial/ethnic minority doctoral students are 28% less likely to complete than other doctoral students (Stiles, 2003). Despite these findings, limited research exists to address underrepresented doctoral student populations and reasons for departure (Gardner, 2008; Maher et al., 2004; Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010; Maton et al., 2011; Truong & Museus, 2012; Vaquera, 2007).

More attention has been focused on racial/ethnic minority and female doctoral students' steady increase in both enrollment and number of doctoral degrees earned in recent years. According to the U.S. Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED), the number of doctoral recipients from minority groups has increased substantially, citing "a 70% increase in the number of doctorates awarded to blacks or African Americans over the past 20 years and a more than doubling in the number of Hispanic or Latino doctorate recipients" (National Science Foundation, 2015, p. 2). In 2008, women received the majority of doctoral degrees conferred in the United States for the first time (50.4%) and have continued to do so in years following (Council of Graduate Schools, 2013). These statistics may suggest on the surface that higher education has become increasingly diverse and, for those who subscribe to the idea of

meritocracy, is full of opportunities to succeed for individuals who work hard. Such an assumption, however, overlooks the experiences of underrepresented doctoral students who endure issues of “fit” resulting in low satisfaction with their graduate experience and, for many, the decision to leave their doctoral program. Racial/ethnic minority doctoral students or students of color experience distinct barriers in the doctoral process including discrimination, prejudicial views of academic merit, isolation and racism (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; González, 2006; González et al., 2002; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004).

Solórzano’s (1998) study of 66 Chicano/a Ford Foundation fellows found that Chicano/a doctoral students experienced: a) isolation in academia as a result of race/ethnicity and gender; b) low expectations from faculty; and c) marginalizing racial and gender-related incidents (Solórzano, 1998). Truong and Museus’ (2012) study of minority doctoral students found that racial/ethnic minority doctoral students spent a considerable amount of time navigating racialized campus climates. Interactions with faculty and peers in their programs produced *racial trauma* which manifested itself in physical and psychological symptoms.

Doctoral students of color in Gildersleeve et al. (2011) ethnographic study experienced disparaging comments from faculty regarding their choice to pursue racial/ethnic-related research. Latina doctoral students in González’ (2006) study faced institutional racism which challenged core cultural values. While some Latina doctoral students were successful in resisting institutional expectations to assimilate through support systems and actively challenging racist practices, others lacked validation and succumbed to adverse socialization experiences.

Female/female doctoral students of color experience gender microaggressions while navigating the male-dominated institution of higher education that warrant closer exploration.

When examining the experiences of female doctoral students, one cannot discount the intersection of gender, racial and socioeconomic identities and how these multiple dimensions may further influence their educational experiences. For instance, Mansfield et al. (2010) observed how female doctoral students' gender-related social identities, intersected with identities defined by "race, ethnicity, age, social class, language and immigrant status" (p. 732). The complexity of intersecting identities became a source of stress, isolation and self-doubt for many female doctoral participants as was poignantly described by one particular Black female doctoral student who felt "invisible" and struggled with the question of whether her mistreatment was due to her race, class or gender.

Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) argued that the inclination to define others by one particular identity may cause individuals with intersecting identities to feel like an anomaly in any one group. They refer to the experiences of "intersectional invisibility," as what individuals with "multiple subordinate identities" experience (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 378). Doctoral students with multiple subordinate identities are often classified under "minority," "female," or "underrepresented minority (URM)". Such categories can inadvertently undermine or negate intersecting identities and nuanced experiences. One such specific group that is often overlooked as a result of a more generalized minority status classification in American higher education is *Latina* doctoral students.

Statement of the Problem

Latinas currently attain the lowest number of terminal degrees in the United States when compared to White, African American and Asian American women. From 2014-2015, White women received 66.7% of doctoral degrees conferred to women; Asian American women received 12.7%; African American women received 10.3% and Latinas received 7.3% (National

Center of Education Statistics, 2016). While Latina doctoral students share common struggles with other minority/female doctoral students, the unique cultural expectations associated with their racial, ethnic and gender-related identities conflict with traditional American educational values in important ways and should be explored further as they may be a contributing factor to their significant underrepresentation among women who have earned doctoral degrees in the United States.

For many Latinas, the doctoral process translates into a decision to cross “from one ethnic culture into another” (Ibarra, 2001, p. 89). Latina doctoral students experience cultural incongruity as they realize that the intrinsic principles that contribute to their ethnic identity, or feelings of belongingness and shared sense of values with one’s ethnic group (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), are incompatible with those deemed necessary to assume a scholar identity (Espino, Marquez, & Kiyama, 2010; Torres, 2006). Transitioning into an academic culture which requires individualistic activities and independence from one’s family and community has been described by Latina doctoral students as “lonely,” “isolating,” and “alienating” (Guerra, 2006; Ramirez, 2006; & Rosales, 2006). Latinas who attempt to maintain their ethnic identity while establishing an academic identity often experience guilt, confusion and frustration as they move fluidly between two realities with no solid footing in either (González et al., 2001; Rendón, 1992).

Of particular interest is the role of gender and how it intersects with ethnicity in experiences of cultural incongruity among Latina doctoral students. Under traditional gender roles, Latinas are expected to remain in the household and act as primary caregivers for parents and elders until married, when they are then expected to enact the roles of wife and mother. Idealized gender roles related to *machismo* and *marianismo* emphasize male dominance, female

submissiveness, and passivity in Latino/a culture. Socially constructed gender roles and Latino/a cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity are incongruent with traditional values deemed essential in academia in order to successfully transition from student to independent scholar. This conflict can become a source of acculturative stress (Berry, 2006) among Latinas as they navigate the doctoral process.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Moran, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Trucios-Haynes, 2000; Valdés, 1997) will serve as theoretical lenses to analyze the academic experiences of Latina doctoral students in this study. When used to explore issues in education, CRT and LatCrit “[challenge] 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” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109).

CRT recognizes that racism and meritocracy are deeply rooted in American society both at an individual and institutional level. Using Critical Race Theory as a framework, this study will examine how perceived racial microaggressions affect Latina doctoral student experiences. These “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 60) are usually unrecognizable or rationalized, making them difficult to address or eradicate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzano, 1998).

CRT acknowledges the intersectionality of oppression beyond race. Recognizing the intersectionality of identities, CRT allows deeper exploration of the multifaceted experiences of Latina doctoral students who may be disempowered as a result of their ethnicity, race, gender

and class statuses (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1998). CRT also recognizes the power of narratives or *counterstories* with respect to exploring individual experiences and challenging the “master narrative,” which “essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group’s cultural life...” (Montecinos, 1995, p. 293). (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). These counterstories provide a voice to marginalized groups who have been silenced or whose experiences have never been validated by their oppressors (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

LatCrit will enhance the perspective of CRT in this study as it addresses the limitations of the Black-White paradigm in CRT and “how critical elements of the Latino/a experience are rendered invisible within it” (Trucios-Haynes, 2000, p. 6). LatCrit also has a strong reputation for critically analyzing issues of gender (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and, therefore, “can address the concerns of Latinas in light of both [their] internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized [them]” (Hernández-Truyol, 1997, p. 885).

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions provide context for certain terms within the scope of this study.

Borinqueña: A female from Puerto Rico or Borinkén/Borinquén which is the aboriginal Taíno name for the island (Aparicio, 2006).

Latino/a or Hispanic: Referring to an individual of Mexican, Cuban, South or Central American, Puerto Rican, or any other Spanish culture, origin, or heritage regardless of race (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014).

Latina: Refers to females of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or Spanish culture or origin (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014).

Machismo: “A universal expression of male authority and domination...including the desire to prove sexual potency and male strength through boastful enforcement of power, aggressiveness toward other men and women, expectation of female submissiveness, and the belief in the superiority of men over women” (Ruiz & Sánchez Korrol, 2006, p. 424).

Marianismo: A set of beliefs “rooted in Christian values brought to Latin America during colonization, which defined women as nurturing figures and spiritual pillars of the family; it is a construction of the expected female gender roles based on the Virgin Mary” (Nuñez et al., 2016, p. 204).

Microaggressions: “Brief and commonplace verbal and behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278).

Passing: “Passing involves a racial denial and active attempts to be perceived (by self and others) as white, or at least, nonblack” (Comas-Diaz, 1996, p. 172)

Resiliency theory: “A form of theoretical understanding and problem-solving that focuses on the assets of people and systems, rather than on the ‘deficits’” (González, 2007, p. 292).

Resistance: A reaction to dominating structures or individuals, not always an act of opposition; at times, it is an attempt to participate/have a voice.

Socialization: “The process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization” (Gardner, 2008, p. 329).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Latina doctoral students’ academic experiences and how they negotiate their ethnic identity and academic success. In this study, I paid particular

attention to experiences and components of ethnic identity related to culture, gender and race. Additionally, I explored institutional norms that reinforce a lack of fit for Latina doctoral students and what strategies they employed to address experiences of incongruity in their doctoral programs. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. In what ways, if any, does culture, gender and race influence the experiences of Latina doctoral students and inform their sense of ethnic identity?
2. What cultural conflicts and academic challenges, if any, do Latina doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs?
3. How, if at all, do Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs?

Significance of the Study

Currently, the existing body of literature on Latinas in higher education is heavily concentrated on the undergraduate experience. Further review and study of this phenomenon would contribute to the extremely limited research on the nature of Latina doctoral student experiences and how these experiences may influence their persistence in doctoral programs. A large portion of the research on Latina doctoral student experiences is now dated, published in the 80s and 90s. Exceptions include González et al.'s (2001, 2002) study on Latino/a doctoral students, González' (2006) study of Latina doctoral students and González' (2007) study on Latina junior faculty reflecting on doctoral experiences. Espino's (2014) study on Mexican American Ph.D.s and (2016) study on Mexican American Women Ph.D.s. recalling their doctoral socialization processes and their navigation of academe are more recent studies. One important reason to explore Latina doctoral student experiences is highlighted by González (2006) who states that most research on Latina graduate student persistence and academic

success presents findings in terms of institutional recommendations rather than primary research questions.

A majority of the research on Latino and Latina doctoral students has explored their process, with a focus on Chicano/a or Mexican American experiences, after they have successfully completed or departed from their programs (e.g. Achor & Morales, 1990; Cuádriz, 1993, 1996; Espino 2014, 2016; Gándara 1982, 1993, 1995; Morales, 1988). Solórzano's (1998), González et al.'s (2001, 2002) and González' (2006) studies examined Latino/a doctoral student experiences while they were pursuing their doctorate and only González (2006) focused on Latinas exclusively.

This study intends to address a gap in literature on Latina doctoral students as they are undergoing their doctoral programs using an East Coast sample which has not been explored. Additionally, it will examine the role of gender, race and culture in their experiences and how each (and their intersection) informs their sense of ethnic identity and academic identity. Chicano/a doctoral students in Solórzano's (1998) study stated that they experienced isolation and marginalization because of their race/ethnicity and gender. While discussing findings, Solórzano called for an in-depth look at Latino and Latina doctoral student experiences separately to explore how the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender shapes their experiences distinctly.

Summary

Research on doctoral education has found that more than half of doctoral students depart before completing their degrees. Attrition rates are even higher among students of color, females, students who lack financial aid and those who are disconnected from the department. Doctoral students with "multiple subordinate identities," like Latina doctoral students,

experience a variety of barriers related to their intersecting identities. Latina doctoral students currently earn the lowest number of terminal degrees when compared to White, African American and Asian American women. Cultural conflicts associated with their racial/ethnic and gender related identities may be a contributing factor to their underrepresentation and/or persistence in doctoral programs and will be explored in this study.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 reviews literature exploring major trends in doctoral student attrition, experiences of racial/ethnic minority doctoral students and experiences of female/minority female doctoral students to provide a broad context for a review of research primarily focusing on Latina doctoral student experiences. A discussion of the foundations and tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) is provided. Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative research design and methods used while employing CRT and LatCrit as analytical frameworks to examine how institutional norms and the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender shape Latina doctoral student experiences and persistence. Chapter 4 reports findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on a discussion of research findings, implications for practice and concludes with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As existing research on Latina doctoral experiences is sparse, Chapter 2 begins with a review of the literature that examines major trends in doctoral student attrition and provides a broad context for future discussion of Latina students' experiences in doctoral programs. The second section focuses on discussing the experiences of racial/ethnic minority students in doctoral programs. In the following section, the role of gender in doctoral student experiences is explored. Next, I will review research primarily examining the experiences of Latina doctoral students followed by a discussion of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory as analytical frameworks to examine how the intersection of race and/or ethnicity and gender shapes Latina doctoral student experiences.

Major Trends in Doctoral Student Attrition

Financing Doctoral Education. The increasing price of graduate education in the United States and the amount of student debt incurred are a major concern for doctoral students and a contributing factor to doctoral student attrition (Gardner, 2008; Grady, La Touche, Oslawski-Lopez, Powers, & Simacek, 2014; Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000). A report based on The Survey of Earned Doctorates conducted by the National Science Foundation (NSF), noted that more doctoral students relied on financial aid than their own resources (e.g., earnings, savings, loans, spousal or family contributions) to finance their doctoral education. In fact, the level of self-support has steadily declined since 2001 when 29.3% of doctoral recipients reported using their own resources compared to 15.4% of doctoral recipients financing their doctoral education in 2011 (NSF, 2012). While this report concluded that such a decline in self-support indicates that other sources of financial aid are available to doctoral students, this trend also demonstrates that financial aid is an important

factor in doctoral program completion (Abedi & Benkin, 1987; Baird, 1997; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Gardner & Holley, 2011; González, 2006; Maher et al., 2004; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Tuckman, Coyle, & Bae, 1990; Wilson, 1965). Those who do not complete a doctoral degree are much less likely than doctoral recipients to have received financial support (Lovitts, 2001).

In Lovitts' (2001) mixed-methods study surveying 511 doctoral completers and 305 noncompleters, the response "unable to meet expenses" had the highest mean among noncompleter reasons for doctoral student program departure. While financial aid is crucial to doctoral program completion, the type of financial aid a doctoral student receives has more of an impact on doctoral student retention at different stages of the doctoral process (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Lovitts, 2001). Students with Research Assistantships (RAs), for example, are more likely to complete each stage of the doctoral process (program admission through the first year; coursework and exams; and dissertation research and defense) (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Gardner, 2008; Gardner, 2010; Lovitts, 2001; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Tinto, 1993; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001) than doctoral students who received any other type of financial aid (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011). Lovitts (2001) found that "the integrative nature of the support type" was a significant predictor of persistence with a substantial difference in attrition rates between doctoral students who received RAs and Teaching Assistantships (TAs) and those who did not (p. 95). Doctorate recipients were twice as likely to have received a TA over those who left programs and three times more likely than noncompleters to have received an RA (Lovitts, 2001). The more the financial aid allows doctoral students to interact with faculty and peers, the more connected they feel to their academic environment, thus, increasing the

likelihood of completing their doctoral programs (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Austin et al., 2009; Lovitts, 2001).

Establishing Supportive Networks. Studies reinforce the importance of establishing supportive peer networks and their relation to doctoral student satisfaction as well as persistence in their programs (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Baird, 1990; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; González, 2007; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Lovitts, 2001). As they become familiar with the values and norms of academia, many doctoral students find that challenges facing them during the doctoral socialization process are mediated by the emotional support and academic advisement of peers (Austin, 2002; Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Gardner 2007; Weidman et al., 2001). In Gardner's (2010) qualitative study, doctoral students in the department with the highest degree completion rate consistently cited the support received by their faculty and peer networks within the department, repeatedly using words such as "family" to describe their relationships. Another high degree-completing department highlighted that mentoring for new doctoral students came in the form of peers or veteran students assisting and advising them. Establishing a peer support system was viewed as an important coping mechanism for overcoming feelings of isolation stemming from the independent structure of doctoral studies (Ali & Kohun, 2007; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005).

As doctoral students progress in their programs, information-sharing among established peer networks still occur but evolve (some may even cease) as research and career interests are solidified (Austin & McDaniels, 2006). These networks extend to include departmental faculty and outside professional associations, providing students with invaluable opportunities to develop their research skills and collaborations (Maton et al., 2011). Such supportive and

professional networks encourage doctoral students to explore research interests early on and establish a rapport with faculty who could possibly serve as mentors.

Faculty Mentoring and Advisement. Since establishing an effective mentor-mentee relationship is considered to be a significant component of doctoral student success and persistence (Creighton et al., 2010; Davis, 2008; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Harden et al., 2009; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Lovitts, 2001; Lunsford, 2012; Maton et al., 2011; Reddick, 2012; Young & Brooks, 2008), choosing a mentor is one of the most critical decisions a doctoral student will make (Lovitts, 2001; Noy & Ray, 2012). Having the guidance of a mentor, particularly for research projects and/or publication collaborations, provides doctoral students with the knowledge and confidence needed to later conduct independent research for their dissertation (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Weidman et al., 2001), increase their professional network and eventually obtain an academic position (Dixon-Reeves, 2003).

Maintaining a consistent and effective relationship with a mentor becomes more difficult once coursework is completed. Constant interaction with a mentor aids with any developmental issues and the ambiguity doctoral students experience as they navigate the self-directed dissertation research process and explore their professional options (Nyquist & Wulff, 2001). The ability to consistently interact with a mentor was more important to doctoral students in Gardner's (2008) study than sharing similar research interests with mentors. Other studies found that having faculty of color who could validate and legitimize research interests is key for minority doctoral student success and persistence (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Haley, Jaeger, & Levin; 2014; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

In sum, the compatibility between advisor and student and the quality of advisement influences doctoral student experiences and their ability to sustain both in the program and the

academic profession (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006; Rose, 2005; Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007). While effective mentoring and advisement can lead to the development of a solid research agenda promoting academic development and professional opportunities, ineffective advisement regarding coursework, research, the job market and career options can negatively affect student self-confidence, student engagement and desire to persist (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000; Vasquez et al., 2006).

Student Expectations of the Academic Profession & Job Market. Cultivating strong relationships with faculty mentors is essential for doctoral students to gain a realistic understanding of and preparation for the academic profession (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Austin, 2002; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Golde, 2005). While 75% of all doctoral students intend to become professors (Nerad, Rudd, Morrison, & Homer, 2009), a majority of doctoral students begin their programs with minimal knowledge of what a career in academia entails (Austin, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001; Wulff, Austin, Nyquist, & Sprague, 2004). Golde and Dore's (2001) study of over 4,000 doctoral students from 27 institutions found that a majority of students did not understand or know how to navigate the doctoral study process. As they progress through their doctoral program and are expected to transition from student to independent scholar, many students remain unclear about the roles and responsibilities of faculty beyond research, particularly, teaching and service (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Bieber & Worley, 2006; Gaff, Pruitt-Logan & Weibl, 2000; Golde, 2008; Golde & Dore, 2001; Nerad, 2004; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000). As universities often place a high emphasis on research, doctoral students who have limited opportunities to be mentored on these additional

roles (Golde et al., 2009) will need to develop pedagogical skills on their own and will less likely become involved in service opportunities (Anderson & Anderson, 2012).

The scarcity of tenured-track faculty positions becomes apparent to doctoral students only after they begin their program (Golde, 2005). In 2008, about half of the 43,000 doctoral degree recipients in the US were employed as faculty at colleges and universities (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2009). Knowledge of the status of the academic job market is a critical factor influencing doctoral student attrition (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Lovitts, 2001). For example, Lovitts (2001) found that students who left for “career-related reasons” tended to do so either after one year or towards the end of the program. Reasons for leaving early in their process included a) the desire for a career with financial security, b) a change in career focus, or c) frustration with the academic job market. Those who left at a later stage in the doctoral process did so because of their concerns with job prospects.

According to the 2011 Survey of Earned Doctorates, the number of science and engineering doctorate recipients who reported definite employment commitments or postdoctoral positions declined for the second consecutive year, reaching its lowest level in the past 10 years. The number of doctorate recipients in the non-science and engineering fields declined for the third consecutive year with humanities reaching its lowest level in 14 years and the number of education and non-science doctoral degree recipients at the lowest in the past 20 years (National Science Foundation, 2011). “The mismatch between the purpose of doctoral education, aspirations of the students, and the realities of their careers—within and outside of academia—continues” (Golde & Dore, 2001, p. 5).

This section discussed major themes among studies focusing on doctoral student attrition, namely, financing doctoral education, establishing supportive networks, faculty mentoring and

advisement as well as student expectations of the academic profession and job market. The following section explores the doctoral attrition problem further by examining the experiences of racial/ethnic minority students or doctoral students of color. As a group under this broad category, Latina doctoral students share many of the experiences and challenges faced by other doctoral students of color.

Experiences of Doctoral Students of Color

While doctoral students of color can certainly relate to the obstacles experienced by all doctoral students, a review of existing literature on racial/ethnic minority students revealed that some challenges are distinct and related to minority status. Doctoral students of color face racism, isolation, tokenism and identity conflict.

Race and Racial Microaggressions. A limited number of studies have focused on the experiences of doctoral students of color and how race/ethnicity plays a role in their academic progress. In their 2012 study, Truong and Museus examined the narratives of 26 doctoral students of color who participated in semi-structured interviews with regard to the experience of racism and *racial trauma*. Racism refers to “a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial-group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable” (Harrell, 2000, p. 43). All participants experienced overt and covert forms of racism, which resulted in *racism-related stress* or “emotional, physical, and psychological discomfort and pain” (Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 228). Experiencing racialized events produced “anger, shock, self-doubt, depression, dissociation, physical pain, and spiritual pain” (Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 237).

Similar experiences were recounted in Gildersleeve et al. (2011) ethnographic study examining the doctoral experiences of 22 Latino/a and Black students enrolled in three major,

public research universities. Gildersleeve et al. found that doctoral students of color experienced repeated instances of racism causing racial trauma. Participants often experienced faculty belittling their race/ethnic-related research interests and did not receive the same support, respect or research assistantship opportunities as other doctoral students. Experiences of overt, but in particular, covert forms of racism were consistently shared in student narratives reaffirming that blatant racism within institutions has evolved into more subtle and ambiguous forms, commonly known as racial *microaggressions* (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al, 2007). Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace verbal and behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278).

Doctoral students of color are repeatedly faced with racial microaggressions whether it is through faculty advisement to challenge issues in a manner that did not appear “overly aggressive,” little to no support for race/ethnic-based research or experiences of tokenism in the classroom (García, 2005; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; González et. al, 2002; Haley et al., 2014; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012; Turner, 2002).

