An Examination of the Lived Educational Experiences of Successful Latinas Currently Enrolled in a Four-Year Institution

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Dedication

To Gabrielle and Josh, your love and care about my well being made me realize what wonderful adults you have become. In addition, your support through phone calls, emails, and face-to-face discussions and laughter greatly assisted me throughout this journey. I am a very proud and appreciative mom. Thank you both.

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Abstract of Dissertation

An Examination of the Lived Educational Experiences of Successful Latinas Currently Enrolled in a Four-Year Institution

This qualitative research study discovers, investigates and explores how selected Latinas make meaning of their high school experience. This study also examines whether there are any resources and/or factors that contributed to their success. The 14 participants are currently enrolled as full time students at a post-secondary institution. The researcher conducted one in-depth, semi-structured interview with each participant. Qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2009) were used to analyze what participants shared. Social capital theory was the theoretical perspective that provided the lens for this study (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). A concept map containing four categories, self, family, school and community, along with a constructivist outlook were included in the overall approach to interpret how Latinas made meaning of their experience. Results from analysis of the data revealed five main themes: (a) Self Identity, (b) Family Influences, (c) Educational Experiences, (d) Advocacy, and (e) Community Connections. These themes and the categories in the concept map are interrelated and were found to have an impact on how Latinas access, acquire, network, and build upon social capital. The conclusions, along with the implication to theory, inform the implications for practice in school systems and policy.

Keywords: Latinas, high school, qualitative research, social capital theory

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

The Latino population has one of the lowest high school graduation rates despite their growing population in the school system. They lag very far in achievement and have the highest high school dropout rate (Excelencia in Education, 2015; Hill &Torres, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; PEW Hispanic Center, 2010). "Latinos are by far the largest minority group, numbering more than 12.4 million in the country's elementary, middle and high schools" (White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, p. 2, 2011). Latinas tend to do better in high school and college. However, Gonzalez (2012) stated, "In fact, although Latinas are the largest minority subgroup in the United States, they are also among the least educated populations" (p. 125).

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) (2010) found there was a 15-20 % gap between Latino and White students when analyzing state reading and math test score data from 2008-09. The study included the 50 states and the District of Columbia. As a result, the CEP (2010) concluded achievement gaps are large and persistent. Second, every major student group made gains since 2002 on state reading and math tests; but even when achievement increased for all groups, gaps have not always narrowed. Third, for most student groups, gaps on state tests have narrowed since 2002. Fourth, although gaps have narrowed more rapidly for some groups than for others, progress may take many years to close most gaps (pp. 1-2).

Immigrants and first generation Latinos believe the United States is the land of opportunity provided one is willing to work hard, make sacrifices, and have a

determination to succeed no matter the odds (Hill & Torres, 2010). However, there could be adversities, responsibilities, cultural and educational differences, and other conflicts that may have a negative impact on whether Latino students earn their high school diplomas and move on to post-secondary institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Latinas are graduating from high school at a higher rate than Latinos. However, they are trailing behind other ethnic female groups (Gandara, Oseguera, Huber, Locks, Ee & Molina, 2013; Gandara & The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH), 2015; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC &MALDEF, 2009; Unmuth, 2012; Zambrana, 2011). It is important to ensure Latinas have opportunities to graduate from high school and seek further education, if desired, in order to improve their lives and have a positive impact on future generations.

Traditionally, Latinas have been expected to take care of household responsibilities, assist with childcare, work part time, and remain at home until marriage (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Zambrana, 2011). If necessary, Latinas dropped out of school to assist in maintaining the home while parents worked one or more jobs. For some families, tradition may still be important but education is also seen as the way to improve the lives of their children, including Latinas.

Research has not kept up with the rising numbers of Latino youth (Denner & Guzman, 2006, p. 4). Based on projections by the EPE Research Center, Latinos are more than one-quarter of the nation's 1.1 million non-graduates (Education Week Diploma Counts, 2012). However, the percentages of non-graduates by race are: Hispanic 27%; Black 27%; White 41%; American Indian 2%; and Asian 3% (Education Week Diploma

Counts, 2012). Latino high school dropouts are the least likely to pursue and obtain a GED (Education Week, Diplomas Count, 2012; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Although the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) stated the dropout rates for Whites, Black, and Hispanics declined between 1980 and 2008, the dropout rates for Latinos and Blacks remained higher than the White rate.

The Education Week Diplomas Count 2013 issue was devoted to dropout recovery and highlighted recovery initiatives from several cities and states. In another section the issue stated, "Dropouts give a common array of reasons for leaving school. Targeted dropout recovery programs have been created in response" (p. 10). Reasons for dropping out included disciplinary problems, chronic absenteeism, financially assisting family, pursuing a GED, feelings of not belonging or not able to stay caught up with school work, academic failure, and pregnancy or other concerns. Seven authors chose one of the seven dropout reasons to discuss and highlighted a program from a state-wide initiative or a particular school which focused on that specific reason.

One in four Latino students will be attending public schools by 2020 or 2021 (Education Week Diploma Counts, 2012; Gandara, 2010). Gandara and Contreras (2009) stated, "By 2025, the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that one of every four students will be Latino, and that the population will continue to become more Hispanic. Latino youth are inextricably linked to the nation's future", (p. 17). Gandara and WHIEEH (2015) reported, "Projections are that by 2060, Latinas will form nearly a third of the female population of the nation", (p. 5). These same students come from homes where parents have little education and live in poverty. As of 2011, 34% of Latino children under the age of 18 were living in poverty (The Condition of Education, U.S. Department of

Education, 2013). Several authors suggested this situation may negatively impact our economic growth and ability to compete in the global world (Education Week Diploma Counts, 2012; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; and Zambrana, 2011).

Academic achievement is crucial for all of our students, but especially for Latino students because they are the largest minority group enrolled in schools across the country. This group of students needs to be formally educated in order to become life-long learners and productive citizens. Their prospects still appear to be a concern due to barriers, such as having difficulty learning English, low educational aspirations, taking low-level courses, teachers who are not prepared or knowledgeable enough to deal with social and cultural issues, and overall feelings of inadequacy and not belonging (Gandara, 2010; Gandara, Oseguera, Huber, Locks, Ee & Molina, 2013; Gibson, Gandara & Koyama, 2004). Schools that have a high percentage of Latino students tend to be located in poor neighborhoods, overcrowded, inadequate, and contain poor resources. In this type of situation, Latino students are isolated and tend not to have the opportunity to work with White or other middle class students (Education Week, Diploma Counts, 2012).

There are a number of Latino students who do graduate and move on to a post-secondary institution. Fry & Lopez (2012) emphasized that increasing numbers of Hispanic students are enrolling in college. They have now exceeded the enrollment of White students (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/04/hispanic-college-enrollment-rate-surpasses-whites-for-the-first-time/). However, Fry (2013) believed this increase is partially due to the beginning of the recession in 2008 and that these students may be more inclined to enroll on a part time basis. Crisp, Taggart, and Nora (2014) noted “the majority of Latina/o students are enrolling at 2-year institutions”, (p. 2).

According to Fry (2004, 2012), Latino students tend to go to community colleges or less selective colleges due to financial reasons. However, EPE Research, Education Week noted "Latino students who make it to college are far less likely than their Black, White, and Asian-American peers to finish" (p. 4). Fry (2004) also noted they will probably not complete a college degree because they live at home, commute to college, and/or provide financial help at home. Krogstad and Fry (2014) stated only 9% of Hispanics, ages 25 to 29, earned bachelor's degrees in 2012. Zambrana (2011) stated, "Latino girls are more likely than Latino boys to attend college – a trend that is similar across racial and ethnic groups" (p. 90).

This basic qualitative study focused on Latinas instead of the entire Latino community because Latinas have not always received opportunities to pursue their education (Gandara et al., 2013), and they have the lowest graduation rate among other minority women (Gandara & WHIEEH, 2015; Zambrana, 2011). However, Latinas do better in both high school and college than Latinos (Gandara et al., 2013; Zambrana, 2011). Therefore, this study chose to look at a successful group of Latinas from a success rather than a deficit perspective. In addition, it is important to note that researching how successful Latinas were able to graduate from high school was vital because the information discovered may provide insight and examples that can be passed on to other young Latinas. It is hopeful this information will lead to more dialogue about possible ways to improve educational outcomes for Latinas. Other studies have shown that the mother's educational level has a direct correlation to how their children will do once they enter school.

According to Kim from the American Council on Education (2011), high school completion among females, ages 18-24, was computed by race and ethnicity from 1989-2009. In 1989, the statistics were 84.2% White, 79.2% Black, and 59.5% Latina. This trend continued to increase; and by 2009 the high school completion rate was 90% White, 82.8% Black, and 75.9% Latina. College enrollment of 18-24 year old females by race and ethnicity in 1989 was 32.2% White, 26.8% Black, and 17.5 % Latina. In 2009, the percentages increased to 50% White, 41.2% Black, and 34.4% Latina. Kim (2011) noted "Since 2006, data were derived from a different survey and may not be fully compatible with previous years' data. Data also includes GED participants" (Table 2, p. 7).

From 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, The Condition of Education (2012) reported females earned approximately 60-62% for associate's degrees and 57-58% for bachelor degrees. Hispanic females earned 62% and Black females earned 68% of associate's degrees. In addition, Hispanic females earned 61% and Black females earned 66% of bachelor's degrees. The Condition of Education (2012) also noted females from racial and ethnic groups earned most of the associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees during the 2009-2010 years.

Having at least a high school diploma enabled students to pursue a full time job or to successfully complete their post-secondary education. Cammarato (2004) stated:

> A study conducted by the American Association of University Women compares national data on achievement rates for girls of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Ginorio and Huston 2001). This study reveals that Latinas have the highest dropout rate, at 26 percent. Only Latinos experience a higher rate of attrition, at 31 percent. . . .The slow pace of their advancement still places [Latinas] at a social and educational disadvantage. (p. 55)

Denner & Guzman (2006) stated "Latina girls living in the United States have unique challenges and strengths . . ." (p. 2). These authors maintained they put together

the first book that concentrated on the "positive aspects of Latina girls' lives" (p. 8). Some Latinas discovered that a high school diploma and a college degree could free them from the role of subordination (Cammarota, 2004, p. 53). Latinas understood the hardships some of their mothers and/or other females in the family endured because the focus was on taking care of the family and being subordinate to the males. Their mothers wanted to see their daughters achieve but sometimes provided conflicting advice if assistance in the form of working or taking care of siblings became a concern. Some Latinas encouraged their mothers to stop being subordinate and open their eyes and minds to possibilities of growing and putting their needs first. When Latina mothers are involved in their daughters' educational experiences, both mothers and daughters become more confident and successful (Cammarota, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Denner & Guzman, 2006).