Ellis’ (2001) study examining the experiences of 67 Black and White doctoral students and recipients found that race is a salient factor in doctoral experiences particularly in the areas of: (a) mentoring and advisement, (b) departmental climate, and (c) peer interactions. White males were more satisfied with their advisors than White females, Black males and Black females. Doctoral students of color often experienced a mismatch relationship with faculty advisors. A lack of common research interests and cultural values often resulted in miscommunication between advisor and advisee as well as racist and/or sexist behaviors from

advisors. Black and White males had less concerns about departmental and classroom climate than Black females. Peer interactions were more important to Black doctoral students than they were to White male and female doctoral students; support networks were racially divided, since cultural differences made it challenging to connect with White doctoral students.

In a study comparing the academic experiences and career aspirations of over 1,200 ethnic minority doctoral students to White doctoral students, Maton et al. (2011) found that each minority group surveyed (African American, Latino/a and Asian American) reported more stereotypical representations of their culture in the curriculum and greater non-representation of minorities in their programs than did White doctoral students (Yoo, Burrola, & Steger, 2010). Additionally, White doctoral students perceived more cultural diversity in their academic environment than did doctoral students of color (Maton et al., 2011).

While Maton et al.'s study found that minority doctoral students and White doctoral students had different perceptions of cultural diversity in the same environment, it could not elaborate on the reasons for the discrepancy using survey responses. This may offer a reason for why a large portion of research exploring minority doctoral experiences has been methodologically qualitative. Narratives provided by minority doctoral students offer an explanation for the discrepancy in self-perceived diversity between minority doctoral students and white doctoral students—varying definitions based on distinct experiences and challenges (Ellis, 2001; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2004). While some White doctoral students may base their definition of diversity on the number of minority students enrolled or “structural diversity,” minority doctoral student narratives provide a perspective based on intergroup relations and the “psychological and behavioral climate” of an institution (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, & Milem, 1998).

In Lewis et al.'s (2004) study, eight African American doctoral students at a predominantly White research institution (PWI) all expressed a profound sense of isolation, leading some to consider leaving their doctoral program. The terms "lonely" and "invisible" were repeated in participant narratives (Lewis et al., 2004, p. 3). For doctoral students of color, having a diverse, inclusive environment transcends the number of students or faculty of color at an institution and encompasses an understanding or at least a desire to understand what it means to be a student of color (Ellis, 2001; Lewis et al., 2004).

Culture, Identity Construction and Otherness. Using Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a lens, Haley et al. (2014) explored how race/ethnicity and cultural values contribute to identity and career aspirations for minority graduate students. SIT states that an individual's identification with a social group (social identity) becomes part of their individual or personal identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Haley et al. expanded on SIT by stating that one's culture and cultural values are part of one's individual identity creating what they termed as *cultural social identity*. Their study of 26 minority graduate students, sought to understand how cultural social identity related to minority graduate student career choices and professional identity, specifically, faculty identity, as these students were considering the academic profession. Findings showed that participants' cultural identities played a significant role in their desire to pursue or avoid a career in academia. Family and cultural community values, needs and expectations were considered prior to making a career decision. Some participants found that the rigor of academic life was not conducive to the cultural expectation of meeting family needs and playing an active role in their community. Others found that pursuing a career in academe would serve their family and community by promoting the value of education, becoming a role model

and using the field as a way to serve their community either through research or representation as faculty of color (Haley et al., 2014).

Several minority doctoral students preferred the industrial or non-tenured track positions because the expectations were more in line with their cultural social identity; the demanding requirements of a tenure track position would preclude them from spending valuable time with family, community, and developing spiritually. Those who chose to continue on the graduate path to become faculty members, did not ignore the conflict between an academic or faculty identity and their cultural social identity, but rather stated that they would approach their profession differently by choosing unpopular cultural research topics and focusing on teaching and building relationships with their students as well as spending time with their families (Haley et al., 2014).

Pifer and Baker's (2014) study revealed similar findings regarding identity conflict among doctoral students. Their qualitative study of 31 full-time doctoral students at a research university found that doctoral students experienced *otherness* related to their multiple identities. Otherness refers to "feelings of negative distinction, isolation, or lack of fit within a given social context based on one or more aspects of one's identity in relation to other group members and group norms" (Pifer & Baker, 2014, p. 15). Guided by the framework of identity in the academic career established in an earlier study (2010), Pifer & Baker identified otherness within three types of identities: *professional identity* (self-perceptions of academic career and interactions with faculty and peers), *relational identity* (sense of self in relation to roles in and obligations to family and other non-academic or non-professional relationships) and *personal identity* (perception of self and personal characteristics).

Participants experienced *otherness* in relation to their professional identity when they discovered that their interests were vastly different from those of faculty in the department. Minority and female students were most vocal about otherness related to personal identity, namely perceived visible attributes causing feelings of isolation or exclusion when they found no one who could relate to their experiences as a student of color (Pifer & Baker, 2014).

Feelings of otherness were predominant among doctoral students of color in Gardner and Holley's (2011) qualitative study of 20 first-generation doctoral students. Participants described otherness in terms of social class and social capital. They experienced feelings of isolation and lack of belonging particularly since a majority of other students had parents who attended college and could provide them with support throughout the doctoral process. Several struggled with otherness when they returned home, experiencing different interactions with family members or dissolving ties with individuals as these associations would jeopardize their academic success.

Resistance Mechanisms and Peer Support Networks. González' (2006) study of 13 Latina doctoral students found that experiences with academic socialization which attempted to impose hegemonic ideals resulted in Latinas either "finding or losing [their] voice" (González, 2006, p. 360). Latina doctoral students who lost their voice were unassertive and did not feel empowered to question faculty for fear of backlash. Those who found their voice communicated through the agency of formal and informal support networks that championed to change racist and/or sexist institutional practices.

Truong and Museus (2012) found that doctoral students of color had various strategies for responding to racism, which emerged under three major themes: internal responses, controlled responses and external responses (see Table 1). Internal responses were used to maintain physical and psychological well-being and included such strategies as "utilizing social

support,” “avoiding racist environments,” and “engaging religion and spirituality” (Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 238). Controlled responses indirectly dealt with racism by restraining themselves from reacting or removing themselves from a situation such as “switching advisors” or “transferring out.” External responses were focused on changing the academic environment by directly addressing racist behavior.

Table 1. *Inventory of Coping Styles among Doctoral Students of Color*

Group 1 Internal Responses: <i>[Used individually & internally to ensure physical & psychological well-being]</i>	Group 2 Controlled Responses: <i>[Used indirectly to deal with racist experiences by restraint or self-removal]</i>	Group 3 External Responses: <i>[Used to alter racist environments by directly addressing them]</i>
1. Utilizing social support	1. Suppressing reactions	1. Speaking up
2. Avoiding racist environments	2. Strategic maneuvering	2. Documenting & filing complaints
3. Engaging religion & spirituality	3. Seeking intervention	3. Reconstructing [dissertation] committees
4. Seeking treatment	4. Switching advisers	
5. Achieving as resistance	5. Transferring out	
6. Advocating for peers of color		
7. Relieving stress through hobbies		
8. Reflecting on racism		
9. Preparing for racist encounters		

(Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 238)

The most frequent coping style among doctoral students of color in Truong and Museus’ (2012) study was “utilizing social support.” Establishing a support network of peers (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005; González, 2001; González, 2007; Weidman

et al., 2001) provides a critical space for minority doctoral students to share stories and racialized experiences that threaten their persistence (Ellis, 2001; Flores & García, 2009; González, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012).

While social support networks are consistently found as an important factor influencing doctoral student persistence, its role in doctoral student education has rarely been investigated in research related to doctoral student attrition (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Jairam & Kahl, 2012). One reason for this gap in the literature may be the prevailing assumption that doctoral education is an “apprenticeship” in which the majority of the knowledge and experiences in the process of becoming an independent scholar is gained from working closely with an advisor or mentor (Golde & Dore, 2001; Kwiram, 2006). This perspective, however, “tends to overlook the larger environmental context of doctoral education and the role that different learning communities, including peers, can play in student development as independent researchers” (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012, p. 73). Engaging in peer support networks, whether formal or informal, allows doctoral students opportunities to advise each other about courses and professional development, share knowledge gained through coursework or via faculty interactions and provide emotional support during challenging experiences throughout the doctoral process (Austin, 2002; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Gardner, 2007; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Weidman et al., 2001). Strong, positive connections to peers influence doctoral student resiliency during ambiguous and strenuous situations in the doctoral process (West, Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011), while lack of peer connection may be predictive of program departure (Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2009).

This section explored major themes among studies focusing on doctoral students of color, including race, racial microaggressions, culture, identity, and otherness as well as peer support

and resistance mechanisms. While doctoral students of color share various experiences and methods of responding to challenges associated with their minority status, the existing literature indicates that being a female doctoral student of color may add another layer of complexity when navigating the male-dominated institution of higher education (e.g., González, 2006, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010, Solórzano, 1998). The following section explores the experiences of female doctoral students and female doctoral students of color.

Experiences of Female Doctoral Students and Female Doctoral Students of Color

While men and women face distinct challenges during their doctoral studies (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013), very rarely does the literature on doctoral student persistence focus specifically on the experiences of female doctoral students. Research that does explore the lived experiences of women pursuing their doctorate reveals more instances of stress, gender bias and role conflict, marginalization and isolation in academia (Brown & Watson, 2010; Deem & Brehony, 2000; Lovitts, 2001; Mansfield et al., 2010; Leonard, 2001; Nerad & Cerny, 1999). Gaps persist in the areas of networking opportunities, mentoring and advisement, and financial aid, particularly, in the form of research and teaching assistantships (Austin, 2002; Lovitts, 2001). “The literature points to an ‘accumulation of disadvantages’ that leads to an ‘unaccommodating culture’ for women in academe” (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 728).

Navigating the System. In a study exploring the experiences of 12 female doctoral students in educational leadership programs, Mansfield et al., (2010) found that one of the major barriers for female doctoral students was the inability to “break through” what appeared to be male dominated “secret clubs” in higher education (p. 731). At times, the exclusion felt deliberate; other times, they were perceived as the result of male faculty being more comfortable with male doctoral students. Participants also felt as if they were constantly lagging behind their

peers with educated parents who could guide them through the process of and opportunities within higher education.

Not being able to successfully navigate the organizational culture and academic discipline places female doctoral students at a disadvantage when negotiating in an educational system that rewards students, particularly White men, who possess the dominant knowledge, skills and social connections to further their success (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Mansfield et al., 2010; Rhode, 2003). This often leads female doctoral students to develop feelings of self-doubt and otherness in academia (Brown & Watson, 2010; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2010). These feelings are akin to the *imposter phenomenon* found in Clance and Imes' (1978) study of high achieving women and Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, and Russell's (1996) study of African American graduate students (Gardner & Holley, 2011). The imposter phenomenon "is an internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). Gardner and Holley (2011) found that the imposter phenomenon was prevalent among female and the few racial/ethnic minority doctoral students in their study who doubted their intelligence and constantly feared that someone would discover they should not be there.

In Johnson-Bailey's (2014) qualitative study, 10 Black female graduate students battled with feelings of inadequacy and wondered if their work was at the same level as that of White doctoral students. High GRE scores were a source of confidence for several participants starting their program of study; however, various interactions and classroom experiences would rapidly dispel this. Those who gained the "respect" of faculty did so in dehumanizing ways—being referred to as "exceptions within their race in terms of intelligence and performance" (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 344). Findings in Johnson-Bailey's (2004) study pointed to four departmental

issues associated with retention of African American female graduate students: (a) presence and mentorship of supportive faculty and administrators, (b) Black peer support networks, (c) faculty respect, and (d) availability of funding.

Funding opportunities are also an important factor influencing the persistence of female doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001; Maher et al., 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010). Financial aid opportunities are not communicated to female doctoral students as they are to males creating a competitive and, at times, hostile academic environment (Mansfield et al., 2010). Male doctoral students, particularly those who associate themselves with the predominantly male faculty on a social level, have an advantage over female doctoral students with access to more funding opportunities (Maher et al., 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010). Female students in Lovitts' (2001) study were significantly less likely than men to receive financial aid in the form of teaching assistantships (63% female vs. 74% male) or research assistantships (41 female vs. 52 percent male), although they held higher GPAs than their male peers. Navigating the doctoral system requires knowledge of the overt and covert rules of academic culture (Parry, 2007); access to play involves identity shifts (Carter et al., 2013).

Gender Roles and Identity Conflict. Female doctoral students have the unique and complex experience of balancing their identities influenced by gender roles (female doctoral student, daughter, wife, partner, and/or mother) with their academic identity (Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2010). Carter et al. (2013) studied gender-specific challenges of 92 female and 36 male doctoral students from over 1400 Ph.D. counseling sessions over two years. They found that “identity transformation during the doctorate seems to rub against the grain of expectations of women in their roles outside university” (p. 348). Recurring themes for female doctoral students included:

- Family commitments – Familial and religious obligations conflict with American values deemed essential to succeed in academia.
- Relationship problems – Increased time to fulfill academic goals translates to decreased emotional, sexual and social availability to partners and spouses and jeopardizes the goal of motherhood for single women.
- Time commitment – Demanding academic expectations often excludes those who have multiple commitments and obligations.
- Female identity problems – Many female doctoral students function under a “double-bind,” where they experience and are critiqued for not performing to the best of their ability, in academe and at home. Female doctoral students were often advised by friends and family to quit whereas male doctoral students were never offered that suggestion by their support circles (Carter et al., 2013, pp. 345-347).

Lynch (2008) and Mansfield et al. (2010) also found that female doctoral students struggled with balancing familial obligations and multiple identities. Lynch (2008) found that several female doctoral students struggled with their roles as mother and student, or at least the socially-constructed conceptions of ‘good mother’ and ‘good student.’ In order to avoid conflict between these identities, doctoral mothers would “downplay” the maternal role in an academic setting (‘maternal invisibility’) much like they would their student role outside of the academic setting (‘academic invisibility’ p. 595).

Female doctoral students in educational leadership felt increasingly stressed as they attempted to meet academic expectations while their families depended on them to take care of their household, elderly parents and provide financial support (Mansfield et al., 2010). Many felt their parenting skills suffered as they divided their efforts between children, work and school.

Racial minority, first-generation doctoral students acknowledged how the intersection of their identities made their doctoral experience all the more complex (“with a different identity superseding the others in varying contexts and circumstances”) resulting in feelings of isolation in academia (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 734).

Peer and Faculty Mentoring. Women who were not first-generation college students and/or advanced doctoral students were especially helpful to female doctoral students in the Mansfield et al. (2010) study. Information about opportunities to join professional networks was not as accessible to females as they were to men. Participants compensated for the deficiency in resources by creating an internal professional network and acting as “informal mentors” for each other (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 731).

Black female graduate students in Johnson-Bailey’s (2004) study consistently pointed to the invaluable “insider” information received from other Black female students, particularly, graduate assistants. These peers provided useful information on graduate opportunities, funding, and course selection. Participants created informal support groups that actively met for academic advisement and to voice their experiences and concerns.

Ellis (2001) found that peer support networks were more of a dominant theme among Black female and male doctoral students than White doctoral students. Vast differences in cultural experiences made it challenging for Black doctoral students to interact with their White peers. With such few Black doctoral students, Black female and male participants felt they needed to support one another rather than establish support networks based on gender. Although Black male and female doctoral students shared many similar experiences, Black females expressed the most dissatisfaction with advisement, stating they had a more difficult time

establishing a relationship with their advisors, particularly, because their race- and gender-related interests did not match those of their advisors (Ellis, 2001).

There is a strong preference among doctoral students of color and women for mentors and/or advisors from their same racial/ethnic groups (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Having the support of Black female professors was important to Black graduate females although they acknowledged the value of cross-gender and cross-cultural mentoring (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The presence of a Black female faculty member provided students with a space to share racialized experiences, race-related research interests, and receive validation. Half of female doctoral students in Johnson-Bailey's (2004) study reported engagement in research collaborations with faculty as a result of opportunities extended to them by Black female professors.

Only two female doctoral students in the Mansfield et al. (2010) study reported a solid relationship with a faculty mentor; six stated that after several years they established informal mentor-mentee relationships and four reported no formal or informal mentoring relationships of any kind. This finding is quite alarming as female doctoral students rely on their mentor for support, trust, guidance and correction to improve research and writing skills (Mansfield et al., 2010). A consistent concern found in the existing literature points to the need for faculty mentorship early in the doctoral process when they are most unsure of the process and themselves.

This section presented dominant themes that surfaced in research focusing on the female doctoral experience (White and racial/ethnic minority), which included the navigation of institutional systems that favor males, the importance and lack of mentorship, particularly

mentors from the same gender and/or same race/ethnicity, the lack and need of financial support, gender roles and identity conflict and the importance of peer mentors and peer support networks.

Exploring these two social identities (minority status and gender) helps to examine how their intersection influences the experiences and academic success of Latina doctoral students, a group that has received scattered attention and is often overlooked when they are lumped together with other females or racial/ethnic groups, male and female, as underrepresented racial minorities.

Experiences of Latino/a Doctoral Students

Literature exploring the experiences of Latina doctoral students is sparse and mostly dated. Several studies that provide critical insight into challenges these students face are not exclusive to the Latina doctoral experience as study samples often include Latino males (e.g. Cuádras, 1993; González, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2001; González et al., 2002; Solórzano, 1993; 1998). Nevertheless, findings in such studies as Cuádras's (1993) study of 40 Chicano/a doctoral graduates and Solórzano's (1998) study of 66 Chicano/a Ford Foundation doctoral fellows who stated they experienced isolation and marginalization because of their class (Cuádras, 1993), race/ethnicity and gender (Cuádras, 1993; Solórzano, 1998) call for an in-depth look at Latino and Latina doctoral student experiences separately to explore how the confluence of racial/ethnic minority status and gender shapes their experiences distinctly. "...Being a woman of color is quantitatively and qualitatively different than being a man of color or white woman or man" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 132).

Familial Support. One of the earliest studies exploring Latinas and terminal degrees was Gándara's (1982) qualitative study of 17 Chicana women examining background factors and experiences influencing successful degree attainment in U.S. institutions of higher education.

Among the most influential factors were strong familial support, particularly from mothers serving as role models, in addition to attending schools that were highly integrated (Gándara, 1982). While the study included women who earned medical and law degrees, of which requirements and processes differ from that of a doctoral degree in an academic field, it still successfully conveyed common units of support Latinas relied on in order to successfully attain their advanced degrees.

Strong familial support also played a critical role for Latinas in Achor and Morales' (1990) mixed-methods study of 100 Chicanas who earned U.S. doctorates with 41.9% of participants stating that family influenced their decision in pursuing their doctoral degree. While Latinas receive strong support in regards to advancing their education, they receive equally as strong, if not stronger, messaging regarding their familial obligations (Espino, 2016).

Negotiating a balance between academic expectations and cultural obligations to family and community proves challenging for many Latina doctoral students (Espino et al., 2010, 2016; González, 2006, González et al., 2001)

Latina doctoral students who attempt to maintain their cultural identity while establishing an academic identity “[wrestle] with the reality of living on the margins of two worlds: their communities of origin, and their new academic environment” (González et al., 2001, p. 574).

Latina scholars Espino et al. (2010) explored their multiple identities as wife, mother, daughter, and academic by sharing and scrutinizing their *testimonios* (personal and educational narratives) of graduate and faculty experiences. *Testimonios* serve to empower Latinas by challenging the master narrative and validating racialized, gender or class-biased experiences (Jones, 2008).

Espino et al. (2010) presented their *testimonios* through *pláticas*. *Pláticas* are composed of informal conversations or stories of lived experiences, both challenges and victories, which

reinforce community-building and strengthens connections between those who partake in the collaborative process (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

Muñoz struggled with justifying a rewarding career opportunity because it challenged cultural expectations of being a good wife and mother. The demands of family and academia were at opposing ends; decisions involved choosing one identity over the other. Espino endured obstacles with legitimizing her academic identity as a researcher who earned her status and faculty connections rather than feeling guilt for opportunities that afforded her access. Marquez Kiyama relayed the emotional and psychological turmoil she experienced as an advanced doctoral student who anguished over leaving her family from a lower socioeconomic status while simultaneously trying to move past her guilt and homesickness in order to motivate herself to complete her dissertation. Her dissertation defense represented the merging of her “home identity” (blue collar, rural, Mexican-American) with her “academic identity” as a scholar (Espino et al., 2010, p. 809).

González et al.’s (2001) autoethnographic study of six Latino/a doctoral students found that participants felt vulnerable as a result of having to adjust to a new academic culture vastly different from their own cultural background. Participants shared how entering the unknown culture of academia drained much of the energy that would have been spent on advancing their skills and scholarship. Participants endured isolation, guilt and pain as they acknowledged that there was a considerable change in identity to the point where they became unrecognizable to family and community members. Factors that contributed to their fragile and vulnerable state included (González et al., 2001, p. 572-578): (a) lack of family understanding, (b) entering a new and unfamiliar world (c) lack of adequate Latino/a presence in their programs, (d) experiencing

an ‘outsider-within’ status, (e) enduring identity changes, (f) yearning for validation, and (g) enduring conflicts between two worlds.

Institutional Obstacles. González et al.’s (2002) study revealed that the primary obstacle for Latino/a doctoral students was the nature of the academy which was perceived to be “conservative, restrictive, and racist” (p. 545). Participants believed that succumbing to the forces that sustained the academy’s nature would limit them to: a) choose only those research topics that have market value in academia, b) work from an elitist framework where individual and institutional prestige is the main focus, and c) participate only in those activities that are rewarded by the current tenure system (González et al., 2002, p. 550).

The variety of institutional barriers that Latinas face while pursuing education are delineated in González’ (2006) phenomenological study of 13 Latina doctoral students. Challenges included: (a) lack of financial support, (b) gender discrimination, (c) racial discrimination, (d) socioeconomic discrimination, (e) tokenism, and (f) lack of departmental mentorship (González, 2006).

Resistance and Resiliency. Using production theory, which states that society is oppressive by nature and can be changed via human agency and critical consciousness, González (2006) observed that academic socialization was resisted by Latina participants who were more conscious of their ethnic identity and did not want their academic identity to be defined by characteristics typically attributed to White males. This concept of socialization was adopted “from Freire’s (1970) concept of prescription, which he defined as the imposition of the oppressor’s choices over those of the oppressed for the purposes of transforming the consciousness of the oppressed” (González, 2006, p. 348). *Successful Resistance*, as González termed it, manifested itself through the creation of “networks of resistance” (González, 2006, p.

359) which included students, faculty and administration from various institutions and associations who shared the same ideas and questioned systems that perpetuated racism, sexism, and classism. *Unsuccessful Resistance*, on the other hand, occurred when some Latina participants isolated themselves by not participating in or attending class and, in some cases, even changing academic programs to avoid acculturation, racism, or sexism from either faculty or students (González, 2006).

Findings in Morales' (1988) doctoral dissertation and Achor and Morales' (1990) study pointed to resistance mechanisms as a vital strategy for addressing and overcoming institutional obstacles related to their gender, ethnic and socioeconomic-related identities. Sixty-five percent of the 100 Chicanas reported experiencing some form of racial or gender related discrimination (Achor & Morales, 1990). A majority of them, however, turned negative experiences into catalysts for success in order to prove misconceptions about them wrong.

Achor and Morales (1990) carefully point out, however, that resistance practiced by Chicana doctoral students in their study proved successful because it was 'resistance with accommodation.' In other words, "a mode of resistance that rejects and challenges existing power relationships but accepts the institutionally approved means of attaining educational advancement" (Achor & Morales, 1990, p. 281). Resistance mechanisms that completely opposed the academic culture were counter-productive and decreased the likelihood of success.

González' (2007) qualitative study examined what attitudes and behaviors proved to be effective for 12 Latinas who successfully completed their doctoral studies and were thriving in the academy. Findings were discussed in the context of the following resiliency theory concepts: (a) *social competence* whereby participants established positive relationships with other minority students, particularly other Latinas, and sought out mentors, at times, outside of the department

or institution because there were no other Latina faculty; (b) *problem solving* which allowed participants to develop their critical thinking skills in order to address racist and/or sexist practices perpetuated by the institution, professors, and dissertation advisors; (c) *resiliency in autonomy* in which all participants developed their ethnic identities and were assertive when individuals or institutional practices threatened these identities; and (d) *resiliency in sense of purpose* whereby participants kept reminding themselves of their purpose as they faced challenges in the doctoral process.

Alliances. Given the amount and degree of personal, familial, and institutional obstacles Latinas face during their doctoral studies and entering the academy, establishing “strategic alliances” (Segura, 2003) or networks of resistance (Achor & Morales, 1990; Flores & García, 2009; González, 2006; González, 2007) is essential “for survival” in academia, particularly in predominantly white institutions (Flores & García, 2009) where a sacred space is needed for Latinas to share testimonios, collectively expose oppressive structures and reclaim their identities (Beverley, 2005; Espino et al., 2010; Flores & García, 2009).

This section explored major themes among studies focusing on Latino/a doctoral students, which included the importance of family and its influence, the disparity between cultural and academic expectations, racial/ethnic and gender discrimination, the use of *testimonios* and *plática* to share triumphs as well as expose stories of racial/ethnic and gender oppression, and the importance of establishing networks of resistance and support among peers and Latino/a faculty within and/or outside the institution.

The following section will discuss the foundations and principals of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) as analytical frameworks. Both CRT and LatCrit will provide a lens to 1) examine how the intersection of race and/or ethnicity and gender shapes

Latina doctoral student experiences and 2) evaluate the influence of institutional norms and policies on Latina doctoral students' academic success.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory

Origins of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT emerged in the 1970s following the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Although various advancements in the area of civil rights and social justice had occurred in the 1960s, legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freedman, and Richard Delgado found that progress came to a halt and covert forms of racism were on the rise (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Joined by legal scholars who wished to expand upon critical legal studies and advance a legal research agenda examining the effects of race and racism (Brayboy, 2005; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Taylor, 1998), critical race theorists held their first workshop in Madison, Wisconsin in 1989 (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

CRT draws from and builds on the perspectives of a variety of disciplines including law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women studies (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Solórzano et al., 2000). As a theoretical perspective and analytical instrument, critical race theory evaluates the “unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial and gendered lines” (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Taylor, 2009, p.1).

Basic Tenets of CRT. CRT and its tenets have been defined and presented in various ways—at times splitting principles for deeper discussion of each (e.g. Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The following describes six basic tenets of CRT:

1. Racism is an ordinary, permanent fixture in American society. Racism, both at the individual level, but in particular, the institutional level is pervasive in American culture. “A CRT lens unveils the various forms in which racism continually manifests itself, despite espoused institutional values regarding equity and social justice” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 390).
2. CRT rejects liberalism and meritocracy. Colorblindness and race-neutral policies operate under the guise of equal treatment for all and mask subtle forms of racism. CRT views meritocracy as a means of maintaining White supremacy (Bergerson, 2003) by recognizing stories from those who have benefitted from privilege, be it wealth or color of their skin, and applying them to marginalized groups (i.e. those who work hard can achieve wealth and power) all the while ignoring systemic injustices and inequalities that prevent those who are disenfranchised from achieving the same type of status.
3. CRT recognizes the intersectionality of oppression. Disempowerment can be the result of one’s race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation or the intersection of such identities (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1998). “No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10).
4. CRT acknowledges lived experiences and views narratives, or counterstories, as a way to put the voices of people of color at the forefront. The sharing of stories has been a survival tool for generations of oppressed groups (Delgado, 1989) and “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 95).
5. CRT recognizes “interest convergence” or “material determinism” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8) which states that racial advancement for Blacks are accepted when they

promote White self-interests. Because racism benefits privileged as well as working-class Whites, there is very little incentive to eliminate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

6. CRT is committed to social justice. CRT not only challenges the discourse on race, it also seeks to empower oppressed groups and further the cause for racial reform (Yosso et al., 2001).

Definition & Functions of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). LatCrit is a “branch of critical race theory that considers issues of concern to Latinos/as, such as immigration, language rights, and multi-identity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 166) and is committed to knowledge-production and community-building. The four functions of LatCrit theory, according to Valdés (1997, p. 1093-94) include: (a) the production of knowledge, (b) the advancement of social transformation, (c) the expansion and connection of antiracist struggles, and (d) the cultivation of community and coalition, both within and beyond the confines of legal academia in the United States.

Origins of LatCrit. LatCrit emerged following a colloquium on Latinos/as and CRT as part of the Hispanic National Bar Association Law Professors’ meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1995. Since then, LatCrit has developed from annual meetings to a series of initiatives. Like CRT, LatCrit recognizes the intersectionality of race and racism “with other forms of subordination” (Solórzano et al., 2000) such as sexism and classism, however, it also acknowledges the complexity of intersectional identities within the Latino/a community which includes issues with language, immigration, ethnicity as well as phenotype (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and how these experiences are not always recognized within the Black-White racial discourse. Latinos/as often do not identify with racial categories stemming from the Black-White paradigm (Lawrence, 1995; Perea, 1998; Ramirez, 1995; Trucios-Haynes, 2001). Results

of the 2010 Census elucidate the issue of racial identity among Latinos in the United States with Latinos/as accounting for more than 18.5 million of the 19 million people who selected “some other race” when asked about their race or origin (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014). LatCrit addresses this issue by recognizing that for many Latinos/as, racial identity is entwined with cultural or ethnic identity (Rodriguez, 1994; Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

Table 2 below provides an overview of the literature reviewed for this chapter. Each column summarizes the dominant themes that surfaced for major trends in doctoral attrition, doctoral students of color, female doctoral students/female doctoral students of color and Latina doctoral students. A comparison of the four columns reveals that establishing peer support networks and faculty mentor relationships were important to all doctoral student groups. A review of the themes in studies exploring racial/ethnic minority, female, and Latina doctoral students found that each group grappled with identity conflict. Other notable observations or themes to further explore include the importance of “networks of resistance” for doctoral students of color and Latino/a doctoral students—the same groups that had racial microaggressions surface as a dominant theme. And finally, Latina doctoral student experiences are distinct when compared to other female doctoral students/female doctoral students of color in that their cultural values are intertwined with traditional gender roles.

Table 2. *Overview of Literature on Doctoral Student Experiences*

Major Trends in Doctoral Attrition	Experiences of Doctoral Students of Color	Experiences of Female Doctoral Students and Female Doctoral Students of Color	Experiences of Latino and Latina Doctoral Students
Financing doctoral education	Racial microaggressions	Navigating an institutional system that favors males	Importance of family & familial influence on gender roles
Establishing supportive networks	Culture, identity & otherness	Self-doubt	Margins of two worlds (cultural & academic)
Faculty mentoring/advisement	Peer support & resistance mechanisms	Importance and lack of mentorship, particularly mentors from the same gender and/or same race/ethnicity	Racial/ethnic & gender discrimination
Mismatch between student expectations of the academic profession & job market	Note: Mentorship dominant theme in studies exploring female doctoral students of color	Lack of financial support	Use of <i>testimonios</i> and <i>plática</i> to share triumphs/expose stories of racial/ethnic and gender oppression
		Gender roles and identity conflict	Networks of resistance & support among peers and Latino/a faculty within and/or outside the institution
		Establishing peer mentors & peer support networks	

Summary

This chapter synthesizes and integrates the existing literature on doctoral student experiences. Major trends in doctoral attrition, experiences of doctoral students of color, female doctoral students and female doctoral students were reviewed to provide a broad context for the discussion of Latina students' experiences in doctoral programs. Additionally, the origins and tenets of CRT and LatCrit were discussed as theoretical frameworks for the proposed study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Latina doctoral students. In this study, I paid particular attention to social and academic experiences related to culture, gender and race and how these informed participant perspectives on ethnic identity. Additionally, I explored departmental and/or institutional norms that contributed to obstacles and issues of fit for Latina doctoral students. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. In what ways, if any, does culture, gender and race influence the experiences of Latina doctoral students and inform their sense of ethnic identity?
2. What cultural conflicts and academic challenges, if any, do Latina doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs?
3. How, if at all, do Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the research design, methods and theoretical perspectives that guide the study. Next, I introduce the research setting and sample selection procedure. Then, I discuss the data collection and analytical strategies and conclude with the study's trustworthiness, my role as researcher and limitations of the study.

Methodological Approach

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it is concerned with the exploration and extraction of meaning from individual or group experiences (Merriam, 2009). Rather than trying to prove a hypothesis, this emergent design acknowledges the complexity of the human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and honors the idea that there is no one truth or

reality following an inductive process from data collected to extracted themes to a generalized model or theory (Creswell, 2009). This approach to inquiry is appropriate for this study because it seeks to understand the processes in which Latinas engage while pursuing their doctoral degree and what meanings they attribute to their lived experiences, particularly those highlighting their ethnic and doctoral or academic identities.

Research Design

The qualitative research design of narrative analysis was used for this study of sixteen Latina doctoral students pursuing their doctoral degree in the East Coast. Stories or narratives are how we make sense of our experiences and how we communicate them to others (Chase, 2003; Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Narrative analysis uses stories as units of analysis in order to understand how people create meanings in their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lindsay, 2006). This design is fitting for inquiries exploring identity development, cultural meanings and values (Merriam, 2009). Using narrative analysis, the primary data analyzed were the rich descriptions of experiences gathered from participant narratives or *testimonios* via semi-structured interviews.

Theoretical Framework

CRT and LatCrit were used in the analysis of Latina doctoral student experiences, institutional practices and the influence of institutional norms and practices on Latina doctoral student perspectives. “CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122). Six tenets guide CRT: (a) the centrality of racism, (b) rejection of liberalism and meritocracy, (c) intersectionality of oppression, (d) lived experiences and counterstories, (e) interest convergence, and commitment

to social justice (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Four of the six tenets: recognition of the intersectionality of oppression, permanence of racism, acknowledgment of lived experiences and counterstories, and commitment to social justice assisted in framing this study.

LatCrit builds on CRT by placing the unique needs of Latinas/as at the center of the theory. The Black-White paradigm prevalent in racial discourses informs “our understanding of what race and racism mean and the nature of our discussion about race” (Perea, 1995). To broaden our scope of racial identity to include the lived experiences and multiple identities of Latinas/as may result in more effective policies (Trucios-Haynes, 2001).

Participant Selection and Research Site

Criterion sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) was used to select the participants for this study. The criteria established “directly reflect[ed] the purpose of the study and guide[d] in the identification of information-rich cases” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). Sixteen Latinas meeting the following criteria were eligible to participate in this study: (a) those who self-identified as a U.S.-born Latina or Hispanic female, (b) those were currently enrolled in a doctoral program in the Eastern Coast of the United States, and (c) those who had completed at least two academic semesters of doctoral study.

Latina doctoral students who were not born in the United States encounter additional challenges and have lived experiences associated with being an immigrant. This study was conducted with U.S.-born Latina doctoral students in order to minimize the risk of undermining or negating nuanced experiences of Latina doctoral students who identify themselves as immigrants along with other identities. It is important to note that participants in this study were

daughters of immigrants or parents who were born on the U.S. commonwealth of Puerto Rico and later moved to the United States. Their experiences would also differ from Latina doctoral students whose parents were born in the country. While they have an awareness of the immigrant experience and their own lived experiences have been influenced by their parent(s) not being born in the United States, there are various challenges that they did not face, such as relocating to the United States or learning a new language. They also had privileges that were automatically afforded to them such as U.S. citizenship.

A focus was placed on studying Latinas in doctoral programs on the East Coast, a region of the United States that has been increasing in Latino/a population growth, as research on Latina doctoral students has not explored experiences using an East Coast sample. According to a 2016 report by the Pew Research Center, Florida, New York and New Jersey were among the top ten states in the nation with the fastest growing Latino/a populations between 2000 and 2011 (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). As of 2014, Florida ranks third among states with the largest percent of the United States Latino/a population (4.8 million Latino/a residents), followed by New York with 3.7 million Latinos/as. New Jersey ranks seventh with 1.7 million of the United States' Latino/a population (Stepler & Lopez, 2016).

Participants for this study are members of the *Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees* (LCDD) Facebook Group, a professional network space for Latina doctoral students, created, monitored and maintained by Dean of Students/Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs at Hofstra University Dr. Sofia B. Pertúz. The LCDD group is a closed group page, meaning the page administrator must approve members and only group members can post to the page and view posted content. Latina doctoral students on the page are encouraged to post questions, announcements for events, positions or studies, and resources geared toward scholarly writing.

A letter of solicitation for study participants (see Appendix B) was posted on the group page a total of four times during the course of four months. Twenty-three Latina doctoral students expressed initial interest in participating in the study; sixteen Latina doctoral students (see Table 3) successfully completed the IRB approved informed consent form, brief demographic questionnaire and interview during a six-month period.

Table 3. *Participant Profile for 16 Participants*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity Self-Identification	Parental Country(les) Of Origin	Doctoral Program
Alejandra	Mexican-American, Salvadoran, Native American (Pipil, Yaqui)	Mexico, El Salvador	Clinical Psychology
Viviana	Latina	Dominican Republic	Social Work
Diana	Latina	Mexico, Puerto Rico	Higher Education
Avery	Latina	Puerto Rico	Counselor Education
Elena	Dominican	Dominican Republic	Higher Education
Graciela	Latina	Puerto Rican/Dominican Republic	English
Julia	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rico	School Psychology
Carina	Latina	Dominican Republic	Urban Education
Olivia	Latina	Dominican Republic	Counselor Education

Monica	Chicana	Mexico	Clinical Psychology
Emilia	Mexican-American	Mexico	English Literature
Cierra	Hispanic	Puerto Rico, USA	Higher Education
Veronica	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rico	Higher Education
Valentina	Peruvian; Puerto Rican & Cuban	Peru, USA	Higher Education
Victoria	Chicana	Mexico	Higher Education
Mercedes	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rico	Special Education

There were 16 total participants. Eleven women were pursuing their doctorate in Mid-Atlantic States (NY – 4; NJ – 4; PA – 2; MD – 1), two were in doctoral programs in the New England region (MA – 2), and three were studying in the South Atlantic Region (FL – 3). Almost all participants in this study were full-time doctoral students with two studying part-time. A majority were in the latter stage of their doctoral program with two preparing for their comprehensive exams and eight working on their dissertation research. Of the six participants who were in the coursework stage of their doctoral program, three ranged from third to fifth year doctoral students and three were on their second year as full-time doctoral students.

Participants’ mothers’ educational attainment was higher than their fathers, although two fathers earned a bachelor’s degree and one earned a master’s degree (see Table 4). Mothers earned more secondary and post-secondary certificates/degrees than participants’ fathers with 10 mothers completing high school and beyond compared to five fathers. Six fathers had middle school as the highest level of education completed; four had elementary school as the highest level of education obtained.

Table 4. *Highest Level of Education Completed by Participants' Parents*

Highest Level of Education Completed	# of Participants' Fathers	# of Participants' Mothers
Elementary School	4	3
Middle School	6	3
High School	2	5
GED	0	1
Trade School	0	2
Associate's Degree	0	1
Bachelor's Degree	2*	1
Master's Degree	1	0
Unknown	1	0

* One bachelor's degree was completed outside of the United States

Data Collection

Study participants were provided with a letter of informed consent to review prior to selection (see Appendix C). Once participants submitted a signed informed consent form, they were asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D), which also aided in determining eligibility to participate in the study as well as provided some background information which, at times, prompted additional questions in the interview. Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E) which lasted between 40-116 minutes were conducted. A semi-

structured interview allowed for the data collected to be relatively consistent through predetermined questions while still providing the flexibility of a conversation. Whenever possible, efforts were made to conduct the interview in person at a location chosen by the participant. Due to distance and financial constraints, eight interviews were conducted using video chat. No phone interviews were conducted. Video conferencing allowed for a more personalized interview experiences as participants and I could see each other, observe and/or respond to physical reactions.

Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder and, on occasion, brief notations were made as a reminder to follow up with a response. In order to ensure protection and confidentiality, participant names and the names of their institutions are not used in this study; a pseudonym was assigned to each participant and their institution was described in terms of institution type and regional location rather than state. Digital audio files of each interview were stored on a password protected USB memory device in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. All digital audio files, demographic questionnaires, interview transcripts and field notes were safely stored and will be retained for at least three years in compliance with IRB guidelines after which they will be destroyed once it is determined that no further analysis is needed.

Data Analysis

Field notes and memos were written following each interview, reflecting on the narratives shared, tracking my own reactions and feelings as well as emerging themes and patterns. These memos also allowed me to make connections to previous interviews and focus on certain questions that should be asked in upcoming interviews. After listening to the audio-recordings and reading through interview transcripts once without coding, data was analyzed using Huberman and Miles' interactive model for data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Data

analysis was comprised of three stages that connect with one another: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Data reduction involved rereading the interview data along with the audio-recordings and conducting open, line by line coding to see what terms, patterns or themes emerged. These were written on the margins along with any questions or observations that surfaced for me. A list of predetermined codes based on themes from existing literature on doctoral students of color/Latino/a doctoral students that are relatable to principles of CRT and LatCrit were used and vetted against new codes that emerged from the data. These codes were: familial obligations, home identity/cultural identity, professional identity/academic identity, between two worlds, racial microaggressions, resistance, support networks, and mentors.

Following the reflection and coding of data, the information was reduced and summarized for the second stage, data display, which allowed for a more focused interpretation of data. After assigning codes to the entire interview transcript, I reviewed marginal notes and codes and was able to group certain codes into subcodes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These categories were used to generate themes. Conclusions were drawn after interpretations of analyzed data were revisited and their implications for the research questions posed.

Trustworthiness

This study used a variety of strategies to ensure trustworthiness of findings. Detailed records were kept to ensure that methods used to interpret data were consistent. Personal bias that may influence findings was acknowledged in reflective memos. Various experiences as a Latina doctoral student were journaled or discussed with my dissertation mentor and trusted faculty mentors who could assist with processing these experiences. This type of reflection and

feedback was critical in order to separate my experiences and not assume shared experiences with those of Latina doctoral students in my study when interpreting the data. Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and/or respondent validation were also used to decrease the likeliness of researcher bias or misinterpretation of data (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In order to effectively relay rich data collected from participant narratives, it is important to be cognizant of one's own stance and the effect one may have on the data (LeCompte, 1987). This was facilitated by maintaining a research journal reflecting on introspections and reactions after every interview as well as debriefing with trusted mentors/professionals. To qualify my ability to conduct this research, it is important for me to be transparent and describe relevant experiences that may have influenced how the topic emerged and how the data was interpreted (Creswell, 2009; Greenbank, 2003).

I approached the topic of Latina doctoral students' experience with negotiating ethnic identity and academic success as a Latina currently enrolled in a doctoral program. My experiences growing up as one of six children in various low-income neighborhoods in North Newark, New Jersey (referred to as "Little Puerto Rico" at the time) contributed to my sense of ethnic identity, or shared cultural values/traditions with my family and community members, as well as my belief that education is strongly connected with opportunities and social mobility. My father has a fifth grade education. He was unable to complete middle school as he had to help support his family by working at a sugar cane plantation in Puerto Rico. An enlarged picture of the plantation, which no longer exists, now hangs in my office—a reminder of his ultimate sacrifice for his family and my motivation to accomplish what he was not given the

opportunity to do. My mother completed high school before she married my father at 19 and started her family in Newark, NJ soon afterwards. We moved to Puerto Rico for approximately a year and a half. The scarcity in jobs resulted in returning to the states. I was four years old when we permanently moved to Newark with my 7-year old sister and 2-year old brother. My parents experienced challenges with finances and acclimating to American culture. *Mami* and *Papi* worked incessantly in a variety of blue collar jobs; the “American Dream” that everyone referred to always seemed just outside of their reach.

My parents, however, never allowed their challenges to dictate who they were or what they wanted for their children. Their focus was on taking care of “*la familia*” (the family) and extended family in our church community. They transmitted their Catholic faith and the importance of humility and service. They taught me that our rich cultural traditions and values regarding family and faith are part of our essence. I was also taught that our history is filled with beautiful stories as well as dark tales regarding colonization and that both needed to be acknowledged. My parents instilled a deep respect for education; they saw it as a privilege to be valued and taken advantage of as it would lead to better opportunities and “a ticket out” of our financial situation and away from drugs and crime. I wholeheartedly believed that education would be “our” ticket and wanted to share that passion with others as a teacher.

Attending a predominantly White, Catholic high school in a suburban area solidified my career goal at the time, not to educate myself to get out of Newark, but to become a high school teacher in Newark. My first memorable encounters with issues of race and ethnicity began in my first year of high school when I was referred to as a “nigger-spic” by a student and watched the teacher, nervous and in utter shock, stumble through her next words and proceed with the lesson. I was told by one of my AP teachers that I was a very good student, “unlike many Puerto Ricans

who tend to be lazy.” These are just a few of the many instances that ignited a fire inside of me, motivating me to excel in classes at all costs; this usually meant locking myself in the bathroom at home to study in a semi-quiet spot until someone came knocking. Other times it involved staying up until 2 am doing homework following home responsibilities which, at times, included feeding, bathing and taking care of my youngest siblings. I found some Latino/a students and relied on them for survival and support. I also befriended several students from various racial and social groups which enhanced my limited experiences having grown up in predominantly Latino/a and Black neighborhoods. I was relieved to be done with my four years of feeling like an outsider in high school and begin college on a full academic and service scholarship awarded to racial/ethnic minority students which since has been reduced to a partial scholarship.