In researching the literature to determine how to understand what assisted with Latino students not dropping out of high school, there were a number of factors found that encouraged students to remain in school and assisted them in completing all required coursework, and ultimately earning a high school diploma. These factors may have included student attitude and family, caring teachers, and community programs. (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor & Bamaca, 2006; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). In addition to these various factors, there appeared to be a number of characteristics that successful Latino students possess. Some of these characteristics were having and maintaining a positive attitude, self-motivation, high self-esteem, a close family adult, and a good working relationship with teachers who cared about them. In addition, parent/student relationships and cultural variables could also affect Latino student

achievement (Gandara, 1995; Gandara et. al, 2013; Gonzalez, 2013; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009).

Some minority students or students at risk for not graduating sometimes have difficulty learning and succeeding in school (Meeker, Edmonson & Fisher, 2009; Somers & Pillawsky, 2004; Zambrana, 2011). Specifically, some Latino students may have additional unique issues, such as language barriers or cultural concerns (Garcia, 2001). A question that persists throughout the literature is how some students are able to cope and succeed in their education despite issues, problems, or other adversities that occur in their daily lives. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) believed minority students need a model that fosters coping strategies, encourages self-empowering, and is intellectually enlightening. Morales (2010) believed there was a growing emphasis on academic resilience as an educational field of study (p. 164). Morales also stated ". . . there is a need to expand basic understandings of which groups of protective factors work well in combination with each other and how these combinations prove efficacious" (p. 173). Latina voices may shed light on how or why various types of supports, protective factors, or other related situations can help us understand whether these types of lifelines were connected to their success.

Leaders in education, the community, and policy makers must dialogue and continue to search for ways to increase Latina/o high school graduation and post-secondary education. One community in South Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, discussed their concerns and steps taken to encourage and increase 'college-going' in their area and beyond the Rio Grande Valley (Yamamura, Martinez & Saenz, 2010). In another study,

the author emphasized the importance of utilizing an initiative such as Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE), (Nesman, Basche & Hernandez, 2007).

Purpose and Research Questions

On February 24, 2009, President Obama spoke with Congress and explained the country must strive to have the highest number of college graduates by 2020 in order to be ranked number one in the world. It was noted that 8 million more people will need to achieve either a two- or four-year degree to be prepared for jobs which require more than a high school diploma. In order to accomplish this goal, each state was asked to set up goals to in order to make this happen. A chart listed the number of additional degrees needed from each state in order to reach the 8 million mark. As of March 2011, 19 of the 50 states set goals to achieve this benchmark (www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/completion_state_by_state.pdf).

There are research articles that focus on Latina/o high school dropouts, transitions to college, and lived college experiences; but more research is needed, which reports data on Latina student voices regarding their lived experiences in high school. Before we can fully understand what factors help Latina students become successful high school graduates, we must listen to the voices of our Latina students. In a dissertation by Vargas (2010), she explained that a gap in the literature of educational success in the face of adversity is the missing voices of minority students. These students could share a wealth of information about their educational experience if only someone would listen.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine and understand how Latinas, attending a four-year post-secondary institution, made meaning of their lived high school experience. Second, this research study investigated whether any resources

and factors, if any, contributed to their success. This study conducted and completed one in-depth semi-structured interview with each participant. Each transcribed interview was read several times, analyzed, and coded for emergent themes. The results of this study provided information about how successful Latina students navigated their high school years and obtained their diplomas. Qualitative methods were used for data collection and analysis in order to bring a voice to Latina high school graduates.

The focus research questions for this study were:

1. How do Latinas, attending a four-year post-secondary institution, make meaning of their high school experience?
2. What are the resources and factors, if any, Latinas experienced that contributed to their high school success?

The qualitative method is used when a researcher is curious about how people's lives are impacted based upon their lived experiences from a particular time or event. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to ask a variety of pertinent questions in order to interpret meanings of experience (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This method was used to seek answers to the research questions listed in this study. The research questions asked Latinas to talk about their lived educational experiences. The researcher also asked the selected participants to talk about any resources or supports, such as friends and/or teachers, who may have assisted them in their successful endeavor. The participants were chosen through a criterion sampling procedure. The participants were at least 18 years old, graduated from high school or earned a GED, and currently enrolled in a four-year university. After the researcher received approval from The George Washington University Internal Review Board, the three educational institutions received a site

permission letter requesting to interview Latinas on their campus. Once approval was granted, the educational institutions received a recruitment email to participants, which the researcher requested to be emailed to potential Latinas. Interested Latinas emailed the researcher allowing the researcher to ensure the Latinas met the criteria selection. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), "In common interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15+/-10" (p. 113). The researcher conducted one in-depth semi-structured interview with 14 Latinas. The criteria cited above were important because the researcher wished to seek answers from selected participants in order to learn about their lived experiences. All interviews were transcribed via a digital recorder. Each participant provided a pseudonym in order to protect her confidentiality. All data were collected and stored in a secure manner. Analytic and reflective memos were written before, during, and after each interview. When reading each transcript, the researcher underlined and highlighted information that seemed important to reference.

There have been studies completed where participants were asked to go back in time in order to reflect on a specific incident or their life history. The method sometimes used is called the retrospective method. Garmezy (1974) discussed how this method can be fraught with concerns about a participant's recollection of events due to various reasons, such as illness or willingness to respond. A study of Malaysian family life was conducted using retrospective survey data. According to Haaga (1986), researchers learned "that more highly educated and literate respondents answered survey questions more exactly and probably more accurately" (p. 54). In addition, Haaga stated, "The retrospective nature of the data, even of data pertaining to events taking place long before the time of the survey, need not exact a major penalty in terms of accuracy. . ." (p. 54).

Gutek (1978) found very little difference in reporting accurate information regarding a specific incident whether it was two years ago or ten years ago. Therefore, the researcher hoped the selected Latinas would be very interested in sharing their lived experiences and recall incidents with clarity.

The first cycle coding consisted of Open Coding. Saldana (2009) stated "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). It was important to capture tentative codes and words/phrases from each participant's perspective. The second cycle coding consisted of Pattern Coding which allowed the researcher to look for patterns or similarities from each participant's responses.

As a result of following all of the steps in the research process, the researcher discovered enlightening information about the Latina's lived educational experiences and how they interpreted those experiences. Using the constructivist approach, the researcher gathered this information and interpreted the findings. The researcher hoped the findings will be beneficial to a number of stakeholders involved in the education field.

Statement of Potential Significance

As the largest minority population in schools today, it is imperative for school systems to find strategies and supports that will foster development and growth for all Latino students, Latinas specifically, as they move through the K-12 system. Studies have been conducted that explored student motivation, acculturation, and reasons for dropping out of high school. However, more studies may be needed to explore Latina student

attitudes or perspectives about what resources or factors are needed or have helped them successfully complete high school.

The results of this study may be beneficial to the district when researching or discussing ways to address underachievement of Latina students. These discussions could lead to the development of a partnership with a local Latino organization within the district. The partnership could meet on a regular basis to establish a mission, set goals, including methods to obtain community involvement, and discuss ways to improve Latina educational outcomes. District leaders and principals may also meet to discuss minority data to determine what next steps may be needed in order to improve Latina academic achievement at specific schools.

The results of this study may have an important impact on leadership because principals have a role ". . . in defining, developing, and implementing education policy" (Fowler, 2009, p. 18). Principals may need to have discussions with staff about minority achievement. These discussions, if needed, could be incorporated into one or more of the monthly staff meetings or during professional development sessions. The initial discussions would be about awareness and could eventually lead to teacher to teacher best practices sessions. Through this method, principals can know teachers have been taught to differentiate instruction, provide a number of opportunities for student growth, embrace a caring and open mindset, and maintain a positive relationship and high expectations for all students.

The results of this study can benefit teachers because it will encourage them to use up to date pedagogy as they plan and prepare appropriate and meaningful lessons, activities, and assessments for different learning styles, and provide immediate and

relevant feedback in order to assist and meet the needs of Latina students. The results of this study may also be beneficial to parents as a way to enhance their abilities to support their daughters' education. Community organizations may be able to partner with parents and schools by providing a variety of resources and possible programs that could help foster determination and boost self confidence. Leadership by the principal can help foster a trusting partnership among the school, parents, and the community.

Research indicates it is important to be a caring adult to all students. However, it is also crucial to uphold a welcoming environment in the classroom, establish rapport, and maintain positive relationships with minority students. In a study about school culture, Rodriguez (2008) discovered, "Black and Latina or Latino students across both schools spoke in detail about the importance of personalized relationships" (p. 764). Students will work hard if they believe teachers care about their well being. The research findings will help me become a better instructional leader because I hope to gain unique insight, from the participants, about their educational experiences. This insight will enable me to share information and support colleagues, teachers, and other staff members in our quest to prepare and equip all students, especially Latinas, with the ability to access and utilize social capital throughout their education and future.

Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (1998) defined theoretical perspective as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (p. 3). This basic qualitative research study attempted to describe, understand, and interpret how Latinas made meaning of their educational experience.

This study also discussed several resources or supports, if any, that may have assisted the Latinas in their success.

In order to examine these experiences, constructivism and social capital theory was utilized. Both were important in order to gather information and understand how Latina students constructed their reality, made connections, navigated the educational system, and possibly utilized a variety of factors in order to be academically successful. According to Crotty (1998), constructivism is "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 43). Therefore, this epistemological approach allowed the researcher an opportunity to obtain the big picture about each Latina's view of her experience. The research study used social capital theory as the lens to interpret the data collected. Using social capital as the lens enabled the researcher the ability to determine how students accessed their social capital, acquired social capital and from whom, or understand how social capital was gained through the Latina's use of her own abilities, resilience, or something else. In addition, social capital assisted in trying to determine whether the community played a role in connecting students, family, and school or if the student utilized community in order to access social capital and was able to make the connection of all three on her own.

Social Capital Theory. Several authors had major influences in defining social capital and the role it plays in society. Coleman (1966, 1988), a sociologist, argued social capital was a resource that could be accessed and used by everyone. He used this theory when trying to understand and explain how social inequality and academic achievement

were related. Coleman (1988) also believed social capital influenced education as well as other aspects of one's life and that family played a very crucial role in this arena. Putnam (2000) believed "child development is powerfully shaped by social capital" (p. 296). He also discussed the importance of being involved in not only one's family but also with other groups within the community and outside of the community. In this sense, people should bond within groups and bridge with outside groups in order to obtain what is needed. This bridging and bonding must be done with trust, support, reciprocity, and civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). Stanton-Salazar (2001) focused on the importance of how institutional agents (schools, places of employment) can assist students in gaining more access to social capital. In addition, Stanton-Salazar contended resiliency, peers, and mentoring have a greater impact on acquiring and using social capital. Putnam (2000) stated:

> A considerable body of research dating back at least fifty years has demonstrated that trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity within a child 's family, school, peer group, and larger community have wide-ranging effects on the child's opportunities and choices and, hence, on his [her] behavior and development. (p. 296)

Once social capital is acquired, students are able to strategize and navigate the educational system, which in turn empowers them to continue to access social capital whenever needed. In other words, social capital is about the importance of relationships and how people can help each other by making connections and commitments (Field, 2008). In layman's terms, social capital is the ability to meet and connect with a variety of people who are able to help one reach their goals at various stages of his/her career and life. Social capital theory looks at how one acquires and utilizes relationships throughout their lives in order to progress through life experiences, which includes school and work as examples.

Access to a promising educational future may depend on a number of variables, such as family dynamics and backgrounds, economic status, social networks, and social capital. Some families are fortunate to have access to all of these, and other families may have access to some or very little. The emphasis on whether the amount of social capital one has will determine one's ability to be successful has and continues to be debated among a number of scholars (Coleman, 1988; Field, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

This study was guided by the three definitions of social capital derived from Coleman (1966, 1988), Putnam (2000), and Stanton-Salazar (2001). Figure 1 represented a concept map, which demonstrated how social capital may affect the selected Latinas in each area depicted. Since social capital was the theoretical perspective used as the theory and lens to examine and interpret Latina success, it was important to see how self, family, school, and community connected with each other, overlapped with one or two, or had no bearing at all on their abilities to acquire social capital. It was hoped they were able to utilize what social capital they may already possessed while building upon and accessing additional social capital throughout their education and beyond.

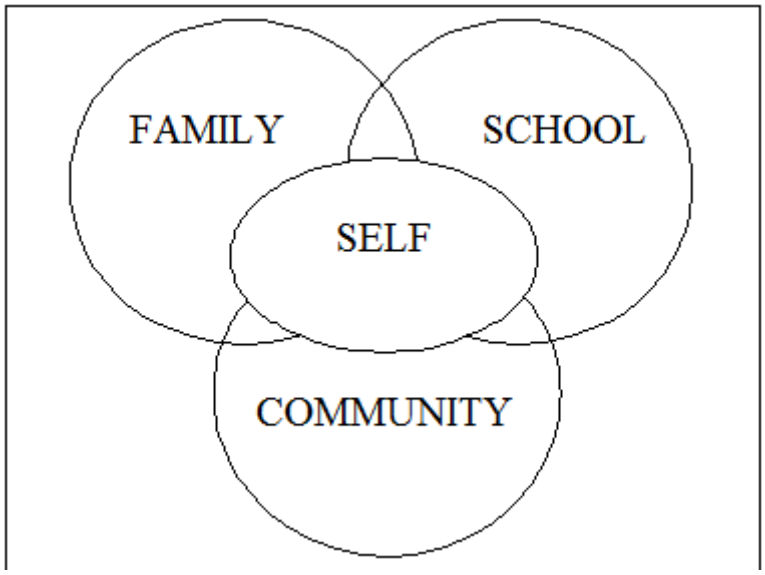

Figure 1. Conceptual Map

Summary of Methodology

Merriam (2009) stated, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). This basic interpretive study utilized social capital theory and the conceptual map as the framework and the lens to interpret and construct how selected Latinas made meaning of their high school experience. One 60-90 minute semi-structured interview was conducted with each selected Latina. Reflective notes were written before and after each interview in order to capture the researcher's thoughts, observations, and questions. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and sent via email to each participant. Participants communicated via email whether corrections were needed, information was left out, or provided additional comments. Once all information was included in each transcript, the researcher began the coding process (Saldana, 2009). The researcher analyzed each transcript several times, underlining, circling words, and highlighting important information. After pre-coding

was completed, first cycle coding was utilized. The researcher did not put a limit on the number of codes formulated during this cycle. For the second cycle, pattern coding was used as the next step. The codes were collapsed and major themes and categories were developed. I used Atlas.ti in the coding and sorting process. Analytic and reflective memos were written throughout this entire process. Several discussions occurred with a peer debriefer. Continuous analysis occurred until five emergent themes were identified. The researcher believed the five themes were appropriate (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The findings provided interesting information about how selected Latinas utilized existing social capital and acquired additional social capital from various sources in order to navigate the educational system. These findings also contributed to existing literature on Latinas and their educational experiences and future educational attainment.

Delimitations

This research focused on 14 selected Latina participants who were able to successfully graduate from high school and enroll in a four-year university. Since these participants are currently in college, the researcher discovered whether their lived high school experiences played a small or large role in their decision to continue their education.

Limitations

Research indicated Latinas have the lowest graduation rate among other female populations. Since this study focused only on Latinas, the results cannot be compared to other female populations. In addition, findings from this study cannot be generalized to represent all Latinas because more data from a larger pool would be needed to make

overall general conclusions and to provide specific recommendations for the Latina population.

Statement of Researcher Subjectivity

As an educator for 30 years, I still strongly believe in the phrase "All students can learn and be successful". This belief and my background experiences are the reasons for remaining in education. I was a teacher for 13 years and always looked for the quiet or shy students in order to encourage and help them find their self confidence and to believe in their abilities to succeed. As an administrator for 17 years, I continue to work with a variety of students but still find myself looking out for those students who seem lost or unsure. I also had experience working directly with Latino students and figuring out how to best communicate with them and their families in order to help them be successful.

As a result of these experiences, I chose to research how a selected number of Latina students made meaning of their high school experience. I wanted to find out what they experienced, how it made them feel, and whether or not there were resources or supports that helped them to be successful. The information discovered was very enlightening, exciting, and important to share. This research could have a very positive impact on understanding Latinas, their backgrounds and responsibilities, and how to provide an education that will prepare them to be college and career ready.

Definition of Key Terms

A ***Hispanic or Latino*** person is of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The term "Spanish origin" can be used in addition to "Hispanic or Latino" (http://nces.ed.gov/statprog/2002/glossary.asp#hispanic) In addition, both terms began to be used together or interchangeably in 2000 (Zambrana, 2011).

Latina is a female of Latin American or Spanish descent**.**

Latino is a male of Latin American or Spanish descent**.**

Resilience is the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today's world (Henderson, 1996).

Protective factors are innate or stress-reducing characteristics; successful coping mechanisms in the face of adversities (Henderson, 1996; Werner, 1987).

Success each participant will provide her definition of success.

Supports are viewed as assistance from family, friends, church, teachers, and schools.

Resources are interventions, counseling, and access to challenging and rigorous courses and/or programs.

Community consists of neighborhoods, after school programs, churches, organizations, and other partners who are vested in educational attainment.

College and Career Ready are students who have successfully met the graduation requirements for the State of Maryland and the University of Maryland System. Students should also be ready for a career. (Maryland State Department of Education; U.S. Department of Education: A Blueprint for Reform, 2010).

Post-secondary education involves attending a two-year or four-year institution and graduating with a certificate and/or degree.

Social Capital is the ability to meet and connect with a variety of people who are able to help one reach their goals at various stages of his/her career and life.

Summary

Due to the limited research on Latina voices, this study attempted to discover and examine how some Latinas were successful in graduating from high school and moving on to post-secondary education.

Chapter 2 focused on relevant research that discusses Latinas and how they view themselves, their experiences, and future opportunities. This chapter provided a historical perspective and argued why it was important for all students to have and access additional social capital in their lives and be able to utilize and capitalize on it in order to be able to navigate and network in and out of various groups for personal and professional success. This chapter also provided a definition of social capital from three key researchers and how this theory was used as the framework to interpret findings.

In Chapter 3, I explained the research methodology, theoretical framework, and research design. This chapter discussed participant selection procedures and explained the procedures used before, during, and after interviews were completed. Data collection, storage, confidentiality, and analysis were explained. The researcher's subjectivity was also included in this chapter.

Chapter 4 shared the results of the findings and provided examples of the participants' thoughts about their families and themselves. The results also provided information about how the participants felt about their educational experiences. In addition emergent themes were shared.

Chapter 5 provided the researcher's interpretation of the findings. This chapter also included implications for policy and practice. In addition, recommendations for future studies were discussed.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine and understand how Latinas, attending a four-year post-secondary institution, made meaning of their lived high school experience. Second, this research study investigated whether any resources and factors, if any, contributed to their success. Research has been conducted regarding Latinos in general, defined in this study as an ethnic group regardless of gender. However, fewer studies have been completed about Latinas specifically and how they view themselves and their educational experience and aspirations. Therefore, this literature review discussed the historical perspective of Latinas in education and how gender may have an impact. In addition, I studied educational aspirations of Latinas in high school and beyond and how they view themselves. The researcher investigated family involvement and discussed the role it may play in Latina success (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Soto, 2007). Finally, the role of the school was explored to determine what school supports, programs, and leadership helped or hindered Latina success.

Methods of Literature Review. While conducting research about the educational aspirations, attainment and success of Latinas and how they navigate the educational system, I utilized the following key words to assist me in my review of the literature:

Latinas	High school education
Latina students	Latinas in the US
Latinas and educational opportunities	Achievement gap
Hispanic girls	Hispanic education
Hispanic Americans & college success	Latina education success
Multicultural education	Student attitudes

Academic aspiration	Cultural differences
Gender	Gender Bias
Gender Oppression	Why Gender is important
Student expectations and education	Aspirations and Hispanic Females
Social capital and Latinas	Social capital
Social capital and high school success	Hispanic and high school females
Social capital, Latinas & post secondary education	Social capital and education
Social capital and minority students	minority education
Resilience	Resilience theory

A variety of databases and other sources were utilized while searching for literature regarding successful Latinas. The list is below:

ProQuest	ERIC
JSTOR	Ebscohost
Aladin	Academic Search Complete
Google Scholar	WRLC Libraries
Gelman Library Assistance	

All of the information from articles, books, and studies were grouped in the following manner: Historical Perspective of Latino Education; Importance of Gender; Educational Aspirations of Latinas; Family, Community Engagement, and Support; School and Leadership; and Social Capital. Each of these topics provided pertinent information. In addition, each topic will be discussed in detail.