It was in college that I transitioned from calling myself Puerto Rican to “Latina.” I am proud to declare that I am *Borinqueña*. As an undergraduate, however, I adopted the additional identity of Latina and used it to identify myself on campus after my freshman year. It was then that I came to believe that “Latino/a” students could work together as a collective voice in order to overcome any institutional barrier that affected us/students of color. My undergraduate experience was that our university administration was not looking at us or referring to us as “Puerto Ricans,” “Dominicans,” etc. but as “Hispanics” or “Latinos.”

With the mentorship of intelligent and dedicated Latino/a students, I became highly involved in programming targeting issues and needs related to the Latino community. It was the relationships established with these Latino/a students and the genuine compassion and mentorship of key university faculty and administrators that guided me as a first-generation college student and inspired me to pursue a career in higher education to pay it forward.

I began my journey under the Division of Student Affairs working for Housing and Residence Life and Upward Bound. These experiences not only afforded me the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to work in higher education, they nurtured my sense of compassion—a vital component for properly being able to establish a rapport with students, manage conflict and develop appropriate crisis intervention responses.

These lessons followed me as I transitioned over to Academic Affairs as a counselor and eventually director of a Title V grant at a Hispanic-Serving community college. Having a student services background was a definite advantage, but even more beneficial than my professional experience was my personal story. A majority of the freshmen served were first-generation Latino/a college students who required extensive guidance in the areas of admissions, financial aid, time management and academic advisement. Serving them provided me with a great sense of purpose; I understood their situations as I recalled my own struggle with navigating college choice and my academic experiences.

I am currently an academic administrator at a university where the Latino/a population is much less prevalent, both among students and faculty. Soon after I enrolled in a doctoral program, I became acutely aware of the underrepresentation of Latinas in my doctoral classes and the fact that there were no Latina (or Latino) faculty in the department. When I discussed my observations with the department chair, I was informed that there were quite a few academically talented and professionally successful Latina doctoral students who were ABD (all but dissertation). This phenomenon intrigued and disconcerted me at the same time. I sought these women out, with the help of the chair and one other faculty member committed to their successful completion, and created a network association geared towards facilitating an environment where experiences could be shared freely, collaborations on similar interests could

be made, mentorship opportunities between veteran and new students could develop, and a space to hold each other accountable for goals and degree completion could exist. The knowledge gained from all of these personal experiences provides me with a deeper understanding of the topic and can add to the validity of this study's results (Maxwell, 2005).

It is possible that participants will respond in accordance to social norms or how they perceive their answers will be judged—more commonly known as the *interviewer effect*. The fact that I, too, meet the criteria to participate in this study provided me with unique access to this group. According to Denscombe (2007), “the sex, the age, and the ethnic origins of the interviewer have a bearing on the amount of information people are willing to divulge and their honesty about what they reveal” (p. 184). Being a Latina doctoral student and supporting other Latina doctoral students provides me with experiential knowledge on how to create and facilitate a welcoming space for narratives or *testimonios* to be shared, thus, minimizing the possibility of victimizing participants as they share their lived experiences.

Limitations

Limitations for this study include the following:

Participant voices or narratives do not represent the stories of all Latina doctoral students' academic experiences. Additionally, differences among ethnicity/countries of origin may account for differences in personal and academic experiences.

A majority of participants in this study were full-time doctoral students (14/16). Experiences of full-time students (working, not working, graduate assistantship) could vary from those who are part-time and working full-time positions.

A majority of Latina doctoral students in this study were in programs within the fields of education or human services with a couple in the field of humanities. There may be differences in the experiences of Latinas pursuing doctorates in STEM or humanities fields.

There may be bias in my sample through my recruitment approach. There is a possibility that Latina doctoral students who are members of a Facebook community of Latina doctoral students are more engaged by virtue of participating in an online support network, although not all were consistently participating on the page.

Finally, while being a Latina doctoral student may provide me with unique access to participant experiences and feelings, there is a chance that it might inadvertently bias the interpretation of responses. To prevent this, I consistently made myself aware of my own stance and bias through reflective memos and discussions with faculty mentors and professionals which assisted me with separating feelings and effectively turning them into ways I can question participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore Latina doctoral students' academic experiences and how they negotiate their ethnic identity and academic success. In this study, I paid particular attention to experiences and components of ethnic identity related to culture, gender and race. Additionally, I explored institutional norms that reinforce a lack of fit for Latina doctoral students and what strategies they employed to address experiences of cultural incongruity in their doctoral programs. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. In what ways, if any, does culture, gender and race influence the experiences of Latina doctoral students and inform their sense of ethnic identity?
2. What cultural conflicts and academic challenges, if any, do Latina doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs?
3. How, if at all, do Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs?

This chapter introduces the *testimonios* of 16 Latina doctoral students. *Testimonios* are personal and educational lived experiences that are shared and serve to empower others by challenging the master narrative and validating racialized, gender or class-biased experiences (Jones, 2008). Analysis of rich, descriptive narratives obtained through semi-structured interviews revealed complex experiences regarding participants' multiple intersecting identities and how these identities influenced personal and professional relationships as well as academic success. In this chapter, I first discuss the various ways in which culture, gender, and race influence participant experiences and inform their sense of ethnic identity. For the purpose of this study, ethnic identity is defined as "self-identification, feelings of belongingness &

commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one's own ethnic group" (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 496). Culture, in this study, is defined as "the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (Bates & Plog, 1990, p. 7). Next, I explore instances of cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral experiences and examine the extent to which they are due to cultural/ethnic and racial factors. Then, I examine how these Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with experiences of cultural conflict and academic challenges in their programs. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit were used as theoretical frameworks to analyze how gender and race influence the experiences of these Latina doctoral students. I used four CRT principles to examine the narrative data: (a) the intersectionality of oppression; (b) the centrality and pervasiveness of racism; and (c) the sharing of counterstories as a means of challenging the dominant narrative; and (d) commitment to social justice. LatCrit is also used as it deepens the analysis by acknowledging and placing additional forms of oppression faced by the Latino community at the center of the Black-White racial discourse, broadening the scope of racial identity which is intertwined with ethnic identity for Latinos/as (Moran, 1997; Solórzano et al., 2000, 2000; Trucios-Haynes, 2000). LatCrit also critically analyzes issues of gender which is also engrained in Latino/a ethnic identity (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hernández-Truyol, 1997). Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary of the findings.

Influence of Culture, Gender and Race on Latina Experiences and Ethnic Identity

In the following section, I will describe how culture, gender and race influenced the experiences of Latina doctoral students. Participants in this study shared elements of their ethnic identity through narratives describing personal and academic experiences leading up to their

doctoral programs. In order to understand their experiences in their doctoral programs, it is important to explore how these women made sense of their lived experiences and ethnic identity prior to becoming doctoral students. These stories were examined using the CRT and LatCrit principles recognizing the intersectionality of oppression and how disempowerment can be the result of one's race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation or the intersection of such identities (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Influence of Culture and Gender. The following subsections will discuss the role that culture and gender played in shaping the experiences and ethnic identity of these Latina doctoral students. I will primarily discuss the intersection of culture and gender as a majority of participant narratives describe Latino/a cultural values in relation to gendered roles.

Latino/a Cultural Values Regarding Education. As participants described their background and early schooling experiences, they consistently shared how parents emphasized the importance of education. Similar to Gándara's (1982) study of 17 Chicana women pursuing terminal degrees and Espino's (2016) study of Latina faculty, researchers and administrators, participants' mothers played a critical role in their educational progress, mainly through support for their daughters. Interestingly, and unlike previous studies on Latinas in higher education, several fathers were influential with regard to participants' educational goals and achievement. Strong encouragement for higher education was not limited to fathers who had obtained a bachelor's degree (n=3); several who had elementary school as their highest level of educational attainment were actively involved in their doctoral process by simply inquiring about their academics or attending professional/academic events.

Those who spoke about their mothers' active role in their education consistently talked about their constant and unconditional support throughout their educational experiences, even

when they could not understand or help their daughters with their assignments as highlighted by Mercedes,

I just remember being on my own doing my school work...my mom couldn't help me. I know that she valued it...I vividly remember having projects...she would take me to the store, buy the materials, and she'd be there, but she had no clue if I was doing it right.

Being present in some form, even if they did not understand, was very important to these mothers. This continued as their daughters attended college.

Paternal roles in regards to education often took the form of valued-centered support for education as a way to improve life. Participants whose fathers had obtained post-secondary degrees were the most vocal about their father's views on education and the educational values they instilled in them. Education was seen as an instrument that could further one's profession, no matter the field. This idea is what compelled Avery's father, an auto mechanic raising a family in an inner city, to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Accounting after his boss noticed his mathematical skills and began assigning him administrative responsibilities at the shop. Avery was exposed to higher education as a young child; she recalled how there were times when her father had to bring her to his college classes. It was her father whom she would later call for support during her undergraduate years at an Ivy League institution where she was overwhelmed with the "culture clash," academic rigor and the thought of disappointing him. Other participants spoke about the academic pressure they received from fathers or step-fathers while pursuing their masters and doctoral degrees. For Julia, Emilia and Diana, paternal validation for academic achievement was not awarded easily as Julia describes, "My stepfather is a perfectionist. So now I'm waiting for my grades...And my stepfather is like, 'I know you're not going to get an A minus, right?' Everything is an A."

Overall, whether it was through unconditional support, leading by example or pressure to excel academically, these women received constant and consistent messaging from their parents regarding the importance of education: “No matter what happens in your life, if you lose everything, you’re never going to lose your education.” While these Latina doctoral students received strong familial support for their educational advancement, they simultaneously received conflicting cultural messaging about their gendered obligations to family which I will present in the next subsection.

Latino/a Cultural Values Regarding Family. One of the strongest principles held in Latino/a culture is—*familismo* (familism). This concept of *familismo* embodies a strong sense of identification with respect and responsibility to immediate and extended family members and, in some cases, close friends of the family. Individual goals and desires are believed to be secondary to the honor, needs and well-being of family and community (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008). In addition to language, cultural traditions and idealized gender roles emphasizing female modesty and submissiveness, this strong obligation to family and the Latino/a community are fundamental to the construction of a whole, collective identity for Latinos/as. The following subsection will explore how participants in my study made sense of their cultural obligation to family from the perspective of a Latina female.

Latino Cultural Values Regarding Gender. Several participants experienced conflict with parents or family members over their decision to leave home to pursue their academic goals. For Julia, Olivia, Emilia and Victoria, leaving for college was considered “breaking tradition”. Olivia shared that family members stopped speaking to her and shamed her mother for allowing her to leave. “So in my family you’re not supposed to move out of your parent’s house until you’re married, but the women in my family married at 19, 20, 21...so that was kind of the norm

for them and what I was doing was just the worst thing ever...like I was trying to run away from home...”.

It is important to note that breaking tradition, in this sense, meant leaving before one was married. This was considered unacceptable—for a Latina female. For a majority of these women, acknowledging their ethnic identity also meant recognizing cultural attitudes toward gender roles that advance male authority and female submissiveness (Ruiz & Sánchez Korrol, 2006). Victoria shared:

So that sexism piece is really important to me. Just the messages that I got growing up about how I had an earlier curfew than my brother who was younger than me, the respectability politics of manners and staying quiet and listening to elders, and dressing in such a way as to communicate femininity and not belching and not cursing...learning how to cook. The ways in which race intersects with gender or sex, I think, is really important to Latina women in ways that obviously Latino men don't have to think about.

Many of these women found that gender expectations affected the decisions they made about higher education. Some participants remained close to home because this was the expectation; others negotiated educational goals with parents and, if they could not successfully do so, some resisted. Both Victoria and Julia's parents expected them to attend college but stay home regardless of scholarships offered or the prestige of the institution. Both were defiant and left. Julia recalls, “I had to go. I had to get that experience. I don't regret it.”

Similar to the Latina women who earned their Ph.D.s in Espino's (2016) study, the tension between being educated while still adhering to cultural traditions, particularly around gender roles, intensified for many participants as they chose to pursue a doctoral degree. Emilia shared:

It was really hard for me to come over here initially because I think they also felt like I was abandoning them...I got a lot of flak from older aunts who would tell me that I was not – I was not being a good daughter because my parents are older and so I'm expected to take care of them...I'm leaving instead of staying with them and working hard and giving them all of my money...getting married and making babies, you know, because that's what I should do.

Several women in this study expressed that they were aware of their families' pride in their accomplishments, at times, observing parents and siblings sharing with others that their daughter or sister was in a doctoral program. As demands in academia increased, however, familial support and understanding dwindled among concerns that they would not fulfill their gendered expectations. Viviana, who has two younger sisters who are married, recalled, "...it's so much pressure on me...you can have all these degrees, but you don't have a husband, so what are you doing?"

Latina doctoral students in this study were not only challenged about moving away from home and/or getting married, they also endured pressure about starting their own families. Although not exclusive to Latina women, cultural/societal messaging regarding timelines for having children were seen in Diana and Graciela's narratives regarding motherhood while pursuing their doctorate. Diana, mother of five-month old twins, recalled how six years earlier she received the news of her acceptance into a Ph.D. program:

Diana: I was absolutely devastated in some ways that I was going to get this Ph.D. and I felt like that's what God really wanted for me to do...because I just wanted to get married and have kids.

Interviewer: I was just going to ask you, why were you devastated?

Diana: I'm like—I'm 29 years old [at the time]...I should have already had like two or three kids, and – and there was almost that – like that underlying panic, right?

News of being admitted into a doctoral program, which otherwise would have been received with celebration, brought about anxiety. Carter et al. (2013) found that a recurring concern for female doctoral students was the realization that increased time to fulfill academic goals jeopardized the goal of motherhood.

Eleven out of 16 participants were not mothers at the time of their interviews (see Table 5). Some described intense pain as a result of being questioned about their academic or professional decisions and why they did not have children. For example, Valentina, a doctoral student studying at a private, mid-sized university in the Northeast, shared that her father is one of the few individuals who are so supportive and proud of her achievements. She also recognized, however, that he holds on to cultural values, stressing the need for her to be married and have children despite the fact that she was married once before and has made it clear that she does not want children. She goes on to describe the difference in her mother's family reactions to motherhood versus academic achievement in her doctoral program: "There's much more excitement over a cousin of mine having a baby than "Oh, wow, she's ABD." No one gave a damn that I was ABD...this is a big deal to me. I cried when I got that final grade. I'm like oh my God, I really made it through. And no one cares. And it hurts. It hurts."

Table 5. *Age, Marital, and Motherhood Status of the 16 Participants*

Participant	Age	Marital Status	# of Children
Alejandra	31	Single	0
Viviana	39	Partnered	1

Diana	35	Divorced/Remarried	2
Avery	34	Married	2
Elena	30	Partnered	0
Graciela	28	Partnered	2
Julia	23	Single	0
Carina	48	Married	0
Olivia	29	Single	0
Monica	28	Partnered	0
Emilia	29	Single	0
Cierra	33	Divorced	0
Veronica	54	Single	0
Valentina	41	Divorced	0
Victoria	29	Partnered	0
Mercedes	35	Divorced	1

At times, the focus on gendered cultural values and what was perceived to be a disregard for their academic goals and accomplishments produced sadness; in other instances, they caused anger. Carina, who is currently pursuing her doctorate at a large, public university in the Northeast, was repeatedly questioned by Latinos/as regarding her professional choices or being “allowed” to pursue a career over family. These questions demonstrated cultural attitudes toward women often seen in *machismo* (Ruiz & Sánchez Korrel, 2006) and *marianismo* (Nuñez et al., 2016) which Carina resisted:

"¿Tú no tienes hijos? ¿Y tu esposo te deja estudiar? ¿Y ven aca, tú tienes una carrera? ¿Y él deja que tú—" [You don't have kids? And your husband lets you study? And, wait a minute, you have a career? And he lets you—] That just takes me into crazy. I want to go crazy. I want to scream...to me those are boundaries-breaking...somebody asking me, "Did you have kids? Why don't you have kids?" And literally my response is, like with the anger that I feel, "¿Pero usted me está preguntando que si yo tengo un centro reproductivo? ¿Qué—qué derecho le da a usted a hablar de mi centro reproductivo? ¿Usted sabe si yo puedo tener hijos o no?" [“So you are asking me if I have a reproductive system? What—what right do you have to be talking about my reproductive system? Do you know if I can have kids or not?”]

Earning a doctoral degree, for several participants, defied gender roles, both for women who were not mothers as well as those who had children. Avery, mother of three-year old twins, shared that obtaining a Ph.D. would provide her with options and “self-confidence” to resist cultural values that assign gender roles. “I can only do that because I have the Ph.D. in my mind. So that, to me, gives that power back that I think is taken from us as Latinas who are told, you know, raise your kids and let your husband earn the money and don't complain...I oppose all of those messages...” The oppression that these Latina doctoral students experienced as a result of their gender was deeply intertwined with their cultural values. Academic decisions that were made, both undergraduate and doctoral, conflicted with Latino/a cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity. The complexity and inability to separate intersecting identities is also seen when exploring the influence of race in shaping the experiences and ethnic identity of these Latina doctoral students, which the following subsection will explore.

Influence of Race on Latina Experiences and Ethnic Identity. In this subsection, I will primarily discuss the perception of race, as well as its intersection with culture and gender, based on personal and academic experiences which contributed to participants' sense of ethnic identity. The women in this study acknowledged their mixed race origins and cultural influences, making it difficult for them to choose one race or separate race and ethnicity. The topic of colorism, or skin color classification, in the Latino/a community was found in multiple narratives from participants who self-identified as dark-skinned or Black Latinas and light-skinned or White Latinas. Experiences with colorism exacerbated the racial identity conflict that several Latinas experienced from feeling forced to choose a race. Latinas who identified with being Black or having experiences as a Black woman described how their skin color and physical appearance were at the forefront of their interactions with others and influenced their gender and cultural identities. Self-identified light-skinned Latinas shared experiences acknowledging colorism and their skin color privilege. For several Latinas, these personal and academic experiences related to race influenced a shift in their racial/ethnic identity in various stages of their undergraduate and doctoral experiences.

A majority of participant narratives regarding race were centered around "fitting in" within racial identity in the United States. Latinos/as often do not identify with racial categories stemming from the Black-White paradigm (Lawrence, 1995; Perea, 1997; Ramirez, 1995; Trucios-Haynes, 2001). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Latinos/as accounted for 97% of 19 million individuals who selected the category "some other race" when asked to identify their race (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014). In light of the number of Latinos/as who chose not to identify with racial categories on the U.S. Census, the question of race was left open-ended on the demographic questionnaire for Latina doctoral students in this study. Eleven out of 16

participants' responses qualify as "some other race." Eight were written in and three were left blank (see Table 6). Self-identified categories for race included terms such as "Multiracial," "Mixed," "Latina," "Hispanic," and "Brown". The following interview excerpts illustrate some of the reasons behind wanting to redefine their race—to acknowledge multiple races or to say they do not fit into any one:

Elena: So I think for me, the multiracial aspect... really comes from...the different races that exist throughout my family and saying that I'm not White, but I'm not Black. Right? I'm both.

Veronica: I guess I have a problem with the whole thing of race. Science tells us there's what, four or five groups...I don't see myself fitting into any one category and never have...But I am Puerto Rican and I see myself as mixed. So I always have trouble when people say, what race? I have no idea. Human.

Table 6. *Self-Identified Race and Ethnicity of the 16 Participants*

Participant	Race	Ethnicity	Parental Country(ies) of Origin
Alejandra		Mexican-American, Salvadoran, Native American (Pipil, Yaqui)	Mexico, El Salvador
Viviana	Black/Afro-Caribbean	Latina	Dominican Republic
Diana	White*	Latina	Mexico, Puerto Rico
Avery	White	Latino	Puerto Rico
Elena	Multiracial	Dominican	Dominican Republic

Graciela	Black	Latina	Puerto Rican/Dominican Republic
Julia	Mixed	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rico
Carina	Latina/Color	Latina	Dominican Republic
Olivia	Black	Latina	Dominican Republic
Monica	Latina	Chicana	Mexico
Emilia	Brown	Mexican-American	Mexico
Cierra	Puerto Rican	Hispanic	Puerto Rico, USA
Veronica	Mixed	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rico
Valentina		Peruvian; Puerto Rican & Cuban	Peru, USA
Victoria		Chicana	Mexico
Mercedes	Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rico

Diana, a doctoral student of Mexican-American and Puerto Rican descent, described the first time she was bewildered by the question of race/ethnicity on the U.S. Census, “I was like what is this? I’m really confused...I just wrote in Puerto Rican Mexican”. Her confusion turned into to discomfort once race was the only question asked of her while obtaining her driver’s license at a new state. She felt forced to choose a race and was not at ease with her decision*:

“Oh, what are you?” And I was like, “Oh, I’m Latina.” And they were like, “No, no, no. What’s your race?” And no one had asked me directly what my race was. I’ve always—it’s always been what’s your race/ethnicity? And then I would say Latina or I would say Hispanic or whatever term that was salient at the time...that was the first time I ever told anyone I was White and I was like, “I don’t want to be White.”

Alejandra, Valentina and Victoria purposefully left the question of race blank on the participant questionnaire. Leaving it blank was a form of resistance to being labeled or forced to choose one racial identity. For Alejandra and Victoria, choosing “White,” which is what they believe others would like to label them, would negate their indigenous heritage and other racial influences. Valentina whose parents are Peruvian and Puerto Rican/Cuban, rejects race all together as an unnecessary divisive power construct, “Race...it’s a man-made thing...to me it causes more problems than solutions. It pits us against each other. It just causes so much intensity and you can see that now in what’s been going on with the presidential election and just in general. I just think the environment for the last couple of years has just become more angry and more hateful.”

Three participant did not recognize traditional definitions of race and identified their race as “Hispanic” or “Latino,” terms that the United States Census considers as one’s “ethnicity”. Mercedes, a Puerto Rican doctoral candidate at a large public university in the Northeast, identifies her race as Hispanic, adding that being a White Hispanic or a Black Hispanic is part of that. As most participants described, the concept of race and being “forced to choose White or Black” does not make sense to her and creates a racial identity struggle because she identifies with both as she explains,

Si es blanco ó piel negra...[If you are white or your skin is black] there’s some stigma behind that...personally, I struggle because—I always make a joke that I’m mixed within the race...so my mom, she is white as can be, hazel eyes. My grandmother is blue-eyed, blanca pero blanca, rubia...[white, very white, blonde]...but my dad, es puro Africano, [is pure African]...all his family, very dark-skinned...I’m like a mix...I’m very light-skinned, but I have the hair...this is all straightened...you know el pelo grifo [kinky

hair], the bigger nose, the big lips...I very much have those African features...but I am extremely light...I am Puerto Rican, but I – I recognize my African roots and I recognize my Spanish roots. I recognize all the roots...I just hate when you have to choose.