Historical Perspective of Latino Education

As of 2011, the Latino population is the largest minority group in the United States (Education Week, Diploma Counts, 2012; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gandara, Oseguera, Huber, Lock, Ee & Molina, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Currently, when looking at pre-k through 12th grade public school students from 1972 to 2011, the Hispanic student population increased from 6% to 23.9% (PEW Hispanic Center, 2012). According to the National Association of Education Progress (NAEP), White, Black, and Hispanic 9-year-olds had higher average reading scores in 2008 than they had in previous assessments. At ages 13 and 17, Hispanic students also scored higher in 2008. Average math scores showed improvement in 1973 for 9-year old Hispanics. During a 35-year period, average math scores improved for 13- and 17-year old White, Black and Hispanic students (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/Indicator_CNJ/COE_CNJ_2013_04.pdf, p. 2).

The NAEP summarized national trends in math for 4th and 8th grade students from 1990-2009. Math scores of 4th grade Hispanic and White students were 199 and 219 respectively. As of 2009, scores were 227 for Hispanic and 248 for White students, which demonstrated a 21 point gap. During the same time period, 8th grade Hispanic students scored 245, and White students scored 269. In 2009, scores moved to 266 for Hispanic and 292 for White students. This left a 26 point gap in scores. The NAEP indicated there were no significant differences with the gaps from the 4th or 8th grade scores (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Data from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) (2010) shows "The gaps in reading between African American and White students, and between Latino and White students widened on NAEP, on the state test, or on both in a notable number of

states" (p. 41). Even though there has been some progress, the achievement gap for Latino students still exists.

At 52 million, Latinos make up 17% of the population. Out of 1.1 million non-graduates in 2012, 27% were Latinos (Education Week, Diplomas Count, 2012; PEW Hispanic Center, 2013; White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, 2011; Zambrana, 2011). With over one quarter non-graduates from the Latino population, there seem to be complex issues, indicators, and outcomes at stake for this population that could have very negative impact on this group and the country as a whole unless we continue to figure out how to help them be successful.

In order to try to understand why there is such a low graduation rate among Latinos, it was important to take a step back and discuss the historical perspective of Latino education.

Before Brown v. Board of Education. Segregation of minority students occurred throughout United States history (Grant, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Saenz, 2004; Soto, 2007). Soto (2007) argued that different explanations about Latinos' lack of education and/or education attainment depended upon the view and beliefs during the years from the 1860s to the 1930s. White Americans believed their race was superior and dominated other races. Soto also contended the "separate but equal" label and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) laid down the rules for discrimination into the 1920s and 1930s. Soto was supported in her contention that Latinos were treated harshly and socially segregated by including information from Menchaca's and Valencia's 1990 article, which discussed how segregation impacted Mexican students in California. In an updated book, Valencia (2011) said "school failure among Chicano students refers to their *persistently,*

pervasively, and disproportionately, low academic achievement" (p. 4). Valencia argued there were 15 reasons Chicano students are not doing well, which included segregation issues, academic achievement, and teacher-student interactions.

The 1947 *Mendez et* al. *v. Westminister School District* (1946) and *Hernandez v. Texas (1954)* cases also occurred before the Brown decision. Saenz (2004) asserted these cases should have been landmark cases because both cited segregation was unlawful, and Mexican Americans were their own group and had the right to fight ongoing segregation (p. 276). Saenz admits the two cases did not become landmark cases for the following reasons:

> Mendez was not part of a concerted litigation campaign to achieve the reversal of the broad and pernicious *Plessy v. Ferguson* precedent and both parties stipulated that Mexican Americans are part of the white race and that the case, therefore, raised 'no question of race discrimination.' (pp. 277-278)

It was noted the designation of White instead of Mexican American did not prevent the continued segregation of Mexican Americans in the schools in California and other states (Saenz, 2004; Soto, 2007). Nieto (2004), in reference to the Mendez case, noted, ". . . Latinos benefited from racism against other groups . . . ." (p. 24). This was true with the Mendez case because the court ruled Latinos were not identified with Negro or other minority races. According to San Miguel (2013), "The trend in federal decisions between 1930 and 1960 was to classify them [Chicanos] as a distinct class of whites for constitutional purposes" (p. 48). This strategy did not remain in place beyond the 1960's because the Chicano students were used to desegregate the schools. Nieto (2004) did reveal in some cases Mexicans were identified as White when some districts wanted to keep Whites separated from African Americans. In order to maintain this ideal, Mexican students were used to integrate Black schools. Nieto surmised these options did not really

provide true equality. She emphasized the importance of African Americans and Latinos organizing together and advocating for educational equity and justice.

The *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954) case protected Latinos under the Fourteenth Amendment but did not state whether Latinos were considered to be an "identifiable ethnic minority" (Soto, p. 89). According to Soto (2007), both cases were important because they helped provide important information and arguments for the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case.

Brown v. Board of Education to the Present. Several authors discussed the impact of the 1954 Brown decision, noting that Latinos were left out of the Black/White discussion (Grant, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Saenz, 2004). McUsic (2004) confirmed this sentiment, saying "As an articulation of principle, Brown has succeeded. As a tool of integration, it has failed" (p. 1334). Therefore, the authors questioned whether this landmark case really made a difference.

Identification with a race was not the only way Latinos experienced discrimination. Nieto (2004) voiced concern about discrimination against Mexican American students due to language more so than race, but believed language was an easy reason to segregate Latino students (Soto 2007). The literature showed *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) made an impact, but also believed the struggle must continue for true equality and opportunities for students of color to be successful in school and beyond.

After the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, there were a number of court cases involving Latinos and their education. In *Crawford v. Board of Education of Los Angeles* (1963), the California court determined the public school system violated the law by segregating Latino students. However, the court deemed it appropriate to

segregate based on language (Soto, 2007). In *Keyes v. School District No. 1* (1973), the Supreme Court stated both Blacks and Latinos suffered the same discriminatory treatment as compared to White people. "The Court declared that despite the variations of local custom and statues, both groups on occasion suffered from identical discrimination and should benefit from the same remedies" (p. 90). Gandara (2011) stated "…this right was never seriously enforced [for Latinos], in good part because the Department of Justice and the Office for Civil Rights were in the hands of administrations opposed to desegregation" (p. 267). Soto (2007) believed in spite of the cases involving Latinos and desegregation, inequality has hurt their education. In addition, the language difficulties enabled Latinos to be continually segregated. Gandara (2011) supported this belief and stated "Latinos have been segregated in three areas: ethnicity, poverty, and language" (p. 266). Orfield (2011) stated "Research shows more clearly than ever that segregation is linked to worse educational outcomes" (p. 314). Hispanics/Latinos were not recognized as an official population until 1976 with the passage of Public Law 94-311 (Zambrana, 2011). Zambrana stated, "In 1980, Hispanics were officially counted for the first time not as an aggregate White category but as a distinct racial/ethnic group" (p. 15).

With over 50 years of mandated integration, a number of desegregation efforts are being dismantled by the Supreme Court (Frankenberg & Debray, 2011; Hall, 2005; Jones & Hancock, 2005). States no longer have to use forced bussing to try to make schools more integrated. As a result, segregation is increasing for African American and Latino children (Frankenberg & Debray, 2011; Hall, 2005; Jones & Hancock, 2005; Nieto, 2004). However, Gay (2004) stated "Latinos are the most segregated group of color" (p. 14). Hall (2005) argued the Brown decision was really about education and

how education would be impacted in the future. However, Hall (2005) stated the gap is widening between Whites and Asians and between African Americans and Latino students. In order to better understand the importance of educating the growing population of Latinos, it is the thought of some authors that the country should be educated on the full meaning of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and how this information impacts Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans – not just Blacks and Whites (Grant, 2004; Hall, 2005; Jones & Hancock, 2005; McUsic, 2004).

In order to fully understand the concerns about the future impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), it was important to take a look at two court cases that changed the landscape of using race as a way to ensure desegregation in schools. The first court case was *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle District No. 1-05-908* (2007). The second case was *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education 05-915* (2007).

Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle District No. 1 (PICS, 2007). Orfield, Frankenberg, and Garces (2008) discussed the ramification of the Supreme Court's ruling in relation to two cases: *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle District No. 1-05-908* (2007) and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education 05-915* (2007) in Louisville, Kentucky. The two districts used a racial integration plan to ensure the appropriate ratio of minority children in their schools. Although several justices agreed with the two districts, others held dissenting views. The Supreme Court did not agree with either school district because the plans were not "narrowly tailored to the interests that the school districts had asserted" (p. 96). In addition the districts were, in essence, discriminating against White families who wanted

their children to have choice as to which schools they would attend (Bell, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, the Supreme Court struck down these cases.

Orfield, Frankenberg, and Garces (2008) identified several reasons why race-conscious decisions by schools should continue. The authors believed if a school is racially integrated, the school would be beneficial to the students and their communities. If the schools are racially isolated, there will be harmful implications for students. In addition, Orfield et al. (2008) asserted, policies would have to be put into place to maintain a racial balance.

The historical perspective provided a discussion about segregation of minority students and how the Latino population was ignored or used as pawns during this period of history. Several court cases were discussed. In addition, authors shared their views, concerns, and questions about the past and what type of impact, if any will *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) have in the future.

Impact of Brown v Board of Education Decision

African Americans were in segregated schools for a number of years. The Latino population was segregated as well. A study which analyzed 20 years of school enrollment collected data by the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights found several states where Latinos were more segregated in the late 1980s and early 1990's (Orfield & Monfort, 1992). In 2012, the most pronounced Latino segregation was found in California, New York, and Texas (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). Even though the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education*, Topeka, Kansas declared segregation as wrong on any level, there were still many southern districts who defied the law. When the Supreme Court enacted Brown II into law, some school districts still did not see the

urgency to desegregate. It was argued if the Supreme Court set up guidelines and timeframes, the movement would have occurred in a more timely fashion rather than being deliberately ignored. Coleman (1975) maintained segregation had decreased dramatically in the South and was the lowest in the country by 1972. Using the "... standards of 1954, dejure segregation has been largely eliminated, along with much segregation (principally in the South) which coincided with residence." (1975, p. 76).

According to Ladson-Billings (2008), resegregation will probably continue due to the court ruling of P*arents involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (PICS, 2007). A recent study by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA noted the country should be proud to celebrate the accomplishments of "*Brown* at 60", but stated we also need to question why we are not focusing on the importance of desegregation. The study also noted the South and West have now become a majority of minority students and believes the enormous growth of the Latino population is in the West (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014).

It can be argued there was a profound and positive impact as a result of desegregation for a number of years, but the efforts obtained are losing ground. Gandara (2011) stated, "Latinos are often triply segregated – by ethnicity, poverty, and language" (p. 266). This can only be changed by improving their educational future, and there are Latinas who are able to access that future.

Future of Education Attainment

President Obama (2010) believed the United States has a "moral imperative" to educate and ensure all students graduate from high school well prepared for college and a career. In addition, he expected the United States to lead the world in college completion

by 2020 (U. S. Department of Education: A Blueprint for Reform, 2010). His plan was to incorporate the Blueprint for Reform into the existing reforms in order to enhance several areas of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The first area of importance was to ensure all students are college and career ready. The second goal was to have excellent teachers and transformational leaders who will be committed to helping their students reach graduation and beyond. Third, all teachers and leaders needed to ensure the needs of diverse learners are met, while ensuring every student will receive equity and opportunity throughout their educational experience. Fourth, local leaders were to work together to increase rigor and excellence. Fifth, all states and school systems were to utilize appropriate materials that align with rigorous standards and will allow for students to excel at every level. The final goal was to encourage and foster innovation, and provide a safe and healthy environment. Maxwell (Education Week Online 2012) indicated Jose A. Rico, the executive director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, informed him Latinos will need to earn more than half of the 9 million postsecondary degrees in order to meet President Obama's goal of leading the world in college degrees by 2020.

The United States has been very concerned with all students having the opportunity to graduate from high school and be prepared to attend college and the world of work. As a result of this concern, the United States put a plan into effect that would put schools on notice if they were not teaching all students and seeing positive results and outcomes. One of those initiatives was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.

No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, signed by President Bush in 2002, with bipartisan support, was written to ensure all

students received an equitable education and the assistance needed to do well in school (http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html). This mandate called for each school to be accountable for growth and improvement from year to year. If a school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the school was expected to analyze the data and make appropriate changes in order to improve the following year. The overall goal was to close the achievement gap by 2013-2014. Some schools had difficulty showing improvement within certain subgroups, but continued to work by providing tutoring, remediation, and after school programs.

The NCLB had a detailed provision specifically for Hispanic children. Former Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings stated, "One in every five children under 18 is of Hispanic origin. We must work together to ensure all these children stay in school and have the chance to achieve their potential" (http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/achieve/nclb-hisp.html, August 2005). This one-page handout highlighted the importance of NCLB, and stated all schools were responsible for yearly progress of Hispanic American students. Perie, Grigg and Donahue from The Nation's Report Card-Reading 2005 noted Grade 4 Hispanic students had a scale score of 203 on the reading test in 2005, which was two points higher than in 2003. The report stated, "The White-Hispanic score gap at grade 4 narrowed by 2 points between 2003 and 2005 but was not statistically different between 1992 and 2005" (p. 7). In math, 4th grade Hispanic students scored 222 in 2003 and 226 in 2005. Eighth grade students' scale score for math was 259 in 2003 and 262 in 2005. The gap between Whites and Hispanics at the 8th grade level moved closer by 2 points, but the gap did not change for 4th grade students.

Even though this snapshot report sounded promising at that time, Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, and Perez (2012) believed NCLB was actually hurting Latinos. Valenzuela et al. (2012) gave an example of a female Mexican immigrant who passed all of her courses and had a 3.0 GPA. This student was planning to attend college. However, her dreams were shattered when she was unable to pass the standard Texas exit exam. She tried numerous times and also received intervention. According to the authors, this student did not receive a high school diploma nor did she attend college because, in their words, "The case of Luz Maria demonstrates how even academically outstanding, talented, and mature Latino/a youth can fall victim to rigid institutional and structural policies, practices, and barriers" (p. 22). The authors believed NCLB looked only at one indicator of school performance and did not take into account students' cultures and their environment. On the other hand, Haycock (2006) believed NCLB shined the light on the "invisible kids"; and as a result, schools were finally paying more attention to minority or poor students. Haycock (2006) noted the importance of making sure accountability would be an important aspect for long-term gains and provided examples, such as expanding expertise and resources to help schools turn around faster, giving schools credit for demonstrating student growth, ensuring students are learning real-world standards and being tested appropriately, increasing teacher quality, and making sure they have the materials for appropriate and challenging lessons. Valenzuela et al. (2012) believed the NCLB law was very rigid and potentially harmful to Latino/a students because, in their opinion, the law did not take into account the impact of poverty, cultural differences, or language barriers that can hurt student achievement. Instead, Valenzuela et al. (2012) argued the student dropped out of school not because of poor grades but because she

could not pass a state-mandated test. Therefore, both Valenzuela et al. (2012) and Haycock (2006) discussed and prescribed what needed to be done in order to improve achievement, decrease dropouts, address poverty, teacher quality and other issues that negatively impact Latino/as and other minority groups.

In 2007, The U. S. Department of Education developed new coding standards which would enable a person to "self-identify" his or her race and ethnicity, and allow a respondent to select more than one racial or ethnic designation. The website listed below explains this further by stating, "The new standards required the use of a two-part question, focusing first on ethnicity and second on race when collecting the data from individuals" (http://www2.ed.gov/policy/rschstat/guid/raceethnicity/questions.html). This change in coding would seemingly allow schools, districts, and the government to have a more accurate picture of how students in the various racial categories were doing on the state tests. Interventions and other supports could be directly targeted to those students (minorities) who needed to improve their NCLB scores. Even though schools were able to identify specific students who needed extra assistance, there were still concerns about not making AYP. As the number of schools who were not making AYP increased, adjustments were made. However, the No Child Left Behind Act was removed. A new initiative officially began at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year.

Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards Initiative became effective at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. During the 2013-2014 school year, schools across the states piloted selected tests to groups of students. A number of experts figured out what should be contained in the standards and the timeline to administer the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

(PARRC) assessments. (http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions).

Since 2012, the NCLR organization published information specifically for Hispanic families in order for them to become knowledgeable and actively participate in their children's education and be able to ask questions about the classes and exams being administered to their children. L. Bustillos (personal communication, April 23, 2014) mentioned NCLR chose to focus on all Latino students, not just Latinas. This organization set up grass roots campaigns in order to signal the emergency of parental involvement so that Latino children are not left behind. In addition, NCLR saw the Common Core and the College and Career Ready tying together in a way that would very beneficial to Latino students. The NCLR believed this because Latino students would be learning information that is standard across the United States. According to this report, the NCLR believed all students are to be held to the "same, high standards" that are aligned to college and work expectations (p. 2).

College and Career Ready. The nationwide graduation rate for 2009 was 73.4%. This was an increase from 71.7% in 2008 (Diplomas Counts, EPE Research Center, 2012). The total male and female percentages for the 50 states were 69.6% and 76.4 % respectively (Diplomas Counts, EPE Research Center, 2012). Each state's results are presented by total male and female and by the five racial categories: American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Black, and White. Table 1 represents the 10 highest and 10 lowest graduation rates of Hispanic students from (among) 20 states.

Table 1

Graduation Rates for Student Subgroups, Class of 2009

Top 10 Highest and Lowest States

State	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic[a]	Black	White
New Jersey	33.2	88.3	74.1	74.4	90.1
Florida	-	86.6	72.6	62.0	73.1
Maryland	-	95.0	70.3	67.0	85.5
Missouri	67.5	84.4	68.7	61.0	82.6
Louisiana	56.9	85.5	68.0	56.0	69.7
Oklahoma	65.8	85.1	67.8	62.4	75.7
Virginia	-	89.0	65.5	64.8	81.5
Texas	-	90.1	64.4	64.4	79.6
Tennessee	53.3	85.9	64.3	68.0	78.6
Arizona	59.9	84.1	64.0	70.6	78.3
Connecticut	55.7	78.8	54.3	61.5	78.8
N. Carolina	56.8	79.5	54.1	56.0	74.9
S. Carolina	33.3	77.0	53.8	53.6	67.3
Utah	59.0	65.4	51.7	54.2	69.2
Mississippi	35.8	73.6	51.6	58.1	67.1
Ohio	-	-	50.5	51.3	83.2
Montana	53.0	56.9	49.2	57.3	79.8
W. Virginia	50.7	72.3	47.3	65.2	71.4
S. Dakota	26.6	66.8	43.8	65.9	75.6
Michigan	48.1	75.7	43.6	-	79.8

Note. Adapted from Diplomas Count: Trailing Behind, Moving Forward [Special Issue], 2012, *Education Week*, 31, p. 26. Copyright 2012 by Editorial Projects in Education, Inc.
[a]Total Number of Hispanics for each state.

According to the above table, New Jersey through Arizona had the highest graduation rates for Hispanic students. Connecticut through Michigan had graduation rates of 54.3% to 43.6%, respectively. The overall graduation rate continues to improve for the nation. The Diploma Counts Education Week (2012) stated "The nation's graduation rate continued to climb for the second year in a row and stands at its highest point since the late 1970s" (p. 25).

Status of Hispanic/Latino Americans

Statistics show Latino economic prospects are worse than other minority groups because there are a number of Latino students who do not graduate from high school on time. In addition, Latino high school dropouts are the least likely to pursue and obtain a GED (Education Week, Diplomas Count, 2012; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010; The National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008). Although the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2009) stated the dropout rates for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics declined between 1980 and 2008, the dropout rates for Latinos and Blacks remained higher than the White rate. The NCES (2009) stated the percentage of Hispanics ages 16-24 who were dropouts was consistently higher than that of Blacks and Whites throughout the 36-year period of 1972-2007. Since 1990, the trend has improved because the dropout rate has decreased, falling from 32.4 to 21 percent. Excelencia in Education (2015) shared, "Between 2003-12, Hispanic status dropout rate decreased by nearly half (from 24% to 13%)" (p. 7).

In 1989, George H. W. Bush and the state governors discussed and established the National Education Goals or "America 2000" in order to ensure students were graduating and prepared to be productive citizens. The six goals consisted of all children being ready

for school, high school graduation rate would increase to 90%, competence in specific subject areas, first in the world in science and math, adult literacy, and schools would be drug and violent free in order for students to learn in a positive environment. These goals were to be accomplished by the year 2000. At the same time, it was noted that Hispanic Americans were dropping out at a higher rate than non-Hispanic and White students. President Bush and the governors believed Hispanic students were not going to reach the goals by the year 2000.