While describing her mixed racial identity, Mercedes calls attention to cultural perceptions of skin color and phenotype with a particular focus on the stigma associated with being Black. While no predetermined questions in this study were geared toward exploring issues of race within the Latino/a community, more than half of participants (n=9) discussed cultural messaging regarding skin color preference or prejudice. “Colorism, or skin color stratification, is a process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas such as income, education, housing, and the marriage market” (Hunter, 2007, p. 237). Colorism among Latinos/as is difficult to address because it is rooted in racism and often denied by embracing such terms as “*mestizaje*” (miscegenation) which, on the surface, recognizes the amalgamation of different races and cultures that make up Latinos/as. *Mestizaje*, however, clearly places a preference on the “mestizo/a,” an individual of European and indigenous descent over “mulato/a” which refers to someone with mixed European and African ancestry or parents.

These cultural beliefs distinguishing Latinos/as by color and physical characteristics were not always directly expressed to participants; they were implied by the statements participants heard and/or the nicknames they or others were given. At times, these rich narratives on colorism were presented as part of a larger story and, when possible, I would ask participants if they could share a little bit more about that particular experience or what they meant by a term or statement so as to not assume their meaning. For instance, the term “Indio” had a negative connotation for Alejandra’s family whereas “India” was considered a compliment for members in Julia’s family.

Interviewer: I want to pedal back to this statement that you said, “Being *Indio* is a bad thing within the Latino community”. Can you elaborate as to what you were either taught or exposed to regarding this?

Alejandra: So no one ever said outright to me like it’s bad...my oldest siblings are very fair-skinned—so they would always look at them...It would just be like, “Oh my God, your skin is so beautiful! “*O, que gueritos!*” [diminutive for *Guero* – Spanish slang term for a fair-skinned or light-haired person]...when we would go back to Mexico or El Salvador, they’d be like, “Oh my God, I should have gone to the U.S. and had White kids.”...But it was always like....we’re not *Indio*, even though we very clearly were, you know? [My mom] would always say stuff like, if it was someone who was dark-skinned and they were arguing with her, when we would get in the car, she would say, “*Indio feo [ugly Indian]*” and I’d be like hmm...it was very clear to me that that was not something you wanted to be...

Julia, who is Puerto Rican, shared that her family ignores their African roots, although not maliciously, by focusing on their Taíno heritage. She enrolled in numerous Latino/a studies courses in college in an attempt to learn more about her Caribbean identity; most classes focused on South and Central America. It was then, however, that she was able to reflect on the messages she received from family members who complimented her on her looks, “You look so Taíno...*Que India!*” to which she would respond, “Thank you.” She now questions, “Is that from [our Taíno roots] or is that from our African roots?”

Graciela and Olivia, who both identify their race as Black, shared various experiences of how their skin color was foremost when they interacted with others and how this affected how they viewed themselves. Olivia, who is Dominican, stated that her physical features would prompt others to assume and even assign a racial and ethnic identity for her: “Oh, you’re mixed, right? You’re mixed. You’re Black and Puerto Rican.” Such a statement serves to delegitimize her ethnic identity, i.e. you cannot be fully Latina because your physical appearance does not fit the idealized *mestiza* image.

Graciela, who is Puerto Rican and Dominican, elaborated on how Latino/a terms of endearment associated with her darker skin, such as “negrita or morena or india” [*black female or dark-skinned female or Indian female*] caused her to feel shame about her skin color at a young age. Convinced that something was wrong with her, Graciela attempted to appear less Black, demonstrating that she had internalized colorism. She wanted to be light-skinned believing that it was better.

I wanted to be able to look a certain way or feel a certain way. And I vividly remember being about 12 years old and putting on makeup that was like two complexions lighter than me so that that way I could look lighter...it was something that I wrestled with because I just wanted to be light-skinned. I thought being dark was, you know, a bad thing and—was just not necessarily pretty...my skin color is, like—that's your image of beauty, right? If you're thinking about your skin color when people are calling you different terms, it really sends a message about what you look like. So it was basically telling me, well, if they're calling me these things and they're pointing out my skin color, then it must be something that – that's, you know, weird about that or that's not right about that.

Comas-Díaz (1996) states that both types of experiences are detrimental to the mental health of LatiNegras or Afro-Latinas who are a “three minorities in one” (p. 188) because of their race, ethnicity and gender. Being able to claim their own identity is critical to their empowerment (Hill Collins, 2009; Helms, 1990a as in Comas-Diaz, 1996). Denying or rejecting their blackness as a result of oppressive messages about their physical appearance can lead to hopelessness and low self-esteem (Comas-Diaz, 1996). Victoria, a self-identified light-skinned Latina, highlighted the complexity of racism towards her Latina peers who are darker-skinned and the possible psychological and emotional consequences of them not being able to identify as either Black or Latina, “So I think not being able to, I speculate, that not being able to fit in that box is troublesome on someone's psyche—not fitting in with Latina, not fitting in with Blackness and what that might do to one's heart, like how that might hurt.”

For participants who described themselves as “light-skinned” or “white” Latinas (n=5), skin color and phenotype also influenced their interactions, albeit differently. These participants acknowledged advantages they had as a result of being light-skinned. Four talked about “*passing*,” not to explain a deliberate act or attempt to pass or be perceived as White, but to take ownership of some of the personal and academic privileges afforded to them because of their skin color. All four who used the term “pass,” in some form, Alejandra, Diana, Emilia and Victoria, are of Mexican descent; Diana is also of Puerto Rican descent.

Diana shared how she learned about the perils of racial passing from her darker-skinned mother, “You can’t deny yourself... You better not pass... Your skin is white. You are my white baby.” Her mother’s warning, however, did not focus on how racial passing would negatively impact her, but more so on how not claiming her ethnic identity would affect White people who would have not offered her access had they known about her ethnic background, “So the White

people will let you in the door and then they'll say [gasps], what have I done? I let this – this Latina in. I let this Mexican in.”

Alejandra, Emilia and Victoria discussed how their experiences, particularly with racism, in their doctoral programs differed from doctoral students who are darker-skinned or Black because they felt they were “passable” in the others’ eyes. Alejandra and Victoria explained how they came to this understanding through academic experiences in which they witnessed the difference in treatment between them and Black doctoral students or Latina doctoral students who identify as Afro-Latina. The disparity was seen, for example, in how students questioned Black doctoral teaching assistants vs. White or light-skinned Latina doctoral students. Alejandra mentioned that she is often assumed to be Italian because of her appearance and last name. Victoria noted that she feels she has benefitted from her skin color observing that the majority of Latino/a academics at professional conferences are light-skinned.

For several Latinas in this study, personal and academic experiences related to race influenced a shift in their racial and ethnic identity in various stages of their undergraduate and doctoral experiences as will be explored in the following section.

Shift in Racial/Ethnic Identity. A majority of participants (n=10) discussed a shift toward a racial/ethnic identity that made more sense to them based on their experiences leading up to and including their doctoral programs. Graciela, Olivia and Carina all shared pivotal moments in their lives that allowed them to learn about and take pride in their Black racial identity. Recognizing their ethnic identity as Latinas was just as important to them. Both Graciela and Olivia found that the term “Afro-Latina” better defined who they were. Olivia stated that she assimilated to Black culture while growing up because she was seen and treated as Black. Experiences of racism within the Latino/a and White community often compel

LatiNegras or Afro-Latinas to assimilate to African American culture (Comas-Díaz, 1996).

When it came to identifying her race, however, Olivia used to check off “Hispanic” and under “Other” write in “Dominican.” This changed once she went to college and continued throughout her graduate studies.

I met so many other Blacks from so many other cultures, so Caribbean, Indian and Nigerian, Ethiopian...I felt like, no, I am Black. My race is Black. I'm perceived as Black and the experiences I've had is as a Black person...I started marking Black Latina or Black Hispanic...these days, I say Afro-Latina...I identify as Black, but culturally my ethnic identity is Latina; it's Dominican.

Like Olivia, Carina also experienced a profound shift with her racial identity as an undergraduate during a summer scholarship program at an Ivy League institution where she studied African writers in exile. She explained how this experience was critical to her identity development, allowing her to embrace her racial roots despite cultural beliefs that negated it. “That’s when I learned about race, my race, and knowing that I’m Black...I wasn’t taught this growing up. I’m Dominican—lot of issues for the record...we’re not Black ‘*entre comillas*’ [quote-end quote] ...it was just an important touchdown in development to recognize this and be deeply ashamed, but then deeply like I have to make up for lost time of understanding that.”

Even Latinas who were comfortable with their racial or ethnic identity during their undergraduate years experienced shifts later on. Avery shared that even though she identified with a certain racial category, it was not how others viewed her, causing her to undergo an “identity search” to discover and “embrace who [she] was as a Puerto Rican woman.” She shared what she deemed a transformative moment with regard to her ethnic identity. After

sharing that she had undergone in vitro fertilization following a question about her twins, Avery was then told by her husband's coworker that mixed-race embryos were highly valuable.

I was, in my mind, thinking mixed race? My kids are not mixed race...this White woman just out of the blue who had never met me before telling me that my kids, that my embryos, are mixed race...it was the first time when someone overtly told me basically we—I—don't view you as White when all my life I thought I was White. So that led me into my whole immersion experience and I said, "Okay. People don't view me as White. So what am I?"

Other participants in this study spoke about shifts focusing on their ethnic identity, however, these were in response to academic experiences in their doctoral programs. Elena, Monica, Emilia and Victoria all moved from areas that had a large Latino/a community to pursue their doctorate in regions where Latino/a representation was significantly lower. The result was a need to shift or express their specific ethnic identity in their doctoral programs.

Elena moved from the North Eastern part of the United States to the South. As an undergraduate, she proudly identified herself as Dominican. When she became President of a Latino/a student organization, she saw the need to identify as "Latina" in order to serve as a voice for all other Latino/a students on campus. Once she moved south to pursue her doctoral studies, she found herself in "an identity search." She explained the thought process behind her decision to revert to identifying as Dominican: "Should I call myself Latina here? Or should I call myself Dominican? And I think in that particular space, I'd had to call myself Dominican. I had to sort of maybe defend where I was from..."I'm, I'm not from where you may think I am..."Don't kind of put me in a label, in a box. This is where I wish to be."

Victoria, Monica and Emilia found it very important to express their Chicana or Mexican-American identity as they navigated their doctoral programs in the East Coast. Monica explained how claiming her Chicana identity in college was important to her because it incorporates “the history and politics of a very specific identity” distinct from Mexicans who are born in Mexico. During her doctoral program, Monica became very aware of her ethnic identity because of her current location—having moved from one region “where there are so many brown people” to “no Mexicans here.” She felt that she needed to express her identity through items and accessories such as earrings or bags that were Mexican so that people would know who she was, “Look at me, this is who I am...I’m taking space as a Mexican woman in...a sea of Whites.”

Unlike Monica, Emilia wanted to distinguish herself from her cousins “who were very into the Chicano Power Movement”. Overcome by the responsibility of taking an active, political stance as a collective and perhaps partly wanting to grow her identity as an individual, Emilia did not choose Latino or Chicano Studies as other friends or family members did. She wanted to pursue an academic identity that was not necessarily defined by her ethnic identity. She explained,

“...it was an expectation that every single one of us would be a model, you know. That we would all major in – in something that dealt with Latinos and that we would all work to fight the power...I – I felt very overwhelmed by that. And I felt like why should this be an expectation of me? Like I – I feel like – and in my surroundings...there were protests like every other week...everyone and their mother would be there...I’m not really needed here, you know? There are so many other activists here... I want to bring

my voice where my voice isn't...I felt like in English...there were less of people of color there...I felt less represented, you know, and I wanted to contribute to that.

Now in her doctoral program and having had experiences where she felt it necessary to introduce perspectives related to race for classmates to consider, "I feel like now, I'm starting to come into my racial identity...I'm here—I'm a lot more open. Now that I've been separated from all the brown people, I feel like I—I can now go back to that."

To summarize, a majority of participants shared the struggle of not being able to identify with a particular racial category because they were mixed racially. Being placed in a position where they had to choose one race and possibly deny another made them feel "uncomfortable," "resent[ful]" and "otherized," to name a few. As a result, some participants chose to reject identifying with a race entirely while others based their racial identification on their racialized lived experiences. For many participants, these personal and academic experiences related to race influenced a shift in their racial and/or ethnic identification which they believed more accurately defined how they viewed themselves in relation to others. Being able to identify themselves was very important to Latina doctoral students in this study. The following section explores their own definitions of what it means to be Latina.

Latina Identity Defined. The culmination of experiences related to participants' cultural, gender and racial identity helped to shape their "Latina Identity". While these women came from various ethnic/cultural backgrounds, races, and ages, their perceptions of what it meant to be Latina were notably similar. Being Latina encompassed strength and pride in a culture that celebrates its heritage and passes down tradition through music, food and language. It also meant responsibility to family and community and acknowledging that this is an important role for women in the Latino/a community, thus, adding to their strength and value.

Strength and Pride. When asked the question “What does it mean to be Latina?” participants in this study overwhelmingly spoke about strength and pride. Ten participants shared their perspectives on the multiple struggles that Latinos/as have and still face in the United States, the value of these obstacles as they reveal strength, and the pride they felt both for their resiliency and cultural traditions which help them to express themselves as well as navigate through some of the struggles. Veronica shares, “It means to be strong. It means family. It means pride. It means holding on to the past or being proud of the past while you move forward...It's learning to go through the struggle and coming out winning at the other side, and I think we got that from our parents, from the women in my family.”

Culture, Music, Food and Language. Nearly half of participants (n=7) spoke of Latino/a culture, music, food and language, stating that these all contributed to what it meant to be Latina. These cultural elements which were passed down from generation to generation not only contributed to their identity as a Latina, but also served as cultural mechanisms to connect with others and cope with struggles: “You could just turn on Spanish music...and all the troubles go away...we have it in our blood to just let it go or dance it away.”

Family and Community. Because much of the research on the Latino/a community references the collective identity that Latinos/as share with family and their community (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008), I expected more responses to tie Latina identity with family. However, only five participants directly spoke about family being part of their Latina identity. Four spoke about the importance of community. Monica stated that in addition to being proud of her culture, language and family, part of her Latina identity encompasses being able to return to and assist her community: “It means to be proud of who I am, of my heritage, of speaking Spanish...valuing my family and my culture and wanting to give back to my community...I

grew up in a very underserved, very poor area...I include that as part of my identity as a Latina—that I wanna go back to my community and help...”

Strong Women. Interestingly, only five participants spoke in terms of gender in their description of what it meant to be Latina although gender is incorporated in the word by nature of the Spanish language (In Spanish, nouns that end with “a” are feminine). Strength, pride, food, culture, music, language, family and community were talked about with much more frequency. This raises the question of whether or not most participants see experiences associated with culture and race as playing a more dominant role in their Latina identity or is it possible that gender is just too intertwined with these identities to separate.

All five participants who spoke about the Latina woman used the adjective “strong” (n=4) or “resilient” (n=1) to define them. Diana, Victoria and Veronica recalled the barriers their mothers faced when providing examples of strong Latina women. They credited generations of strong women with teaching them how to overcome obstacles and to fight for their family as well others in the Latino/a community. While defining what it means to be Latina, Valentina took a moment to separate and focus on gender identity and how difficult it is to be a woman without considering other identities. Being Latina adds another level of complexity to gendered experiences as she explains, “...the word resilient just comes to my mind because being a woman is so hard anyway—just in general if you take away all of the other identities...And then on top of that, if you’re Latina, you’re now dealing with a lot of culture-clash, too, because the ‘me’ here is not the ‘me’ that’s at home.” Valentina expresses what many other participants described when discussing the overall climate in their departments. Latina doctoral students in this study experienced multiple instances of cultural conflict in their doctoral programs as the next section will explore.

Cultural Conflicts and Academic Challenges for Latina Doctoral Students

The following section examines experiences of cultural incongruity between core values that are part of these Latina doctoral students' ethnic identity and the norms and expectations required of them to succeed in academia. Latino/a values regarding placing the needs of family first, the importance of working as a collective and giving back to one's community were not compatible with departmental behaviors and academic expectations. Additionally, participants in this study reported racialized academic challenges which were explored using the CRT tenet that contends racism is a permanent fixture in American society. "A CRT lens unveils the various forms in which racism continually manifests itself, despite espoused institutional values regarding equity and social justice" (Harper et al., 2009, p. 390). Academic obstacles included a lack of support for racially/ethnically based research, a lack of racial/ethnic diversity among faculty, experiencing racial/ethnic microaggressions, otherness and isolation, and feeling like an imposter.

Lack of Understanding about Familismo. Several participants shared narratives illustrating how departmental norms and expectations considered essential for cultivating their identity as a doctoral student, conflicted with Latino/a cultural values regarding taking care of or establishing their own family. Being present on campus, working with faculty, presenting at conferences and publishing were seen as markers of a successful doctoral student. While some were able to partake in these types of academic activities, many shared that they were not able to engage in such opportunities to the extent that they desired or that was expected of them because of familial obligations. According to Graciela:

It's been interesting trying to balance my relationship at home with my relationship with the university...I'm pretty sure people feel like, you know, I'm not there as much as I

need to be or I should be more present...my response to them is always that my family comes first, which I know a lot of scholars and even other White students don't have that same automatic response.

Participants felt that there was a lack of understanding, on the part of faculty, about the importance of family in the Latino/a culture and what role Latinas play in the family. Veronica explains,

We're expected to still be the caretakers. Family is not just you or you and your spouse, you and your children. It's your mother, it's your grandmother, it's your aunt, it's your siblings... I don't think a lot them get it. It doesn't matter where we are in life, it doesn't matter how old we are. Those individuals in our life play an important role...if it wasn't for them, I would not be where I am... I stand on their shoulders...It's, I think, a Latino way of life as opposed to an Americanized way of life...

They attributed the lack of understanding to American values and perceived that faculty did not understand, or in some cases respect, the principal of *familismo* because of how they responded to them, "There was a lack of empathy and compassion." At times, their words or reactions would make participants feel conflicted about their cultural values or criticized for their choices as Olivia highlighted:

And so this obligation to family, they don't understand...sometimes their words are – they make you feel like you're crazy or you're wrong for not being more independent, you know, those Western ideas. You gotta be an independent woman and stand on your own two feet. Not all of them...some of the staff. I just felt the judgment there.... "Get it together." And to them "Get it together," looks like be your own person and don't have any commitments to anyone else.

On the other side of the spectrum, participants also discussed the guilt and sadness they felt for spending less time with family (González, 2001) as a result of having to devote more time to their academic responsibilities (Espino, 2016). These women found themselves in situations that were very similar to their undergraduate experiences. Family members were proud of their educational accomplishments, but were less supportive when they felt that their daughters were placing their education before them. Viviana shared:

I'm a big family person...I love my family. We are very tight. And since I've been in the program...I can't attend every single event. I can't go to Mami's house every Sunday to have dinner with the family...that's been a major thing...And then the guilt trip from my mother and my father...so I feel guilty...there's been times that I've been home...at bed at night like literally crying...they don't understand...it's not like I don't want to spend time with my family...that's a very important thing to me, but I also have these responsibilities...it's like, "What are you doing?"

While family and loved ones were a top priority for participants, many who attempted to balance familial obligations with academic requirements were left feeling as if they were fulfilling expectations for one and not the other. Alternatively, some of the women interviewed (five in total) expressed feeling that they were "failing" at both even though they were performing well academically and were reassured by family members that they were doing their part. Only one participant, Graciela, stated that she felt she was living up to familial and academic expectations, but by her standards.

More than half of participants shared that they found it difficult to make their doctoral or academic identities relatable to their families. Doing so often minimized their academic responsibilities and obligations, e.g. "*Tengo tarea de la escuela.*" [*I have homework from*

school’]. Participants struggled with assuming the role of scholar when their parents and family members did not know what they were doing. Not understanding the academic process also limited the type of support that parents and families were able to provide participants for coping with the demands of their programs. This was especially difficult for participants since familial support and interdependence is such an important part of their ethnic identity.

Lack of Community. Latina doctoral students in this study also commented on the individualized nature of the departmental climate. This comes into direct conflict with Latino/a values of family and community interdependence seen in narratives provided by participants where family members helped others to succeed, particularly upon arrival to the United States. Various participants spoke about the “the lack of community” and feeling “disconnected” from department faculty and peers. This imposed independence left many to make academic decisions on their own with little guidance unless efforts were made on their part to interact with faculty. Several felt that the only way to connect with program faculty was to be awarded a graduate assistantship or become more assertive with one’s approach. Cierra, a doctoral student in a mid-sized private university explains:

...it was every man for himself kind of thing. If you weren't in it and if you weren't connected, then you were fucked basically...and so being on the innerpoint, because I was blessed to have a graduate assistantship and to meet people within that assistantship that were connected, I was able to see on the outside and understand more and more clearly why people weren't persisting—because it's damn hard...you're either a go-getter and you make yourself known and you're there every day because you're on campus and you work there, or it's ten times harder for you because you work a fulltime job and, you know, you're not that connected.

The responsibility of academic progress and networking in one's field of study was placed on the student. Several participants grappled with how to assume a doctoral or academic identity that promoted self-reliance when their cultural values taught them to rely on the strengths of community members and that success was not an individual accomplishment. Elena highlights this point, "I think that that's super important—to kind of think of a degree beyond yourself and to really look at the degree from a community perspective, from a community collective, you know? That when you graduate, your community's graduating with you." Collective success, however, was not promoted or experienced in their academic departments. Acknowledgment of student achievement was individualized and interactions with and outreach to participants were few.

A majority of participants in this study (n=10) expressed that they had minimal or no support from most of the faculty in their programs. There was no distinction in terms of the level of faculty support between participants who were in the earlier stages of their doctoral programs and those who had completed their coursework. This type of distant relationship with faculty conflicted with Latino/a cultural values regarding community support and *personalismo* where "closeness is expected, people are valued over things, and interpersonal characteristics are emphasized over individual achievements" (Bean, Bedell, & Perry, 2001, p. 50).

While there were faculty members, as described by Elena, Carina, Monica and Victoria, who did reach out to participants if they noticed they were struggling, this was not often; several noted that even when outreach occurred, there were no follow up interactions to check on their progress. Some faculty seemed to be uncomfortable addressing cultural disconnects that were affecting participant academic experiences. For instance, Monica recalled how she was asked to meet with one of her professors because she was struggling with the writing "or not conforming

in the way that [the professor] wanted”. Overwhelmed with feelings of isolation, loneliness, and self-doubt, Monica recalled, “So I started crying and then she kind of freaked out...looking at me like I don't know what to do... she never called me into her office again...I continued in her class, but that was the last time I really talked to her.” The overall sentiment among these women was that there was little connection with faculty and no understanding or consideration of their cultural values. The following subsection will discuss how in addition to cultural conflicts, Latina doctoral students faced academic challenges associated with their cultural, racial and gender identities.

Academic Challenges

Some of the academic challenges that Latina doctoral students in this study faced have been explored and found to be obstacles across various doctoral student populations. The need for financial support (Abedi & Benkin, 1987; Baird, 1997; Bowen & Redenstine, 1992; Gardner & Holley, 2011; González, 2006; Maher et al., 2004; Nettles and Millett, 2006; Tuckman et al., 1990; Wilson, 1965) and not understanding the doctoral process or the academic profession (Austin, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001; Wulff et al., 2004) have been cited in previous research as challenges among all doctoral students. In addition to these challenges, participants in this study experienced academic challenges associated with their race, culture (e.g. Gildersleeve et al., 2011; González et al., 2002; González, 2006; Hurtado, 1994; Solórzano, 1993; Truong & Museus, 2012) and gender (e.g. Brown & Watson, 2010; Clance and Imes, 1978; Espino, 2016; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2010). Academic obstacles for Latina doctoral students in this study included a lack of support for racially/ethnically based research, a lack of racial/ethnic diversity among faculty, experiencing racial microaggressions, otherness and isolation, and feeling like an imposter.

Lack of Support for Racially/Ethnically-Based Research. At times, the disconnect between participants and department faculty came in the form of a lack of support for their racially/ethnically based research interests. Haley et al.'s (2014) study on minority doctoral students found that cultural identities played a major role in their professional decisions. While some doctoral students of color found that the rigors of academic life would conflict with family and community obligations, others believed that they could serve their family and community through their research (Haley et. al, 2014). The latter was the case for most Latina doctoral students in this study. The opportunity to research their own/marginalized communities was their way of contributing to or giving back to community that supported them.

A quarter of participants conveyed that there was little attempt by their advisors to understand their topic or find avenues to help them mold it into a conceivable dissertation. For example, Carina explained,

She told me, "You can't... You can't. You're generating the data. It's your questions. You are asking the kids the questions that they base their responses on and you're establishing the aesthetic of the work. You're brokering...or nurturing the performance. You're too close."...So I kept reading and reading and they are doing what I'm doing. These fucking people are doing what I'm doing in a different way...these scholars...using performance of children...acting out improvisational exercises about stop and frisk...they are looking at performance...so I'm heartbroken and I go, "Okay, alright, what else could I study?"

Similar to Latino/a doctoral students in González et al.'s (2002) study and Gildersleeve et al.'s (2011) study, some participant research interests clashed with the conservative nature of the department which often tried to restrict them to topics and methods of research that they were

familiar with and were considered valuable in academia. Veronica stated that she felt uncomfortable and was perplexed after she spoke to one faculty member who questioned the relevance of her research topic. “‘Really? You wanna—this is what you want to deal with? Undocumented students? Why is that important?’ And it just threw me for a loop because I would think that as educators they would see the issues... We're in the Northeast... You can't ignore the whole issue or the debate about undocumented [students] to begin with. It's not a new issue.” For these four Latina doctoral students, the rejection of research interests that were focused on relevant issues among marginalized communities was demoralizing.

Lack of Diversity/Interactions with Diverse Faculty. Other participants stated that they appreciated their program’s attempts to emphasize social justice and cultural competence in relation to approaching research. These ideals, however, were often not modeled for doctoral students in departmental practices. Nine participants pointed out the discrepancy between messaging regarding the importance of diversity in their field and what they experienced in the classroom. Julia related,

[This institution], like any institution, is going to preach diversity, inclusivity, because that is important. There's a huge rise in awareness of multicultural issues, I feel, for the psychology unit... So I see it in my coursework. I feel like every class I have, they have little sections to focus especially on multicultural issues. I don't see it being expressed by my faculty and I don't see it being really understood by my fellow students, my peers, my colleagues.

Some participants also mentioned that their programs appeared to be inclusive with faculty of color present, although, most of their doctoral classes were taught by White males. Several relayed that they were disillusioned with the limited interactions they had with faculty of

color, particularly since the opportunity to conduct research with them was one of the main reasons they had chosen to apply and eventually enroll in a particular doctoral program.

Racial/Ethnic Microaggressions. More than half of participants shared experiences of racial/ethnic microaggressions with faculty or peers. Some were very clear microaggressions such as being confused with another Latina, being asked, “Where are you really from?” or being called on to represent the views of Latinos/as and other minority groups. Other experiences were more subtle critiques of Latino/a culture that, at times, required guidance from mentors to understand how they were forms of microaggressions. A majority of experiences, however, demonstrated a blatant disregard for how their words/actions negatively influenced these Latina doctoral students’ experiences in the classroom. These types of interactions contributed to racializing their academic identity by placing participants in the uncomfortable situation of having to correct and educate faculty and peers on issues related to race and ethnicity. Additionally, they were expected to become the experts on race or ethnicity in class. Alejandra illustrates this experience,

We were talking about depression rates in the United States and he said, “Well there’s an interesting dynamic that happens with Hispanic or Latino immigrants” and then just turns to me and says, “Did you want to talk about this?” And my response...I kind of stammered out an answer and I was like “Well, I’m not quite sure what you’re asking me because I don’t study this—I studied police and trauma and interactions with civilians.”

She observed that this type of microaggression did not occur toward White students when the topic concerned their race:

...he was talking about how the majority demographic that uses drugs is White, but that we criminalize Black and Brown people and why is that? He never looked at any of the

White students and said, “Do you want to talk about this?” It’s just like, you’re different and this is how I perceive you, so talk about it.

Participants were often left stunned by these types of interactions with faculty who they felt should be aware of their actions and repercussions, particularly because they were researchers in higher education and human services fields. For several of these participants, it was important that they make faculty and peers aware of the impact of their words, regardless of their intention, and how they could further marginalize students of color by repeating their behaviors. The disadvantage of this responsibility is that they carried the weight of having to be the lone voice on racial and/or ethnic issues in the classroom. Elena provided an example of her experience during a race and gender class.

So one person would say, "The illegal immigrants, you know, have—" and I'm like... "Don't ever say that word in your life." So I feel like I had to kind of stick up for, you know, the Latino community to say, "The proper terminology is undocumented," ...And when you're speaking of Brown and Black struggle... I have to kind of chime in with, "Cesar Chavez was around." ...There were also other civil rights leaders. So I felt like I had to be that voice for the Latino community.

Bringing up the implications of race and ethnicity in class discussions became an understood, and exhausting, obligation for these Latina students and was made all the more difficult when the points they made in class were not acknowledged by faculty or peers. Some disclosed how they were “tired” of having to be the one who broached the topic; at times, they felt like they had to choose if they should, seeing as they had brought up implications of race and culture in a previous class session. Having “to be the only one to speak up” was often the result of being “only Latina” or “the only one of color” in their class or program.

Otherness and Isolation. Being the only Latina in an academic environment often made these participants feel “lonely” and “uncomfortable”. Many were used to being in this situation in higher education. However, the frequency in which they found themselves to be the only Latina did not make the situation any easier as Mercedes explained, “I was always the only Hispanic. The only one...I’m used to that...it is what it is...that is nothing new to me, but it was just like oh my God, here I am again...” At times, participants found that they were the only doctoral student of color in the classroom or at an academic function. This heightened the level of discomfort and feelings of tokenism which was also experienced by Latina doctoral students in González’s (2006) study. Olivia relayed, “Any function or workshop or meeting I went to, I always noticed if I was the only person of color there, which, typically, I was. I was the only person of color in all my classes and in my program all together there was one other class where I saw someone else of color...I felt so much like a token. And I was uncomfortable and I felt very unsupported.”

Even when there were support systems available, participants felt isolated because these resources or individuals in their doctoral programs could not understand or adequately address challenges related to race and culture. For example, Emilia mentioned that while her cohort is a close-knit group and she could rely on them when she is feeling overwhelmed, she could not do so when she was dealing with issues related to race. “The race issues...I’m alone...Those kinds of things...I can’t really talk to them about.” When prompted regarding what issues related to race she experienced, Emilia described situations that were also closely related to social class.

Similar to Gardner and Holley’s (2011) study of first-generation doctoral students and Espino’s (2014) study of male and female Mexican American PhDs, the topic of social class status surfaced for almost half of the participants when discussing otherness in academic

experiences. Social class affected their experiences, became part of their ethnic identity and informed their identity in academia. When describing their backgrounds, statements such as “[we came] from a working class, poor background,” “we were poor,” and “when I talk about being Hispanic, I’m talking about being a poor Hispanic...” were mentioned. At the doctoral level, Cierra, Emilia, Graciela, and Mercedes shared how vastly different their experiences were in comparison to other doctoral students because of their socioeconomic background. They were often left perplexed by the lack of knowledge or level of indifference to disadvantages that students of color and/or Latinos/as from poor backgrounds faced. Graciela described the differences in experience between her and those of White students as two different worlds. She could not relate to the privilege of not working and being able to stay on campus all day. She also noted that her White peers failed to understand that working hard would not reap the same rewards when obstacles are different.

Cierra mentioned similar discrepancies in experiences and advantages for students with financial resources. She noticed that, in a couple of programs at her institution, Latina doctoral students stopped taking classes for several years to fulfill their familial and financial obligations. She questioned whether or not faculty and administration were truly aware of “the weight that they’re carrying” and, if so, what were they doing to encourage and support them. Among these participants, there was a clear sense of frustration regarding faculty and peers’ subscription to meritocracy and their inability to see how equal opportunity for advancement requires equal access to those opportunities, which is severely hampered when one is poor.

In addition to feelings of otherness because of their race, culture or social class, Latina doctoral students in this study experienced extreme feelings of self-doubt and worthiness—“the imposter syndrome times a thousand because of who I was in my cohort”.

Imposter Syndrome. Despite numerous academic achievements, 12 out of 16 participants wrestled with whether or not they had legitimately earned their place in their doctoral programs. Ten participants actually used the word “imposter” or identified what they were experiencing as “imposter syndrome”. According to Clance & Imes’ (1978) study on high-achieving professional women, those who believe themselves to be imposters do not believe that they are intelligent, dismiss their successes as luck, and live in fear of being discovered as Carina reveals: “[I] never really quite feel like I’m in where I’m supposed to be. There’s always a, “They’re gonna find – you know, the imposter– they’re gonna find out, they’re gonna know. They’re gonna know they’ve made a mistake.”

The following exchange between me and Viviana shows some of the reasons why she, like other participants, felt like she did not belong or deserve to be in her doctoral program.

Viviana: But this – this process has been – oh my God. It’s challenged me in so many different ways...for one, you know, I’m in an Ivy League University...a lot of times I feel like, “Why am I here? I don’t belong here at all.”

Interviewer: Why don’t you belong here?

Viviana: Oh my god. I just – the first week was the most challenging week. I’m like – I just felt like I didn’t belong there...I’m the only Spanish girl in this classroom...I felt like I was—like I just got in because of affirmative action...they needed to have the one Latina so let’s just take her...And I was hearing all these people with professional backgrounds and what they currently do and I’m like, “I totally don’t belong here...I’m just a therapist working with kids in [an inner city]”...It’s a lot. It was a lot. And still to

this day, I battle with that...just a sense of—just not belonging. And I feel, not that they directly do anything to make me feel that way, maybe it's just my own *complejos [insecurities]*, I don't know, but it's uncomfortable.

While studies have found the imposter phenomenon or imposter syndrome to be prevalent among female professionals (Clance & Imes, 1978) and graduate students of color (Ewing et al., 1996; Gardner and Holley, 2011), previous studies on Latina doctoral students have not found this phenomenon to be a dominant theme. The nature of the sample may have played a role in why so many participants were able to talk about and identify what they were experiencing as “imposter syndrome”. Participants in this study are members of a closed Facebook group called *Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees (LCDD)*, an online community of Latina doctoral students whose goal is to support each other through the process. Two participants mentioned the *LCDD* Facebook group when speaking about their encounters with imposter syndrome and how they saw members post about similar experiences. So by virtue of being part of a community in which this was discussed, participants might have felt more comfortable articulating it knowing that they were not unique in feeling this way as Valentina explains:

I mean there are days when I feel so insecure about it that I just think, oh my God, am I really going to be able to do this? That's where the group on Facebook has been good, just to see that I'm not the only one feeling like that. So I feel like that's the first Latino community where I feel like I fit in. I know it's virtual, but we're all kind of dealing with a lot of the same voices in our head or insecurities or imposter syndrome – all of it – and it's definitely helpful.

Additionally, a majority of participants are studying in programs within the education/higher education and human services fields which may have exposed them to the terminology to adequately identify what they are experiencing. In addition to peer acknowledgement of their experiences with imposter syndrome, some participants shared that they were able to gain self-confidence and “build that researcher identity” by incorporating the knowledge and skills obtained in their doctoral program toward research that was meaningful to them. Finding ways in which could they contribute while being “authentic” was important to these Latina doctoral students and helped them see how they could fit in academia. For example, Diana shared,

I do hard core Hermeneutic Phenomenology...I'm allowed to write in a way – it's not straight academic writing...It's written very lyrically—it's like the first time I ever read Gloria Anzaldúa and I was like, “Oh my gosh. This is my life. This is me...this is how I want to write and this is how I feel—it feels right to me.” And so, I'm able to write like that as a phenomenologist. And I can be in the academy...and be comfortable.

A majority of participants questioned the worth of their knowledge and experiences at various points of their doctoral progress. Finding a community where they felt they belonged, receiving peer validation of their experiences and engaging in research that was meaningful to them was critical to combatting feelings of being an imposter and feeling comfortable assuming their academic identity.

In sum, this section explored various cultural conflicts and academic challenges that contributed to issues of fit for these Latina doctoral students in their doctoral programs. Latino/a cultural values of familismo, community interdependence and personalismo conflicted with academic expectations for success. For many participants, there was a lack of support and lack

of racial or ethnic diversity within the department. Participants reported various instances of racial or ethnic microaggressions among faculty and peers. Being the “only Latina” and, at times, the only student of color resulted in feelings of otherness and isolation which influenced participants’ sense of belonging. A majority of participants struggled with feeling like an imposter at various points in their doctoral program. Feelings of self-doubt and worthiness in academia were tempered by virtual interactions with Latina peers who shared and validated their feelings as well as engaging in research that was meaningful to them. The next section will explore the various ways in which these Latina doctoral students responded to or coped with experiences of cultural incongruity and academic challenges in their doctoral programs.

Responses to Cultural Conflicts and Academic Challenges in Doctoral Programs

In the following subsections, I will examine how these Latina women responded to or coped with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs from the perspective of CRT tenets, counterstories and commitment to social justice. CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of those who are marginalized and views the sharing of these experiences as a survival tool (Delgado, 1989). It is also committed to empowering those who are oppressed by resisting and seeking to eliminate all forms of subordination (Yosso et al., 2001). Additionally, the LatCrit principle regarding the importance of cultivating community and coalition are used to examine narratives.

Many participants spoke about wisdom passed down from their family, which inspired and helped them negotiate their lives and doctoral process. “*Dichos*,” which are traditional Latino/a sayings or proverbs, are a very important part of Latino/a oral tradition and “convey strong messages about a common culture and heritage” (Castro, 2000, p. 82). Each subsection of this section will feature a “dicho” which describes the theme. There were three major themes

with regard to how these women responded to and/or coped with academic obstacles. Latina doctoral students in this study responded to academic challenges and conflict between their cultural values and academic expectations with: (a) self-advocacy and resistance, (b) mentor relationships with faculty of color, and (c) various support networks consisting of family, doctoral students of color and academics met through professional networking.

Self-advocacy and Resistance: “Nada que valga la pena se logra sin crear conflictos.” [*Nothing of worth is achieved without creating conflict*]. Latina doctoral students in this study were vocal about the lack of understanding for their cultural values and overall lack of support from a majority of departmental faculty. One response to this deficiency in their doctoral programs can be summed up in Viviana’s mantra, “If it’s not there, I’m going to look for it.” Half of the participants in this study discussed learning that they would need to actively seek support and initiate interactions with administration and faculty for academic survival. Only two participants shared that they approached administration directly. Cierra and Alejandra both shared instances where they approached the dean of their college, although for different reasons. Cierra felt it was important to knock on the dean’s door to make sure she knew her name and face. Since faculty and administrators were not necessarily reaching out to her, she was going to do so for the sake of making the climate more comfortable for her. Alejandra approached her dean and was frank about the lack of resources for Latina doctoral students. The dean responded with some Latino/a professional networks that she could contact.

Graciela, Valentina, and Carina advocated for themselves to faculty members in their doctoral programs. They used various methods to express their desire to excel in their doctoral programs and what they would need in order to do so. Graciela was happy to report that her department recently finished a search for a Latino literature scholar after she expressed her needs

and those of undergraduate English majors at her institution. Following no responses to her or her peers' emails, Valentina arranged a meeting to get to know her advisor better, to inquire about his expectations and how to best communicate with him. Similarly, Carina found herself developing a plan of action with a faculty member to ensure her academic success. She described her experience with an historian who stated that she needed to work on her writing because it was "too flowery." Carina relayed to him that her writing was who she was and that plenty of writers like Gabriel García Márquez wrote like this and it was recognized as a style. After taking an incomplete for the class, Carina could not bring herself to conform to the professor's standards. She approached the faculty member requesting differentiated assessment, which would still allow her to convey her understanding of the course content, but in an authentic voice.

And then somewhere I got the crazy idea...I'm not going to write that paper for him. He has to have space for differentiation. He has to be able to look at me. I'm not writing that fucking paper—not that paper...I'm gonna go with what I know...Think like a teacher...So I wrote to him and I said, "...I look at this as a play. It is in one location. You have one event with many characters. I would like to challenge myself to show you my understanding of this event in history based on my point of view as a playwright and how I create the world for this play." And he was like, "This is the most exciting thing I have ever heard. I would love for you to write this play...yes, go, do it!"

After reading her first draft the faculty member provided her with feedback that she felt was respectful. He insisted on a reading of the play and went as far as casting himself. Carina, as playwright and director, informed him that he could not cast himself, but that she would consider it, noting that he would be "perfect" for the part—a response which amused the

professor. She found that her new role “kind of equalized the relationship” with him. The department hosted a reading of the play with the professor and Carina’s actor friends. The play was also published in the graduate center’s online magazine. This experience, like Graciela’s and Valentina’s, was pivotal in changing her trajectory in the doctoral programs. She explained that it taught her to stand up for herself and reminded her of the reason she was in the field of education, “to change and transform.”

In addition to learning how to advocate for themselves, several participants discussed having to actively resist departmental attitudes and practices. This proved to be an effective method for Latina doctoral student persistence in González’ (2006) study in which several Latinas challenged doctoral socialization through “networks of resistance” and Achor and Morales’ (1990) and Espino’s (2014, 2016) study of Chicana and Mexican American doctoral students who resisted racial and gender-related microaggressions. Eight women in this study used the word “push” to describe their resistance or how they coped with academic barriers. Several shared how pushing back on racial and ethnic microaggressions in class highlighted them as problematic. Asserting one’s humanity and being “the only one” to point out how curriculum or norms were oppressive often isolated participants from their peers and exerted much of their energy.

Julia, Cierra, and Graciela used the word “push” to discuss the measures they took to demonstrate to others in their department that they could achieve their academic goals despite obstacles. Julia spoke about the added pressure she places on herself, pushing in a way that her peers may not necessarily experience, not because they are not working hard, but because they may not be battling having to prove that they are a “right fit” for the program. Cierra and Graciela spoke about their experiences with individuals who expected them to fail. Rather than

internalizing these messages, they used them as “ammunition to push” similar to the type of resistance practiced by Latinas in Achor and Morales’ (1990) and Latinos/as in Espino’s (2014) study who wanted to disprove departmental misconceptions or low expectations of them. Graciela recalls, “I’ve cried in too many people’s offices who didn’t give two craps about me because they were literally telling me to my face that I couldn’t do it...And I just decided every time I would hear that—that I would push that much harder.”

To summarize, several Latina doctoral students in this study shared experiences of having to independently look for resources or lobby for themselves to ensure academic success. Only two felt comfortable enough to approach administration, make themselves known or inquire about resources. Several approached faculty to relay their academic needs or request assessment that would recognize their experiential knowledge. Others were empowered by resisting departmental norms or expectations. A large number of participants, however, spoke about the importance of establishing and maintaining faculty mentoring relationships in order to navigate academic challenges, which the next subsection will discuss.

Mentor Relationships: “Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres.” [*Tell me who you walk with and I’ll tell you who you are*]. Latina doctoral students in this study consistently shared how the support of faculty mentors, both formal (dissertation mentors) and informal, was critical to their success and persistence in their doctoral programs. Participants shared that these relationships provided them with encouragement, academic guidance, and connections to resources and/or professionals that could further assist them with their research interests. A majority of participant narratives regarding faculty mentors described their close, personal relationships with faculty of color.

Viviana, Alejandra, Carina, Victoria, Avery, Julia, Monica, and Veronica spoke about having informal mentors or dissertation mentors of color and how these relationships were so important to coping with and responding to racialized challenges in academia. Faculty of color were open and candid about their own experiences in academia and often helped them to unpack racial or ethnic microaggressions experienced. For example, Alejandra's dissertation chair and co-chair took the time to process her experience of being asked to speak on Latino/a immigrant mental health, reflecting on how a faculty member could respond in a situation where he/she has committed a microaggression. They did so without attacking the professor. Her primary advisor shared that he wished her professor would have stopped and simply stated, "Oh I'm so sorry. Do you identify as Latina?" acknowledging that an assumption was made while modeling behavior for doctoral students in his class who would be future psychologists in the field.

Participants benefitted extensively from mentors who cultivated a more personal relationship, which helped to bridge academic and ethnic identities. Victoria shared how grateful she is for being privy to the struggles of her Black female advisor who has also gone as far as sharing her room at an academic conference to help Victoria with costs. Monica shared that her Cuban-American mentor would invite her to her house which she found to be so warm and in stark contrast with the overall department environment. Outside of her interaction with this faculty member, she did not connect with professors. When Monica disclosed to her mentor that she was struggling emotionally in the program, her mentor reached out to Latina students in other cohorts and asked them to please connect with and check on how she was doing.