The Hispanic population continued to grow and concerns about their educational attainment continued to mount. During a number of years, there were several White House initiatives that specifically focused on the plight of Latino children and families. The next section will briefly discuss those plans.

Concern for Latino Educational Disadvantage – White House Initiatives

On September 24, 1990, President H. W. Bush signed Executive Order 12729: Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. This was the first White House Order signed to research the progress of Hispanic Americans (http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/hispanic-initiative/files/2012/11/final-factsheet.pdf). The President appointed a Presidential Advisory Commission, and the members advised and reported their findings to the Secretary of Education. The final report submitted in 1992, "A Progress Report to the Secretary of Education from the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans", provided an abundance of information and recommendations. These recommendations included participation by the Federal Government; private sources; and national Hispanic organizations, such as ASPIRA, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and Project Excellence in

Community Educational Leadership (EXCEL), in order to improve the educational attainment of Latinos.

This report was part of an important dialogue that was occurring regarding the prospects of Latinos and their future generations. However, this was not the only report commissioned by a president to determine concerns and possible solutions.

White House Initiative Two. President George W. Bush (2001) issued an Executive Order 13230 on October 12, 2001. The President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans was expected to present two reports on this topic. In order to find out more about this concern, the commissioners held a number of full commission meetings and held various stakeholder working group sessions in five states. During the first full commission meeting held in Washington, DC, each member chose to be part of one of the five working groups, which focused on five areas: educator; family; community and faith-based partnerships; public awareness and motivation; and government resources and accountability. Seven full commission meetings were held and typically included expert testimony from an educator and/or head of a state department of education, a community member who worked closely with a local school that was doing well in educating Hispanic students as well as other organizations interested in the concerns of Hispanic needs. Each working group also presented their thoughts, ideas, and possible solutions. This commission also held four bilingual town halls and heard from over 1600 parents, educators, students, business and community leaders, and public officials, including Hispanic families who spoke in Spanish about their concerns and hopes regarding the desire for a high-quality education and future for their children.

. The commission wrote two reports during President Bush's (2001) term. The first interim report was entitled, "The Road to a College Diploma: The Complex Reality of Raising Educational Achievement for Hispanics in the United States" (2002). This report utilized the NCLB's four main elements as the framework which outlined how the commission would "evaluate and assess model programs and identify best practices" (p. 1). The commission utilized population data from the 2000 Census, which included various Hispanic subgroups. However, Mexican Americans made up the majority, 58.5%, of the Hispanic population. The interim report also contained information from the NCES and the Labor Department regarding high school completion rates for years 18-24 and 25-29, citizenship, enrollment into college directly after high school by race/ethnicity and by Hispanic subgroups. Each working group shared their findings and research. The family group shared information from Partners for Academic Excellence, Inc. (PACE) which stated the importance of parents being involved in their children's education. The group noted some parents do not get involved because they feel unprepared or unwelcomed. The public awareness and motivation group accessed data from the 1970 Census, which showed only 2% of African Americans and 3% of Hispanic Americans had completed college. This group also analyzed data to determine if a public awareness campaign to increase college completion would be appropriate. The group determined this type of campaign would be appropriate and would be piloted. The educator group focused on teacher recruitment, training, development, and retention; and utilized information from the 1998 NCES and a Department of Education survey that indicated "fewer than 36 percent of current teachers feel 'very well prepared' to implement curriculum and performance standards and fewer than 20 percent feel 'prepared' to meet

the needs of diverse students or English language learners" (p. 16). This group briefly discussed the importance of having highly-qualified teachers in order for students not to fall behind due to poor teaching. The community and faith-based initiatives group spoke with a number of organizations such as America's Promise and Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE). America's Promise has over 550 partners across the US. This working group believed it was crucial to support programs, whether faith-based or not, that were making a difference in helping students prepare for college and work. The government resources and accountability work group discussed three important roles for the Federal government such as sponsoring research, requiring measurable outcomes, and developing appropriate federal monitoring tools. This work group planned to research all programs in order to prepare new reporting guidelines. The purpose of these guidelines was to determine how monies were spent in various government agencies. The interim report also acknowledged that states were working on ways to improve education for all students.

The interim report documented why the NCLB framework was used as the criteria to study the needs of Hispanic students. The report documented the extensive planning; research from over 30 references; town hall discussions from educators, Hispanic families, business and community; and discussions and preliminary decisions or recommendations from each work group and why the information should be included in the final report. The research and statistics included in the report were informative, timely, and extremely helpful in understanding why there was a need for each work group to focus on a specific area in order to bring all of the components together in this important report and to lay the groundwork for the second and final report.

The second and final report entitled, "From Risk to Opportunity: Fulfilling the Educational Needs of Hispanics in the 21st Century" (2003), highlighted the crisis of the Hispanic American student. The crisis ranged from low societal expectations, limited early language development, limited parent/community engagement, poor academic instruction, to not enough attention to using scientific research to drive instruction to teachers who are poorly prepared to teach Latino students. The final report included the same statistics, charts and graphs that were in the interim report. This report focused on six recommendations provided by the commission. The first recommendation asked that high expectations be shared across America in order to help parents understand and navigate the education system. The Commission (2003) expected to see partnerships created to help shine the light on the importance of achieving a college education. A website entitled, YesICan.gov was a place parents could go to find information that would help them find needed information. This website was a limited one-year ad campaign and was based on a similar type of campaign from the United Negro College Fund for African Americans when the numbers of African American students going to college was low. According to the report, the YesICan.gov was a successful campaign. ENLACE was also a source for parents, students, and community organizations to set up academic and enrichment programs for Hispanic students as another strategy to help close the achievement gap. Second, the Commission (2003) believed it was critical to support NCLB and asked "states and school districts to increase the percentage of 4th graders reading at or above proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress by 30 percentage points and meet or exceed the annual measurable objectives defined . . ." (p. 12). The third recommendation stated teacher preparation programs

needed to better prepare teachers to work with diverse populations and to find ways to reach out and recruit potential Hispanic teachers. This recommendation emphasized that teachers must know how to work with Hispanic students in order to close the achievement gap. Another recommendation was to conduct research to ascertain information about educational attainment, student dropouts, special education, and teacher and service provider preparation. Fifth, the commission suggested pathways to college graduation needed to be created. This means more Hispanic students should be encouraged to take AP classes; and students and families should be provided more information in order for them to understand the process of financial aid, scholarship options, and other costs involved in a college education. Lastly, it was important to create ways to ensure accountability and coordination among federal departments and agencies who are working with Hispanic Americans.

The final report was well developed, contained up to date data, and other pertinent information. This information would assist educators and other stakeholders in understanding the importance of not only acknowledging the Hispanic crisis but recommendations to help eliminate the crisis. Even though this document had been thoroughly prepared, another president would also prepare a similar document during his presidency.

White House Initiative Four. Following the footsteps of Presidents Bush, Clinton, and Bush, President Obama signed Executive Order 13555 for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH) in 2010. This initiative was aimed to advance concerns, such as improving availability and access to high-quality early learning programs for Hispanic children and dramatically increasing the number of

Hispanic high school graduates. In addition the initiative wanted to ensure more Hispanic students enroll in and more importantly complete college. (http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/hispanic-initiative/files/2012/11/final-factsheet.pdf)

The 2012 Advisory report emphasized each of the initiatives listed above. These recommendations/accomplishments from the subcommittees ranged from providing more money and assistance to Latino families with very young children in order for them to be ready for pre-k learning and not be so far behind other children their age to focusing on teachers and how they can be "champions of change" when working with Latino high school students (p. 11). Each subcommittee planned to continue writing recommendations that would enhance and/or change public policy since the fate of Latino children was tied directly to the United States' economy and growth.

Each Hispanic White House Initiative built upon the previous one issued. In 25 years, the WHIEEH and the Presidential Advisory Commissions have discussed and recommended numerous policy changes. Some changes and improvements, such as an increase in Latino attendance in college, TV and website campaigns were set up to help parents learn and understand college and financial aid information, and more advertising and websites encouraged partnering with community organizations have occurred; but there is still a great deal of work and policy recommendation/implementation that needs to be done, which would specifically focus on Latina females and the strategies and recommendations needed for successful high school completion and enrollment and completion of a post-secondary degree.

As stated previously, the White House, other government agencies, businesses and community organizations, as well as national organizations, have worked to improve

the educational and professional opportunities for Latino students and their families. This information needed to be shared in order to understand the complexities of trying to improve conditions for this group of people. However, it is also imperative to take a look at Latinas, a specific group within the Latino population, in order to strive to develop strategies that will also assist them in their personal, educational, and career goals.

The Latina Experience

The United States is a country full of people from different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. According to Gandara and Contreras (2009), immigrants, such as Italians, were eventually able to integrate into the United States, but not without some difficulty and adjustment. This country is proud to expect and rely upon an educated workforce in order to remain competitive with other countries throughout the world. Traditionally, organizations in the United States thrived on male-dominant ideals, which include gender patterning of jobs (Acker, 1992). The civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s occurred in order to help make education, workplace environment, and opportunities for advancement equitable and realistic goals for minorities and women.

A descriptive, exploratory study conducted by Aguilar and Williams (1993) focused on African American and Hispanic women and the factors they believed helped them to be successful. Both authors acknowledged racism and sexism still exist, but wanted to find out how these minority women defined success. There were 324 participants; 164 were Hispanic and 160 were African American. Their ages ranged from 20-75, but 47% of the Hispanic and 38% of the African American women were between the ages of 30-39. According to Aguillar and Williams (1993), over 50% of the women did not realize they were a minority until they left their segregated neighborhoods. Some

respondents stated they felt hurt, pain, or anger when they did experience discrimination. A Hispanic woman told the authors her own family expected her to follow the traditional path that was expected of women. Both the Hispanic and African American women self-identified eight success factors which included attainment of goals, job satisfaction, self-esteem, education-skills, family support-stability, personal strengths, ethnic-racial pride and community and professional commitment. The top three for Hispanic women were job satisfaction, education-skills, and personal strengths.