Establishing a consistent relationship with a mentor was a crucial component of participants' academic success. Participants benefitted from cultivating relationships with mentors of color who could guide them with coping and responding to challenges associated

with their race, culture or gender. Close, personal mentor relationships were highly valued. In addition to relying on the support and guidance of mentors, participants overwhelmingly shared how having strong support systems among family and loved ones, doctoral students of color and professional networks was important to overcoming obstacles in their doctoral programs, which the next subsection will discuss.

Support Systems: “La unión hace la fuerza” [*In unity there is strength*]. The women in this study drew strength from various informal support systems within and outside their institutions. Participants received emotional support from home, academic and social support from peers of color and professional support from networks outside of their department. These support networks empowered them to continue on their doctoral journeys despite experiences that oppressed them (Espino, 2014; González, 2006) and challenged their values, worth of experiences and self-confidence. They also served to affirm their cultural values and experiences and helped them to define and defend their academic identity.

Support from Home. Although, many times, family members did not understand the challenges these Latina doctoral students were experiencing in academia (González, 2001), participants shared that this did not stop them from offering support in their own way. Participant mothers’ “cheerleader” support continued in their doctoral programs and was seen repeatedly as they recounted the struggles they faced in their doctoral journeys: “Yo voy a tí. Olvidate, que tu puede’. Yo sé que tu puede. Yo voy a tí.” [“I’m rooting for you. Forget about it, you can do this. I know you can do this. I’m rooting for you.”] Participants’ mothers made financial sacrifices, offered simple but meaningful gestures of support, and kept them connected to cultural traditions.

Graciela's mother opted not to work and take care of Graciela's two young children so that she could fulfill obligations for her teaching assistantship. When Monica travelled back home for her externship interviews, her mother would wake up at 6am, make breakfast, coffee, wish her luck and give her a hug. "That's all she could do and she did," Monica shared teary-eyed. For Elena, moving so far away from her family and being one of the few Latinos/as at her institution had such a profound effect on her. She recalls losing her Spanish and having difficulty speaking to her mom. Elena could count on her mother to walk her through making "*un moro de gandules*" [*rice with pigeon peas*] over the phone, because as Elena explained, "it kind of keeps you rooted. It keeps you grounded. It keeps you—part of this fabric of who you are."

Spouses, partners and friends often had a better understanding of their challenges than family members did. Through their own academic or professional work experiences, they were able to or advise them on how to approach certain challenges with faculty. Diana's husband received his doctoral degree and encouraged her to switch to an advisor who was "invested" in her. Victoria's partner is currently pursuing his doctorate and shares racialized experiences from his perspective as a Black man. Other spouses and partners consistently encouraged and inspired confidence, particularly when participants were overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy.

Close friendships that began prior to their doctoral journeys served as a source of support as participants faced challenges pertaining to cultural disconnects. Friends could relate to certain academic expectations and the sense of being pulled by two worlds. They provided these women with reassurance about their academic and professional endeavors while keeping them connected to their home identity as Mercedes explains, "I can totally be who I am...no apologies...no

feeling of imposter either way with them...I fit into the world. We are who we are, but they don't see me not fitting into this Ph.D. role either.”

Family, spouses, partners and friends were able to provide participants with the emotional support that would inspire hope and motivate them to keep moving forward. With regard to support for coping with academic challenges experienced in the department, participants relied heavily on fellow doctoral students of color.

Peer Support among Doctoral Students of Color. Several Latina doctoral students in this study discussed the alliances created with other doctoral students of color from various cohorts in their program in order to cope with academic challenges they faced. Seven participants stated that these informal peer support groups were essential for academic resources as well as guidance with important steps in the doctoral process such as qualifying and comprehensive exams. The most common reasons for participants establishing a peer support system with other doctoral students of color were to create a space where they could share and process microaggressions faced, cope with the demands from family, combat isolation and validate their academic goals. Cierra highlighted a common perspective among participants on why establishing peer support networks among Latino/a or doctoral students of color was critical, “I don't know how far I would've made it in the program, and still be healthy, you know, without these individuals”.

Valentina, Mercedes, and Viviana specifically mentioned the peer support they received outside of their program through the *Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees* Facebook group. This online community helped them to connect with other Latina doctoral students across states and disciplines who shared similar personal and academic experiences. In this online network, questions are posed and resources are shared. Additionally, this virtual space served as a source

of motivation and was used to celebrate all types of member accomplishments, both personal and academic.

Support from Professional Networks. While support from home, mentors and doctoral students of color provided participants with ways to cope with and respond to cultural conflicts and academic challenges, several participants still found themselves having to look for resources outside of their institution that could supplement areas where their departments or doctoral programs were deficient. Only two participants, Emilia and Alejandra, reported formalized support systems within their institutions or departments for minority doctoral students. Emilia stated that one of the main reasons why she chose her doctoral institution was because it had an office dedicated to minority graduate students. This office coordinated a visitation program for prospective graduate students of color who were also given an application fee waiver. Once students were admitted, they were provided with an opportunity to enroll in an independent study course prior to their first semester which included room and board along with \$2000 for living expenses. Similar forms of support continued throughout one's tenure as a graduate student with conference travel grants available for up to \$900 a year. Alejandra shared that her department had a diversity committee that consisted of faculty of color and a student chair. She, however, was discouraged by the lack of structure, goals and the fact that they tried to place the responsibility of hosting community meetings on her.

Since most participants did not have formal support systems in their departments or at their institution, attending state and national conferences were an important way to network with experts and other doctoral students who shared their research interests. When they were able to attend, conferences provided them with an academic community that could relate to their challenges and empower them. Victoria explains, "So I rely on people that I meet at

conferences—I would say my squad that's national—to sustain me because I don't really have community here.” Attending and presenting at professional conferences gave them access to critical Latino/a and/or minority scholars in their field. Establishing a rapport with these academics affirmed their research interests, increased self-confidence and motivated them to continue to pursue their academic endeavors. For instance, Avery explains, “Going to conferences where there are like-minded people helps me a lot to strengthen my passion for scholarship and not feel like I’m failing because, I guess, it also humanizes the people that I admire and put on pedestals...they’re just people like me...they’ve had their struggles, too.”

This section examined how these Latina doctoral students responded to cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs. Narratives revealed four main approaches to coping and/or responding to obstacles faced. Participants advocated for themselves to administration and department faculty as well as resisted norms they found to be oppressive. They relied on formal and informal faculty mentoring relationships. Participants mainly spoke about their close relationships with faculty of color. Establishing various support networks were also important for academic survival. Family, friends and loved ones mainly offered emotional support. Doctoral students of color also provided emotional support in addition to academic support and guidance. Networking outside of the department through professional conferences offered an additional community that could advance their academic and professional interests and goals.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which culture, gender and race, and their intersection, influenced the experiences of Latina doctoral students and their sense of ethnic identity. In order to understand how they made meaning of their ethnic identity today, it was

important to explore various experiences leading up to their doctoral programs. Participant narratives highlighted components of their ethnic identity that were important to them, mainly focusing on Latino/a values regarding education and family and how gender played a role in both. Race was a salient and complex influencer of experiences and ethnic identity. Its intersection with culture revealed deep-seated racist attitudes within Latino/a culture. Experiences with colorism resulted in shame or denial among some participants who now identify their race as Black. Light-skinned Latinas recognized their White privilege. Participants widely discussed learning about their race and experiencing shifts in their racial and/or ethnic identity following knowledge gained in courses and their interactions with others during their undergraduate and doctoral process. Despite differences in race, ethnic background and experiences, participants in this study had similar views on what being Latina means to them. Being Latina was equated to strength and pride by the majority of participants. Additional important concepts of being Latina included cultural traditions, food, language, music, family, community and the pivotal roles they played as women.

Exploring the various roles that culture, gender and race played in shaping their understanding of ethnic identity allowed for me to see how various practices and behaviors in academia directly conflicted with Latino/a cultural values considered important components of their ethnic identity. Academic expectations clashed with cultural values pertaining to the importance of family, identifying and working as a collective and giving back to one's community. For some Latinas, earlier experiences with race made them acutely aware of their race and the advantages or disadvantages associated with their skin color in their doctoral programs. Academic challenges that were most prevalent were associated with their race or

gender, including a lack of support for race based research, racial/ethnic microaggressions, otherness and isolation, and feelings of being an imposter in their academic programs.

Latina doctoral students in this study responded to and/or coped with cultural conflicts and academic challenges through multiple means. Several participants resorted to self-advocacy in order to gain the departmental support they needed or to request fair assessment of their experiential knowledge. Participants also “pushed” back on or resisted behaviors that were oppressive by speaking up in class or by virtue of succeeding in their programs. Latina doctoral students also coped with challenges through various support systems. Family, spouses, partners and friends consistently encouraged them and, to a certain extent, provided advice. Latina women in this study were grateful for faculty mentors, particularly those of color, who guided them academically and helped them process racial microaggressions experienced. Some faculty mentors developed a more personal rapport with participants, sharing their own experiences associated with race in academia and welcoming them into their homes. Latina doctoral students in this study relied heavily on peer support, especially from doctoral students of color. They were able to connect with other Latina doctoral students virtually via their membership in the *Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees* Facebook page. Finally, participants in this study were able to connect with academics and doctoral students who shared their research interests through professional networks established by attending academic conferences.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 provides a brief summary of the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework and methodology. It then focuses on a discussion of research findings and implications for practice. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on Latina doctoral student experiences.

Overview of the Study

Latinas currently attain the lowest number of terminal degrees when compared to White, African American and Asian American women (National Center of Education Statistics, 2012). While there are similarities among the experiences of Latina doctoral students and those of doctoral students of color/female doctoral students, there are important differences associated with their ethnic identity that conflict with traditional values in American higher education. These conflicts are obstacles to academic success and may contribute to the significant underrepresentation of Latinas who pursue and obtain their doctoral degrees in the United States. Previous literature on Latinas in higher education found that they often experience guilt, confusion and frustration as they toggle between two worlds (e.g., Espino et al., 2010; Espino, 2016; González et al., 2001; Segura, 2003). With this in mind, the current study sought to explore the experiences of Latina doctoral students and how they negotiated their ethnic identity and academic success.

This study centered on how culture, gender and race as well as their intersection influenced experiences, which in turn helped to shape these Latina doctoral students' sense of ethnic identity. Experiences with cultural incongruity between values stemming from their ethnic identities and departmental norms and expectations were also explored. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: (a) In what ways, if any, does culture, gender and

race influence the experiences of Latina doctoral students and inform their sense of ethnic identity? (b) What cultural conflicts and academic challenges, if any, do Latina doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs? and (c) How, if at all, do Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) were used to analyze the experiences of Latina doctoral students in this study and institutional practices in their doctoral programs. “CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122). Four of CRT’s six tenets were used to frame findings in this study: recognition of the centrality of racism, the intersectionality of oppression, acknowledgment of counterstories, and commitment to social justice (Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

LatCrit was also used to explore the experiences of Latina doctoral students in this study because it builds on CRT by broadening the Black-White racial discourse and placing the unique needs of Latinos/as at the center of the theory. LatCrit broadens the scope of racial identity by exploring additional forms of oppression experienced by the Latino/a community based on gender, language, immigration, ethnicity and phenotype (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Moran, 1997; Solórzano et al., 2000; Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

Methodology

Sixteen Latina doctoral students were interviewed for this study using criterion sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). In order to qualify for this study, participants had to self-identify

as an U.S.-born Latina or Hispanic female, be currently enrolled in a doctoral program in the East Coast, and have completed at least two academic semesters of doctoral study.

Data were collected via a short demographic questionnaire and in-depth, semi-structured interviews ranging from 40 minutes to approximately 2 hours describing participant backgrounds and academic experiences leading up to their doctoral programs. Field notes and memos were written following each interview. After listening to the audio-recordings and reading through interviews once without coding, data were analyzed. Open, line by line coding was conducted to see what terms, patterns or themes emerged for each interview. A list of predetermined codes based on themes from existing literature was used and vetted against new codes that emerged from the data. Codes were then grouped into super codes which were used to generate themes. While some themes corresponded with those found in previous literature on Latina doctoral students, others were new to the discussion.

Discussion of Findings

The following section discusses findings of this study within the context of existing literature on Latina doctoral students. Since research on Latina doctoral students is limited, findings, at times, were also compared to research exploring the experiences of female and doctoral students of color. This study endeavored to expand on the role of gender along with culture and race in the experiences of Latina doctoral students. While several themes that emerged from this study aligned with those found in previous research on Latina doctoral students, findings in this study add to the existing literature with respect to Latina doctoral students' rich narratives demonstrating their struggle with racial identity and colorism in the Latino/a community and their acknowledgement of experiences with the imposter phenomenon.

This study also discusses a new form of peer support through a virtual community of Latina doctoral students.

Influence of Culture, Gender, and Race. In response to the research question, in what ways, if any, does culture, gender, and race influence the experiences of Latina doctoral students and inform their sense of ethnic identity, this study found that important components of these Latina doctoral students' ethnic identity were revealed through narratives showing the role that culture, gender, race and their intersection played in their personal and academic experiences. Latina doctoral students' sense of ethnic identity was influenced by Latino/a cultural values regarding education, family, gender and race. These stories were explored from the CRT and LatCrit perspective recognizing the intersectionality of oppression. CRT and LatCrit theorists contend that there is no such thing as a "unitary identity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10) and that oppression can result from one's race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation or the intersection of such identities (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000). LatCrit theorists add that gender is engrained in Latino/a ethnic identity (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hernández-Truyol, 1997).

While participants received strong familial support for education and pursuing their professional goals as did Latinas in Achor and Morales' (1990), Espino's (2016) and Gándara's (1982) studies, they also had conflicting expectations regarding the importance of honoring Latino/a cultural traditions, particularly those involving their gendered obligations to family (Espino, 2016). Consistent with findings in Espino et al.'s (2010), González et al.'s (2001), and González's (2006) research on Latino/a doctoral students, participants shared that activities that were integral to building their scholar identity in academia conflicted with familial obligations. The topics participants discussed involving gender and culture support Espino's (2016) findings

on Latino/a cultural stereotypes and sexism regarding gendered roles with respect to family and education. Latina doctoral students in this study received pressure about leaving their homes before getting married and/or starting their own families. A majority of these women (n=11) were not mothers. Several shared the persistent questioning from family and/or Latino/a community members regarding motherhood. For some, the cultural pressure and lack of recognition for their academic goals and achievements caused pain.

Cultural values regarding race and participant experiences with racial ambiguity and/or racial identity conflict also informed participants' Latina ethnic identity. LatCrit theorists Lawrence (1995), Perea (1998), Ramirez (1995) and Trucios-Haynes (2001) argued that a majority of Latinos/as do not identify with racial categories as defined by the United States Census. Several participants in this study chose to redefine their race; still others opted to not identify a race at all. Participants resented being forced to choose one racial identity category stating the Latino/a community is a conglomeration of European, African, Asian and indigenous civilizations. A majority resisted existing racial categories viewing them as "a mechanism that tends to otherize." By referring to themselves as "Mixed" or "Multiracial," refusing to label themselves racially, or shifting their racial or ethnic identities, these women were claiming their own identity and were empowered—"Don't...put me in a label, in a box. This is where I wish to be."

When discussing their backgrounds or internal conflicts they experienced regarding having to choose a race, more than half of participants discussed colorism, or skin color stratification, within the Latino/a community. Some shared experiences relating to the stigma associated with being Black or a dark-skinned Latina (Comas-Díaz, 1996) or privileges that accompanied being a light-skinned or White Latina. Personal and academic experiences

associated with their skin color, phenotype, language and culture influenced a majority of participants in this study to reflect on their experiences and shift their racial and/or ethnic identity to one that was relevant to them, both in how they viewed themselves and their interactions with others.

Three participants who self-identified as darker skinned Latinas had profound shifts of racial identity during their undergraduate years in college. While at college, they were able to either reflect on cultural messaging behind terms of endearment based on skin-color, “*negrita* or *morena* or *india*,” recognize the shame or stigma behind acknowledging their African roots, “I’m Dominican. Lot of issues for the record...we’re not Black *entre comillas [We’re not “Black” quote-end quote]*, and their experiences based on their interactions, “No, I am Black; my race is Black. I’m perceived as Black and the experiences I’ve had is as a Black person.” It was also important for these participants to acknowledge their ethnicity and gender by either adding the word “Latina” when asked about race or by adopting the term “Afro-Latina.” The term “Afro-Latino/a” expands on the panethnic term of “Latino/a” and acknowledges the differences in cultural and socioeconomic experiences within the Latino/a community as a result of one’s race (Flores & Román, 2009).

Five participants who self-identified as light-skinned Latinas discussed being aware of privileges they were privy to because of their skin color. Some shared experiences that illustrated Latino/a cultural perceptions that White or lighter skin is better. Cultural standards of beauty, for example, were embedded in family members’ comments on lighter skin, e.g., “Oh my God, your skin is so beautiful!” Being light-skinned also resulted in White privilege in academia described in instances such as being taken seriously by students they were teaching or seeing light-skinned Latinas overwhelmingly represented at academic conferences. Helms’ (1990) and

Sue's (2003) research on White racial identity development would describe these instances of awareness as "immersion" where one explores one's experiences as a racial being, what it means to be White and the ways in which one benefits from being White. In this stage, one also becomes engaged in wanting to overcome racial oppression.

Cultural Conflicts and Academic Challenges. With respect to research question 2, what cultural conflicts and academic challenges, if any, do Latina doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs, this study found that participants believed there was a lack of understanding among most faculty and peers about Latino/a cultural values pertaining to *familismo* (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008), community interdependence and *personalismo* (Bean et al., 2001). Academic challenges they described were explored using the CRT tenet that contends racism is a permanent fixture in American society. CRT theorists contend that racism, particularly at the institutional level, is pervasive in U.S. culture.

Duty to one's family first was a fundamental principle for these Latina doctoral students. While many were firm on this precept, they struggled with what this meant for their academic identity (Espino et al., 2010). This was also seen among female doctoral students in Carter et al.'s (2013) study who felt that familial as well as religious obligations conflicted with academic expectations. Participants in this study felt misunderstood and judged for placing the needs of their family before their own. Some perceived conflicting expectations to be independent and place academics first as the "Americanized way of life" or "Western ideas." These women acknowledged that their achievements were tied to their family and community who supported them and are an integral part of their identity. They did not feel the same sense of community or emphasis on relationships in their departments. There was a general lack of connection with faculty, minimum outreach to students and an individualistic approach to academic achievement.

Previous research on doctoral students of color found that they consistently faced instances of tokenism, racism and racial microaggressions during their doctoral socialization process (Achor & Morales, 1990; García, 2005; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; González et al., 2002; González, 2006; Haley et al., 2014; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012; Turner, 2002). Latina doctoral students in this study shared numerous instances of tokenism in the class and racial/ethnic microaggressions with faculty and peers. Several were left in awe as to how faculty or peers who were mostly preparing to be future faculty and administrators in the education and human services fields were not able to see how their words and actions could disenfranchise students of color/Latinos/as. As a result, participants often felt that they had an obligation to be the voice for racial/ethnic/social class issues that were brought up or were omitted in class discussions. This became burdensome as “the only Latina” or “only student of color” and contributed to feelings of otherness among classmates, similar to racial/ethnic minority and female students in Pifer and Baker’s (2014) research who felt isolated once they found that their visible attributes and interests were vastly different from those of fellow doctoral students. Feelings of otherness and isolation (Lewis et al., 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010) influenced their sense of belonging in their doctoral programs prompting many to state “I don’t belong here” or ask “How did I get here?”

Three-quarters of the women in this study questioned, at one point or another, whether they belonged in their doctoral programs. Ten actually stated they battled feeling like an “imposter” or recognized what they were experiencing as “imposter syndrome.” This is an important finding and is distinct from previous research (e.g. Ewing et al., 1996; Gardner & Holley, 2011). These women were not sharing experiences that could then be analyzed as being characteristic of the imposter phenomenon or imposter syndrome; through reflection of their own

experiences, they identified and acknowledged that they “suffered from” or “battled” imposter syndrome. They claimed it as an obstacle that they have overcome in the past and, yet, continue to encounter in their doctoral process. Several also included the experience in their advice to fellow Latina doctoral students during their interview, “You do belong” and “You are not an imposter,” perhaps empowered by Latina doctoral students who have shared their *testimonios* regarding bouts with imposter syndrome on the *LCDD* Facebook page.

Responses to Cultural Conflict and Academic Challenges. With regard to research question number three, how, if at all, do Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs, participants shared their experiences with: (a) self-advocacy and resistance, (b) faculty mentor relationships, and (c) support systems consisting of family and loved ones; doctoral students of color; and professional networks. Critical race theorists acknowledge lived experiences and see the sharing of counterstories as “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 95). LatCrit theorists would add that cultivating community and coalition are also an important survival tool for oppressed groups.

Latina doctoral students in this study approached administration and departmental faculty in order to make themselves known, to discuss faculty expectations and to lobby for their research needs and approaches. Participants actively sought out academic and professional support, at times outside of their department, much like Latinas who demonstrated “social competence” and successfully completed their doctorate in González’ (2007) study. In addition to advocating for themselves, several participants voiced that they “survived” by resisting departmental practices that marginalized them (González, 2006; Espino, 2016). Previous studies found that resistance practiced by Latina doctoral students was critical to redressing racist and

sexist behaviors and persisting in their programs (Achor & Morales, 1990; Espino, 2016; González, 2006; 2007). Participants in this study discussed having to “push” back by questioning departmental behaviors that oppressed them or challenged their ethnic identity and by succeeding academically in order to prove those who expected them to fail wrong (Espino, 2014).

Establishing positive relationships with mentors has been found to contribute significantly to doctoral student success and persistence (Young & Brooks, 2008; Creighton et al., 2010; Davis, 2008; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Harden et al., 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Lunsford, 2012; Maton et al., 2011; Reddick, 2012). Such was the case for participants in this study who found that establishing a mentor relationship with faculty was essential in coping with social and academic challenges in their doctoral programs as was found in Johnson-Bailey’s (2004) research on Black graduate women. Mentors provided academic support and connections to resources as well as professionals who could further their research interests. Various participants shared how important it was for them to find mentors of color who could relate to and help them process cultural conflicts, racial/ethnic microaggressions and/or connect with them on being women of color. This finding supports Ellis’ (2001) research on Black and White doctoral students and graduates which found that race was a salient factor in mentoring and advisement. Few participants in this study spoke on mentor relationships with Latina faculty, mostly due to their absence in their programs and/or departments.