A study conducted by Espinoza (2010) noted other researchers have maintained Latinas continue to face barriers from the beginning of school through post-secondary education. He also stated the barriers become more difficult when Latinas are enrolled in college and also devoted to their family and family obligations. Espinoza identified this as the "Good Daughter" dilemma. Espinoza reviewed the importance of Latinas living between two cultures and learning how to maintain their culture and adapt to the dominant culture. He discussed the Chicana feminist theory, which focused on a third hybrid identity called *mestiza.* This identity means that Latinas have developed a way to accept/tolerate the daily ambiguity in their lives. His study focused on 15 Latinas, average age was 27, who were enrolled full time in a doctoral graduate program. Two of the participants had at least one family member with a Bachelor's degree, and 13 were first generation college students. All of the participants were single with no children, but they grew up in households that expected assistance with chores, taking care of siblings, spending time with family instead of friends, and providing translating assistance when needed. Snowball sampling was used to choose participants, 80-minute interviews were conducted, and a few of the participants were asked to complete follow-up interviews.

After reading the transcripts, Espinoza (2010) found emerging themes that he collapsed into two main areas called "family relationships and responsibilities growing up, and family relationships and responsibilities during graduate school" (p. 322). He then took a closer look at the themes under the two main areas, checked for similar thoughts and came up with two "major thematic categories" called integrators and separators.

Nine integrators were able to manage school and family obligations by letting their families know the commitments and expectations of school, reminding parents how they believe in the importance of a good education, and compromising or negotiating when to come home for a weekend instead of every week (pp. 324-325). Espinoza stated "The integrator strategy often blends being a good daughter with being a good student" (p. 325).

The six separators kept school demands and family life away from each other. One participant received a phone call from her mother expecting her to help a sibling with homework. This participant was completing a mid-term exam but she put it aside, helped her sibling, and resumed her mid-term. Other participants did not want their families to worry so they did not discuss what was going on at school. These six participants believed they were being good daughters by protecting their parents from worries or concerns. Espinoza (2010) stated, "Unlike the integrators, the separators' *mestiza* identity variant is characterized by a 'good daughter' role that is separate from the 'good student' role" (p. 327). He believed higher education needs to develop support programs that will inform faculty of the dual roles and support the Latinas in graduate or doctoral programs. The research article was very informative and interesting to learn how some Latinas who are very close to their families cope with their responsibilities to their

families and remain responsible and committed to their studies and expectations. This type of situation could ring true for other women as well.

The Latina experience is very similar in terms of family expectations and aspirations for completing high school and college. Balancing these two expectations can be very overwhelming and stressful and could cause less Latinas to pursue higher education. However, through various studies, it is hopeful there will be more dialogue and programs set up to address these issues. There are still concerns among some cultural groups about how the traditional gender roles of females will impact future generations. Since this research is focused on Latinas, it is important to discuss how their gender is perceived among themselves, their families, and schools. The next section focused on three studies conducted by three organizations whose goals are to assist Latinas in attaining their educational and lifelong goals.

Three Studies on Latinas

There are three studies that were conducted about the Latina K-12 educational experience. Each of the studies focused on aspirations, self-esteem, gender stereotypes, family values and expectations, and schools and how they related to or promoted academic success. The studies discussed how all of these components impacted Latinas' education, goals, or lack of educational attainment. The first study, Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can, was written by Ginorio and Huston (2001) and published by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation. This "national grass roots organization" was established in 1881 and focuses on empowering women (www.aauw.org). The second study was written by the National Women's Law Center and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (NWLC & MALDEF)

in 2009. The NWLC was established in 1972 as a nonprofit organization, which concentrates on protecting the legal rights of women. The MALDEF is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1968. This organization advocates for equality and justice for Latinos in a variety of areas. Making Education Work for Latinas in the US is a study written by Patricia Gandara, a professor from UCLA and co-director of the Civil Rights Project, and several others. According to The Civil Rights Project (Proyecto Derechos Civiles), the institution is well respected; and its focus is on racial and ethnic equity. This study was funded by the Eva Longoria Foundation.

Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can. In this study, Ginorio and Huston (2001) discussed the concept of "possible selves" while researching how Latinas viewed themselves as well as how their families, peers and schools saw them (p. vii). The overall purpose of their research was to take a look at ". . . the educational status of Latinas, both in comparison with their male counterparts and in comparison with their peers in other racial and ethnic groups" (p. viii). Their research focused on four main areas. First, the study provided an overview of Latinas, education, and "possible selves," and trends in Latina/o educational participation. Second, the authors looked at the impact communities have on Latinas and their relationship to the educational process. Third, individual traits and how individual experiences are shaped by educational variables were explored. Finally, the study included conclusions and recommendations for a variety of stakeholders. Throughout this discussion, both authors emphasized the importance of how Latinas view themselves and their future versus how Anglo females view their lives and futures. For example when talking about "possible selves", Ginorio and Huston (2001) explained this concept was utilized throughout their study in order to explain "…

the interaction between Latinas' current social contexts and their perceived options for the present and the future" (p. x). When reviewing the study in more detail, it was noted that if Latinas dropped out of high school, they typically did not return. Their report also indicated Latinas have a higher rate of finishing high school over Latinos, but the 9th and 12th grade years were more likely to be when Latinas may drop out of school (p. 2). Ginorio and Huston (2001) emphasized most people have experiences they draw from family, education/work, and community. These experiences helped or hindered their possible selves because of positive or negative assumptions made by these areas. For Latinas, there is sometimes a disconnect with one or more of these areas. Ginorio and Huston (2001) maintained schools emphasized the importance of education; and depending upon where and how a Latina was raised, and whether or not her family was poor or educated, her family may or may not assume high school graduation, let alone college attendance would be an automatic next step for their daughter.

Ginorio and Huston (2001) provided a number of recommendations to help Latinas reach their "possible selves". The recommendations included academic advising during middle school. This will help Latinas set goals, which can be consistently monitored. The next recommendation was to help Latinas and their families learn about the college-going process. Schools should provide programs that openly discuss teen parenthood. Another recommendation suggested schools adopt ways to monitor and move students from remedial tracks to coursework that is valuable and challenging. In addition, Ginorio and Huston (2001) expected to see the promotion of diversity in teacher programs; and teachers should be bolstered with techniques/tools that will work with minority students. The authors believed financial aid should be offered to students so they

are not tracked into community college, which may sometimes lead to non-completion of degrees. The final recommendation from Ginorio and Huston (2001) was "Encourage research that accounts adequately for gender, race/ethnicity, and class in its construction of variables, analysis, and measurement. ." (p. 46).

Ginorio and Huston (2001) referenced a number of authors throughout their report, which pertained to the specific topics stated earlier. They also included a large bibliography, which contained over 200 authors. Appendix B contained summary data, which was Latina/o educational attainment and labor force characteristics from eight states. The report mentioned a focus group was conducted. However, there was no specific information shared about how the participants were chosen and how many were included in the focus group. The report also did not state where the participants came from, their ages, or how long the focus groups met. This information, along with statistical data pertaining to participant interviews, would have made the report more thorough, interesting, factual, and informative.

Listening to Latinas: Barriers to High School Graduation. This national study about Latinas was conducted by the National Women's Law Center and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (NWLC & MALDEF) (2009). NWLC and MALDEF (2009) stated reasons for the low graduation rates among Latinas were family care-taking responsibilities, low expectations, poverty, discrimination, low self-esteem, poor academic preparation, and gender stereotyping. The two organizations researched this concern and conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups. More than 1,000 surveys were sent to Latina students throughout the United States to specific schools and programs ". . .whom we knew worked with Latinas and were willing to

distribute the survey to their Latina students" (NWLC & MALDEF, p. 36). The survey contained demographic, biographical, and school-based questions. The students could provide all of the information requested. However, students were not required to provide all of the information, including their names or contact numbers. There was a section that asked about goals and aspirations, and there was a section that asked about school experiences while pregnant and/or a teen parent. There were 335 completed student surveys that were returned. From the surveys, 21 students were interviewed individually for approximately 30 minutes via the telephone, and 26 additional students participated in focus group discussions. From the same survey questions, another 28 students participated in four focus groups. These students came from a drop-out recovery GED program and a college-access program from the East Coast. Follow up questions about difficulties staying in school or goals for the future were included, and discussions/interviews lasted for 1-2 hours. When the surveys were mailed out, program staff surveys were also included. From the 45 returned program staff surveys, 15 were interviewed by telephone and answered questions such as challenges they thought Latinas faced, what they thought was working, and what they thought schools could improve on to assist Latinas. In addition, NWLC and MALDEF (2009) also reviewed a great deal of literature regarding Latino experiences in the United States.

NWLC and MALDEF (2009) discovered several themes during their research. First, Latinas have high aspirations, but there are people who do not believe they can reach their goals. Second, there are a number of challenges the Latino community faces, which may help to explain why there are problems in Latinas reaching their dreams and expectations. Lastly, the intersection of ethnicity and gender causes a variety of

challenges. These challenges included discrimination and gender stereotypes, which can undermine Latinas' educational opportunities; pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, which significantly limit educational opportunities; and other family responsibilities which compromise Latinas' educational success.

According to NWLC and MALDEF (2009), the goal and scope of this study was to investigate why Latinas were having difficulty completing high school. The authors stated, "Our goal was not to gather statistics; we wanted to take a qualitative look at the educational experiences of Latina students. We focused on factors that either hinder or enhance Latinas' academic progress and thus affect their prospects for success" (p. 6). Even though this statement was made, relevant data were dispersed throughout their research findings. The authors noted they used Dr. Christopher Swanson's Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) methodology, which utilized school data to predict whether a student will graduate.

Approximately 80% of Latinas who completed the survey stated they wanted to graduate from college, and 98% planned to graduate from high school. However, when the authors looked at the class of 2006 by race/ethnicity and gender, 41% of Hispanic females did not complete their high school education. It is interesting to note that respondents had doubts they would achieve their goals. The authors interviewed several girls and the comments ranged from a possibility that they could drop out, admit to having high aspirations but realizing that one will probably accomplish less to only attending community college due to the cost of tuition. Another concern about the drop out situation was that a Latina female mentioned she was stressed due to her mother being undocumented and was sent back to her home country. Due to this situation, the

young lady dropped out of school. The authors also noted that students interviewed were concerned about their language barriers. One girl dropped out and attended a GED program because she thought it would be easier. Another girl was upset she was still in an ESL program, but could not get out because she believed the school was forcing her to remain.

The education level of Latina parents was another concern. According to NWLC and MALDEF (2009), approximately half of the 149 participants indicated their dads "had less than a high school degree; and 123 of them (about 40%) indicated that their mother had less than a high school diploma" (p. 13). Since the educational levels of both parents were low, their children could not rely on them to speak on their needs. One student interviewed stated, "I feel like my parents are always working, and I think that's another reason why I feel so alone in my school subjects and stuff. . . ." (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009, p. 13).