This study found that participants relied on a variety of informal support networks to help them cope with challenges in academia. These women received encouragement and gestures demonstrating support from family despite their limited understanding of their obstacles. Achor and Morales (1990), Espino (2016) and Gándara (1982) found that strong familial support was

instrumental in Latinas' decisions to pursue and persist in their doctoral programs. Participants also shared how much they appreciated the emotional support of their spouses, partners and friends. Drawing from their experiences in graduate school and/or in their professional environment, these individuals could better relate to their academic challenges than participants' parents could. They often were a soundboard for ideas or venting frustrations and, whenever they could, they provided sound advice and reassurance when they felt guilt regarding meeting obligations and doubt in their abilities.

Participants in this study relied heavily on informal support networks they either created for themselves or that other doctoral students of color established and they joined. As found in previous studies on doctoral students, establishing a support network of peers (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Espino, 2014; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005; González, 2001; González, 2007; Weidman et al., 2001) provides a critical space for doctoral students of color to share stories and racialized experiences that threaten their persistence (Ellis, 2001; Flores & García, 2009; González, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012). These peer support systems with other doctoral students of color served to validate their experiences, share advice and resources as well as model self-advocacy/resistance strategies. One type of peer support network used by participants is distinct from any other type of peer support network explored in previous research on doctoral students, due in large part to the inability to participate in such an online support network until 2004. The creation of Facebook, currently the world's largest social media network, facilitated the opportunity for individuals with similar interests to create closed, online network groups managed by an administrator accepting requests for membership. The *Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees (LCDD)* Facebook group, established and facilitated by Dr. Sofia B. Pertúz, currently has 3,019 members

and growing. According to the page, “This group is for Latinas and anyone who wants to actively support, motivate and inspire Latinas considering a doctorate, currently working on one or who have already completed a doctoral degree.” This virtual support network allows Latinas in doctoral programs to have access to Latina doctoral students, graduates and mentors from all over the country. Members can post questions, share experiences and resources and can opt to develop smaller virtual or in-person support groups after connecting online.

Finally, several participants found that presenting at or attending national and regional conferences was important for their academic development. Meeting critical scholars within their research area of interest was essential to fill in gaps in their doctoral education. It also served to “humanize” academics which helped to increase self-confidence. Meeting other researchers and doctoral students with shared interests also provided them with yet another community of individuals who could relate to and assist with cultural and academic challenges all while empowering them as they cultivate their scholar identity.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study provide several implications for how faculty and administrators can increase their understanding of Latina doctoral student experiences and assist them with negotiating success in academia.

Increasing Awareness and Integration of Latino/a Cultural Values. Latina doctoral students endure the struggle of honoring principles associated with *familismo* and fulfilling expectations deemed necessary to be a successful doctoral student and scholar. It is important for faculty members to be cognizant of Latino/a cultural obligations and gender roles and do their best to refrain from judging a Latina doctoral student’s decision to take care of family first which is an integral part of her ethnic identity. Faculty can still uphold their academic standards

while demonstrating empathy, encouragement and simply asking Latina doctoral students how they could be of any support. Additionally, they can look for ways to capitalize on the strengths of *familismo* and *personalismo* such as honoring family, closeness and collective achievement and incorporate them into student advisement and classroom practices.

Support from family, friends and loved ones was critical to Latina doctoral students in this study in addition to faculty mentoring and peer support. Doctoral programs should establish a New Student & Family/Friends Orientation with the date established well in advance so that newly admitted students and allies can plan to attend. Having a family member/partner/friend with them at such an orientation can begin to help Latina doctoral students with the challenge of important people in their lives not understanding what the doctoral process entails. In addition to providing students with formal requirements and expectations, doctoral students and alumni of color should be part of a panel discussion on experiences and advice or should at least be available to speak to candidates at faculty/student/alumni meet and greet session to close the orientation.

Latina doctoral students in this study endured various instances of otherness. These experiences of otherness led them to feelings of isolation both at home and in their doctoral programs. In an attempt to assist Latina doctoral students with cultural and academic isolation, faculty members and administrators should inform themselves and make their students aware of any resources/offices/organizations on campus that support racially/ethnically diverse students as well as encourage them to join Latino/a professional associations in their particular field (i.e. The National Latina/o Psychological Association, American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, Latino Social Workers Organization, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, etc.). Because joining these organizations involves annual costs that some Latina students may

not be able to pay, departments/colleges should consider granting small scholarships/stipends for doctoral students of color that would pay at least one year's membership and/or fees associated with a national/regional conference. Latina doctoral students would then have an opportunity to either present or interact with Latino/a scholars in their field and, in turn, share what they learned/presented with their department via a program or in class. This could also be included on the college's website or departmental newsletter which would not only serve to promote the doctoral program but also highlight the student's achievement.

Increasing Faculty and Student Interactions Outside of the Classroom. Research on doctoral student experiences has demonstrated the importance of establishing peer support networks and how they influence satisfaction and persistence (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Baird, 1990, Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; González, 2007; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Lovitts, 2001). Being one of the few students of color/Latinas in their doctoral program makes it difficult for Latina doctoral students to engage with students who can relate to their experiences and challenges. Peer mentoring programs/pair-ups should be established for doctoral students of color/Latina doctoral students. At minimum, faculty advisors and/or mentors should introduce Latina doctoral students to Latina doctoral students in the program or in other cohorts and, if there are none, a recent Latina alumna of the program (either in person or virtual introduction via email).

One way that faculty and administrators can effectively interact with Latina (and all) doctoral students outside of the classroom is through the use of social media. Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane's (2011) study of over 1900 faculty members found that more than 90 percent of faculty were using social media for their course or for professional purposes outside of the classroom. Latina doctoral students in this study shared that they were rarely able to interact

with faculty and students outside of the classroom. Creating and/or sharing existing professional faculty/administrator social media accounts for students to follow would provide them with opportunities to establish a rapport with faculty by learning about their research interests and sharing their perspectives on posts or research shared.

Technology could also be incorporated as an alternative form for meeting with faculty members. When meeting in person becomes difficult for a student to schedule due to work or familial obligations, faculty members should consider conducting a video chat meeting. While meeting in person is ideal, virtual meetings, under certain circumstances, would provide an opportunity for students with obligations precluding them from coming to campus to remain connected in a more personalized manner than a phone appointment where parties cannot see each other.

Understanding and Addressing Racial/Ethnic Microaggressions. When sharing their perceptions of the departmental climate, many Latina doctoral students in this study shared their experiences with racial/ethnic microaggressions. Racial/ethnic microaggressions play a major and disturbing role in the experiences of doctoral students of color (Ellis, 2001; García, 2005; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; González et. al, 2002; González, 2006; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Lewis et al., 2004; Truong and Museus, 2012) and can cause emotional, physical and psychological pain and distress (Sue et al., 2007; Truong & Museus, 2012).

Microaggressions are systemic behaviors that need to be addressed at an institutional level. A quick search on the mission statements of the universities these doctoral students attend revealed similar clauses regarding an institutional value placed on diversity or the learning of diverse students. Institutions need to place value on diversity not only in word but in practice, beginning with hiring a more racially/ethnically diverse faculty, particularly Latina faculty who

currently make up approximately 4 percent of tenured/tenure-track female faculty in the United States (Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012).

Diversity training workshops beyond online modules to comply with institutional requirements should be delivered in a program series or through roundtable discussions in order to allow faculty, administrators and students the ability to explore their own racial, ethnic and gender biases more deeply. Service credit should be awarded to faculty seeking promotion for attending such sessions or for facilitating them. Graduate student organizations should co-sponsor such trainings through member attendance and receive programming credit.

In addition to course evaluations, departments should consider implementing their own departmental climate survey for faculty and students in order to assess and compare both groups' perceptions of departmental behaviors and attitudes, academic experiences, racial/ethnic diversity and experiences with racial/ethnic/gender microaggressions or racism. A summary of survey responses should be discussed at a departmental meeting or retreat and an action plan drawn for how best to use the data gathered to inform and/or change departmental practices, course development, programming and resources used for students and faculty.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined the experiences of Latina doctoral students and how intersections of gender, culture and race influenced their experiences, negotiation of their ethnic identities and academic success. More research is needed to further understand the academic experiences of Latina doctoral students. Recommendations for future research are as follows:

1. According to the U.S Census Bureau, in 2009, Latino immigrants had lower levels of degree attainment among all racial groups in the United States—foreign born and native (Siebens & Ryan, 2012). This study was conducted with U.S.-born Latina

- doctoral students in order to minimize the risk of undermining or negating experiences of Latina doctoral students not born in the country who may face additional challenges and stressors associated with being an immigrant in the United States. Future research should explore the experiences of non-U.S. born Latina doctoral students and compare them to experiences of Latina doctoral students in this study.
2. Participants in this study all self-identified as Latina or Hispanic in addition to identities such as Chicana and Afro-Latina which were more meaningful to them based on their experiences. The majority of participants were of Puerto Rican, Dominican and Mexican descent. Narratives regarding social class and racial identity were prevalent among Latina doctoral students of Puerto Rican descent. Racial identity, but in particular Black racial identity, was a salient topic among participants with one or both parents from the Dominican Republic. Among Latina doctoral students of Mexican origins, there were two dominant themes: the recognition of privilege associated with being a light-skinned Latina and the need to express their ethnic identity in communities where there were few Latinos/as or Mexican-Americans. Given the variations in some experiences across Latino/a ethnic groups, future research is needed to explore the nuanced experiences of Latinas who are part of a particular Latino/a ethnic group.
 3. Comas-Díaz (1996) states that LatiNegras or Afro-Latinas are “three minorities in one” because of their race, ethnicity and gender. Self-identified Afro-Latinas in this study endured racism and racial microaggressions because of their appearance and shared experiences where they struggled fitting in as Black or Latina. Future studies

- should focus on the racial and ethnic identity construction and experiences of Afro-Latina doctoral students and how they cope with various forms of oppression as a result of their multiple intersecting identities.
4. This study focused on Latina women currently enrolled in doctoral programs to explore how they negotiated their ethnic identity and academic success. While academic success was seen in grades, passing of qualifying and comprehensive exams, completion of coursework, conference presentations on their research and publishing, the ultimate goal for these participants was to obtain their doctoral degree. A future study should be conducted tracking these participants' academic progress with regard to degree completion and career path from a long-term perspective.
 5. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of establishing “social competence” (González, 2007), “strategic alliances” (Segura, 2003), and “networks of resistance” (González, 2006) in order for Latina doctoral students to create a space where they could share their experiences, address oppressive behaviors, systems that marginalize them and reclaim their identities (Beverley, 2005; Espino et al., 2010; Flores & García, 2009). This study confirms these findings and adds the unique component of an online support network for Latina doctoral students making a “virtual space” accessible to Latina doctoral students from all over the country. Future research should explore virtual/online support networks and how they influence Latina doctoral student persistence.
 6. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Latinos made up 11.2 percent of U.S.-born males graduating with a Bachelor's degree in the 2014-2015 academic year; Latinas made up 12.5 percent of U.S.-born females graduating

with a Bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The educational attainment gap closes, however, when comparing doctoral degree attainment. In 2014-2015, Latino men accounted for 7 percent of males earning a doctoral degree (higher than Black males who earned 6.2 percent of doctoral degrees that year). Latina women earned 7.3 percent of doctoral degrees conferred to women (lower than White, African American and Asian American women; important to note is that American Indian/Alaska Native women earned considerably less at .6 percent). Future studies should explore the academic experiences of Latino male doctoral students and compare them with Latina doctoral students. These Latino doctoral students should then be tracked following attainment of their doctoral degrees as it was further reported that while Latinos and Latinas are equally represented among Latino/a assistant professors, they are disproportionate at the associate professor level (56 percent Latino vs. 46 percent Latina) and even more so at the full professor level (68 percent Latino vs. 32 percent Latina) (Excelencia in Education, 2015).

Conclusion

Findings for this study add to the current body of literature focused on Latina doctoral student experiences by reaffirming as well as identifying dominant narratives that contribute to the ethnic identity, adjustment struggles, and academic challenges of Latina doctoral students. Latina doctoral students' cultural, gendered and racial identities informed their ethnic identities and academic experiences in important and interesting ways that should be acknowledged by faculty and administration looking to support these students. This study not only endeavored to explore, understand and share the stories of Latina doctoral students, it also hopes to bring social awareness to norms and behaviors both in the Latino/a community and in higher education that

contribute to their oppressive and dehumanizing experiences. It calls for socially conscious and humanizing curriculum and institutional practices to ensure their academic success, thus, our collective success in academia and in the United States.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



October 7, 2015

Omayra Arocho

Dear Ms. Arocho,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved as submitted under expedited review your research proposal entitled "Understanding the Latina Doctoral Student Experience: Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success." The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped Consent Form.

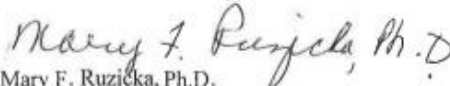
The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,


Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Eunyong Kim

Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2641 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

Appendix B

Letter of Solicitation

Dear Student:

You are invited to participate in a study on the experiences of Latina doctoral students titled: *Understanding the Latina Doctoral Student Experience: Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success*.

All Latinas who are currently enrolled in a doctoral program in the United States are eligible to participate in this study by completing a short demographic questionnaire and will participate in a 60 to 90-minute interview. The interview will be conducted at a place and time that is convenient for you between October 30, 2015 and December 30, 2015. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your academic experiences in your doctoral program and how your Latina identity may have influenced these experiences.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you grant permission, the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. **All conversations will remain confidential; your name and other identifying characteristics will not be used in reports and presentations.**

Thank you for your time and consideration of this study. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me as soon as possible at omayra.arocho@shu.edu.

Sincerely,

Omayra Arocho
Doctoral Candidate
Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy
Seton Hall University College of Education and Human Services

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Understanding the Latina Doctoral Student Experience: Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success

Researcher's Affiliation: Ms. Omayra Arocho is a doctoral candidate in the Seton Hall University College of Education and Human Services, Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to explore the academic experiences of Latina doctoral students and how they balance their ethnic and academic identities. Particular attention will be paid to how race/ethnicity and gender influence their experiences and academic success in doctoral programs.

Research Procedures: Research procedures include the following: research subject completion of a demographic questionnaire and participation in one digital audio recorded, in-depth, semi-structured interview that will not exceed 90 minutes conducted by the researcher. Participants' information and identities will not be released. Interview questions will focus on the participants' intersections of Latina identities, specifically, how race and/or ethnicity and gender have impacted their academic experiences in their doctoral programs.

Interview Guide Instrument: Sample questions that will be asked of each participant will include:

- What factors or experiences, if any, have contributed to your academic progress in your doctoral program?
- What challenges, if any, have you experienced in your doctoral program, department and/or institution?
- What does it mean to be Latina?
- Describe what factors or experiences influence your sense of ethnic identity.
- Do you feel that you are fulfilling what is required or expected of you as a) a doctoral student? b) in your personal/family life? c) Why or why not?
- Has your sense of ethnic identity changed since you began your doctoral program? a) Why or why not? b) How has this change/lack of change impacted you? Your academic progress? Your family? Community or Friends? Partner/Significant Other?
- Describe what formal and/or informal resources/support systems are currently available in order to advance in your doctoral program? a) How, if at all, do you use them?

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time.

Anonymity Preservation and Confidentiality: Anonymity is not possible because the researcher will know the participants as part of the interview process. However, all interview responses will remain confidential and pseudonyms (aliases) will be assigned to each participant and their respective

Expiration Date

OCT 07 2016

Seton Hall University
6/2007

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board
OCT 07 2015
Approval Date

institutions. Participants' identities will not be revealed in preliminary and final reports or published materials. During the study, the dissertation mentor and committee members will have access to the coded information through the researcher.

Anticipated Risks: There is little to no foreseen risks or discomfort involved in the completion of this study.

Benefits: Your participation in this study will provide valuable information in further understanding the academic experiences of Latina doctoral students and how they balance their ethnic and academic identities.

Participant Compensation: There will be no monetary compensation provided to participate in this study.

Contact Information: At any time during the project or after the study is completed, questions regarding this research and research participant's rights can be directed to the principal researcher, Omayra Arocho at omayra.archo@student.shu.edu. The Dissertation Mentor, Dr. Eunyoung Kim can also be reached at eunyoung.kim@shu.edu in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079. If you have questions about your rights as a human research subject, you may contact Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research at (973) 313-6314 or irb@shu.edu.

Audio Record Consent: A digital recorder will be used to record the interviews. Participants will be identified by a pseudonym (alias). Audio files will be kept confidential on a separate, password protected USB memory device transferred from a digital audio recorder. Only the researcher will have direct access; however, the dissertation mentor and committee members will have the right to access the data files upon request. The USB memory device and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher until the study is completed. Participants will have access to their interview data upon request. After the research is completed, the audio files, transcripts and print materials will be destroyed.

Consent: To indicate consent to participate in this research study, please sign and date this form in the space provided below, retain a copy of the signed form for your records and forward the original to me.

_____ **I understand the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of this study. I agree to participate in this study.**

_____ **I agree to be audio recorded during my interview.**

Participant Name (Please Print)

Participant Signature

Date

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

OCT 07 2015

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Expiration Date

OCT 07 2016

Seton Hall University
6/2007

Appendix D

Demographic Information Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation in this study, **Understanding the Latina Doctoral Student Experience: Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success**.

In order to facilitate the interview, please fill out the following demographic questionnaire.

Please Note: Any identifiable information will be kept confidential.

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Place of birth: _____
4. Race: _____
5. Ethnicity (Must self-identify as Latina or Hispanic to participate): _____
6. Nationality/Country of Origin: _____
7. Gender (Must self-identify as female to participate): _____
8. Marital Status: __Single __Partnered __Married __Widowed __Separated __Divorced
9. Do you have any children? If "Yes," how many?
 - a. Yes _____
 - b. No _____
10. Please indicate the highest level of education completed by your parents or guardian(s):
 - a. Father: _____
 - b. Mother: _____
 - c. Guardian(s): _____
11. How many siblings do you have and of what gender? _____
12. What religion are you affiliated with, if any? _____
13. Doctoral Degree & Program (Must be enrolled in a doctoral program in the United States)

14. Student Status: (Must have completed at least two academic semesters)

Full-Time Student Part-Time Student

15. Institution & Location: _____

16. Institution profile: Small Mid-Size Large
 Public Private Religiously affiliated

17. When did you start your doctoral program? Semester & Year _____

18. What phase of the doctoral process are you currently in:

Coursework Comprehensive Exam Dissertation Research

19. Are you currently employed? Yes No Profession:

20. What is your career goal? _____

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Process: Study subjects will be participants in a semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes. This study utilizes the qualitative research methodology strategy of narrative analysis. Therefore, the interview questions will be used as a guide to help maintain the focus of the interview, and to assure that the research questions are thoroughly addressed. Study participants will be informed that they may share as much or as little as they prefer; all stories each participant chooses to share will be accepted. There are several pre-determined questions and probes in the interview protocol in order to elicit specific information that provide background information about the subject and address the research questions.

Consent Process: Once potential subjects express interest in participating in the study after reading the letter of solicitation, I will send a consent form to their student e-mail address and ask that they read it, sign two copies, retain one for their records and forward the other copy to me.

Interview Session Protocol: After, obtaining a signed the Consent Form, a brief demographic survey will be sent to participants to be completed and returned before the scheduled interview.

Interview Script:

“Thank you for your participation today. My name is Omayra Arocho and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program at Seton Hall University. You were invited to participate in this study because you shared on your questionnaire that you identify as a Latina and are currently enrolled in a doctoral program with at least two academic semesters completed. During this 60 to 90 minute interview, I will ask you questions about your background, academic experiences and how your Latina identity may have impacted these experiences.

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic experiences of Latina doctoral students and how they balance their ethnic and academic identities. Particular attention will be paid to how race and/or ethnicity and gender influence their experiences and academic success in doctoral programs. The title of this study is: Understanding Latina Doctoral Student Experiences: Negotiating Ethnic Identity and Academic Success.”

As stated in the Consent Form that you signed, your participation in this study is voluntary and the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder so that I may accurately document your responses. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any presentations or publications that may result from this study. All conversations will remain confidential; your name and other identifying characteristics will not be used. Thank you in advance for your time and for being part of this study.”

Interview Guide:

Participant Interview Number: _____ Pseudonym: _____

Institution Pseudonym: _____

Date of Interview: _____ Start Time: _____ Location: _____

Interview Question	Research Question Addressed
1. Can you tell me about yourself, your family, where you grew up and where you went to school? 2. When did you decide to pursue your doctoral degree and why?	Background questions supplementing Demographic Questionnaire Establish background and ensure study eligibility in addition to questions asked in demographic questionnaire
3. How would you identify yourself? a) What do you base your identity on? 4. Describe what factors or experiences influence your sense of ethnic identity. 5. What does it mean to be Latina?	1. In what ways, if any, does culture, gender and race influence the experiences of Latina doctoral students and inform their sense of ethnic identity? Gain an understanding of how participants view their multiple identities and what experiences influenced their perspective of ethnic identity. Exploration of experiences influenced by gender, race and culture.
6. How did you choose your institution? 7. Describe the a) campus climate b) departmental climate. 8. Describe your relationship with a) program faculty b) your academic advisor c) your dissertation chair/mentor if have one; if not, why? 9. Describe your relationship with the doctoral students in your program. 10. What challenges, if any, have you experienced in your doctoral program, department and/or institution? 11. Have you experienced any events that resulted in you thinking about your race, gender, ethnicity or Latina identity? a) If so, please describe them and how you responded. 12. Do you feel that you are fulfilling what is required or expected of you as a) a doctoral student? b) in your personal/family life? c) Why or why not?	2. What cultural conflicts and academic challenges, if any, do Latina doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs? Overall experiences in doctoral program and relationships/experiences with program faculty and peers Academic and social experiences related to race, ethnicity and gender and exploration of any institutional/departmental norms that may reinforce barriers or a lack of fit for Latina doctoral students

<p>13. What experiences or factors, if any, have contributed to your academic progress in your doctoral program?</p> <p>14. Describe what formal and/or informal resources/support systems are currently available in order to advance in your doctoral program? a) How, if at all, do you use them?</p> <p>15. What can program faculty and administrators do to support Latina doctoral students?</p> <p>16. If you were asked to give advice to a Latina doctoral student about to begin a doctoral program, what would it be?</p>	<p>3. How, if at all, do Latina doctoral students respond to or cope with cultural conflicts and academic challenges in their doctoral programs?</p> <p>Exploration of strategies for academic success, coping and/or resistance Accessibility to and the nature of formal or informal support systems/resources</p>
<p>17. Do you have any questions for me regarding this interview or is there something you would have wanted me to ask you regarding your experience as a Latina doctoral student?</p> <p>18. If I need to clarify any of your responses, may I contact you?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Interview Wrap-Up</p> <p>Opportunity to share additional comments or elaborate on anything already shared</p> <p>Opportunity to correct any misinterpretation or add additional comments</p>