A conundrum was noticed because many Latino parents did not have a high school diploma, and these parents felt unwelcomed at their child's school. NWLC and MALDEF (2009) stated, "Latino parents tend to encounter more barriers and unwelcoming experiences at school than do non-Latino parents. Latino parents also face practical obstacles to getting more involved in their children's schools" (p. 14). Two examples were given, such as a Spanish-speaking parent not attending a PTA meeting because only English was spoken or not being able to attend a PTA meeting because of the time the meetings were scheduled. One female student interviewed stated her mom was going to a parent-daughter college access program and was reluctant to speak at first. As she became more comfortable, she communicated more and helped her daughter with

school and problems. NWLC and MALDEF (2009) still believed this is an area that needs to be improved ". . . because the education level of a child's mother has been shown to be closely correlated with student success across all ethnicities" (p. 13). Other authors have noted this connection as well.

Another concern noted was the problem of discrimination and gender stereotypes. Some participants mentioned their parents have sets of expectations for boys and girls. This is partially due to family views and values, but there are also few role models in the family or schools that could help Latinas see their potential and provide advice on how to achieve their goals. According to NWLC and MALDEF (2009), Latinas experienced discrimination and stereotypical attitudes from schools and society in their daily experiences. They stated, "Latina girls internalize these gender stereotypes" (p. 17). Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) found similar information. In their study, they noted Latinas have limited access to what they needed to complete high school, lacked mentors and positive role models, and experienced negative attitudes from school personnel.

Another area of concern was the level of teen pregnancy among Latinas. NWLC and MALDEF (2009) reported 27% of Latinas who were interviewed knew someone who was pregnant and dropped out of school. At the national level, 53% of Latinas in 2007 were pregnant before they reached the age of 20. Some of the Latinas interviewed stated they did not talk with their parents about sex, or if the subject came up, it was only discussed indirectly.

The last major area of the study discussed how family responsibilities can have a negative impact on Latinas and their aspirations and goals. If the girls are expected to go to school and to return home to help with chores, siblings or financially, this greatly

impacts their ability to become involved in extracurricular activities or after school programs at school. NWLC and MALDEF (2009) noted these types of activities are excellent ways for Latinas to stay engaged, connected, and supported (p. 27).

This study suggested a number of recommendations for schools and for policy that could have the potential to assist Latinas to become more successful in their pursuit of a high school diploma and post-secondary education. For example, schools can connect Latinas with role models and engage them in goal setting and make sure school environments are respectful of all cultures, race, and gender. Another example was to find ways to get Latino parents more involved in their children's education, which could include funding parent involvement initiatives and identifying successful parent involvement programs in order to replicate them. Third, schools and policy makers need to improve efforts to prevent teen pregnancy and also support pregnant and parenting students. Finally, schools should have more accurate data collection and accountability for all students (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). This research was quite extensive and provided other researchers, teachers, parents, principals, and community members with a great deal of valuable insight into how some Latinas perceive themselves and why this perception and stereotype is hard to change.

Making Education Work for Latinas in the U.S. Gandara, Oseguera, Huber, Locks, Ee and Molina (2013) conducted the third study. This study incorporated existing knowledge about encouraging Latina education success, but also reviewed and analyzed data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS,2002) and the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) (p. 30). It was noted the NCES oversaw and funded the ELS data that was collected. These data included over 15,000 10th graders from 750 high

schools around the U. S. The students were randomly selected; and other data came from one of the students' parents, teachers, librarians, and administrators. In addition school records were also obtained. In 2004 and again in 2006, these same students were contacted when they were in the 12th grade and two years after graduation respectively. The ELS data were utilized because it contained 2, 217 Latinos during the 2006 follow up, and there were approximately the same number of males and females. Gandara et al. (2013) were concerned about the sample size because they also looked at data from the U. S. Department of Education, which showed Latinas completing high school at 66% versus Latinos at 58%.

The CHKS sampled many students across the state of California during their 9th and 11th grade years regarding important learning and health-related items. Gandara et al. (2013) analyzed data from fall 2006 and spring 2008. The authors stated, "The single largest subgroup was Latina/o with more than 40,000 of the respondents. A little over half of these were Latinas" (p. 34). The authors found Latinas did not feel safe, happy, that they belong, or had a teacher they could see as a role model.

Gandara et al. (2013) stated many studies did not focus on factors associated with Latinas and their school achievement. The factors the authors found during their research were the importance of early school aptitude, being good in math, and having a strong sense of self and ability. In addition, Latinas needed to possess high expectations, have a significant adult in their lives, be bilingual, and delay getting pregnant. Following these suggestions will likely provide a better opportunity to enroll into a post-secondary institution.

The most interesting findings came from the case studies. The authors looked for 'typical' Latinas who could represent different types of circumstances. They looked at community colleges to UCLA, and looked for women who came from modest or poor backgrounds. The authors also indicated they chose institutions that would accept and support their IRB application and selected places where they were employed. Seven young women who graduated from high school and were either enrolled in college or graduated shared their stories. Each one experienced difficulties such as " . . . undocumented status, low-income homes, early pregnancy, struggling with low grades and little support in high school- but they have all surmounted most of those hurdles" (p. 38). It was hoped these Latinas would be able to shed light on what they did to accomplish their goals and whether their steps mirrored what was found in the research. Several interesting themes were found, such as having early support from parents who encouraged educational aspirations. One student stated her mother was resilient, which influenced her determination. Second, Latinas needed an early aptitude for school and teachers who would encourage and work with them. Third, Gandara et al. (2013) were surprised to learn the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities. All seven participants were involved in sports or another activity because these activities were motivators, taught the importance of time management, supplied peer groups, and provided deep engagement in their schools. Each of the young ladies realized their involvement in an extracurricular activity helped them realize how the activity assisted them with their studies, sense of belonging, interacting with a group of peers, fulfillment, and accomplishment. Fourth, the authors found increased opportunities of going to college for Latinas if they had a Latina/o teacher. The next theme was college access

programs. Two of the participants had been in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, beginning in middle school, and one participant attended a *Stepping Up* program. Gandara et al. (2013) cautioned that typically these programs have a limited number of seats and certain programs are expensive. The final common theme was having cross cultural relations, which meant being able to exist in two cultures and having the ability to move from one to the other with ease. The authors called this "border crossers" (p. 52). Latinas who have a strong sense of identity and have opportunities to work with other cultures by attending desegregated schools will provide them with more opportunities to grow and expand their world. Gandara et al. (2013) stated many of the participants did have opportunities such as this by taking AP classes and being involved in a variety of sports. The authors also noted the importance of the participants maintaining their bilingual ability, which is a wonderful asset.

There were three barriers discussed in the research study. Latinas and their families sometimes have financial difficulties when it comes to paying for college. That is why some Latina/os attend a community college or a university that is close to their homes. As reported earlier, some Latino students must help with family finances.

Another barrier that can impact Latinas is early pregnancy, which can derail high school completion and college plans. One participant did get pregnant but was fortunate to have a "supportive boyfriend-husband" who encouraged her to continue her studies (p. 56). At the time of this research study, she was in her third year at a community college. However, the participant believed she will be a good role model for her son because she planned to complete her degree.

The third barrier was being undocumented. Half of the participants were undocumented or had a family member who was undocumented. However, these participants were able to utilize options. In one case, a participant's brother put his goals aside in order to help her with tuition.

All three studies discovered similar findings. However, the study conducted by Gandara et al. (2013), as described above, provided additional insights and several surprising findings, such as having a math aptitude, a Latina/o teacher, and involvement in extracurricular activities. This study looked at the lives of Latinas by utilizing two large data sets and combining this information with case studies. Since the seven case study participants had already completed high school and some completed college, they were able to discuss their lived experiences. This provided invaluable insight into the complexities of Latinas and their cultural world and how others perceive them. All of the studies and findings provided researchers with plenty of information that will be able to help Latinas, parents, communities, schools, policy makers, and advocates to encourage, mandate, and pave the way for Latinas to pursue their dreams, goals, and aspirations.

The Traditional Gender

There are Latinas who believe the traditional roles and gender identities are oppressive and unjust (Denner & Guzman, 2006). Zambrana (2011) emphasized in two studies that Latino families expected both boys and girls to complete household chores, but boys received more freedom than the girls. Zambrana (2011) asserted traditional roles go away if parents have less traditional role attitudes.

Latinas are the largest racial/ethnic female group in the United States (Zambrana, 2011, p. 90). According to NWLC and MALDEF (2009), "Latinas are the fastest growing

group of female school-aged youth" (p. 5). They have the lowest graduation rate among other female racial and ethnic groups (Gandara & The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, 2015; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Unmuth, 2012; Zambrana, 2011). In 1975, the Latina dropout rate was more than twice that of White and one third more than Black females. Table 2 displays an adapted dropout comparison history among White, Black, and Latina students between the years of 1975 through 2008. The original chart used by Zambrana (2011) came from the 2009a U. S. Department of Commerce. The chart displayed the high school dropout rate among females (16-24) by race and ethnicity during the same time period. However, the chart listed data every five years, between 1975 and 2000; and then the chart listed every year from 2001-2008.

Table 2

High School Dropout Rates Among Females (16-24) by Race and Ethnicity, 1975-2008

Year	White	Black	Latina
1975	11.8	22.9	31.6
1985	9.8	14.3	25.2
1995	8.2	12.9	30.0
2005	5.3	9.0	18.1
2008	4.2	11.1	16.7

Note. Adapted from Latinos in American Society, R. E. Zambrana, 2011, p. 91. Copyright 2011 by Cornell University.

However, researchers stated Latinas are more likely to complete high school and college than Latinos, but still lag behind. Latinas face unique challenges, such as family and societal expectations. Instead of going away to college, some Latinas will remain home and help out with the family. EducationWeek Diplomas Count (2012) interviewed a community relations coordinator who mentors Hispanic females. She stated, "It's kind of

like you're born with responsibility" (p. 2). Some Latinas believe they will let the family down by thinking about accomplishing something for self. Other challenges are becoming pregnant and dropping out of school, feeling left out and ignored at school, and focusing on the importance of being part of their family, which is almost the entire part of the Latina's identity. In some cases, Latinas are expected to remain home until they are married.

Another study researched the significance of race and gender in school success. Barajas and Pierce (2001) asked, "How do race and gender shape Latinas' and Latinos' experiences in college?" (p. 859) The authors wanted to "challenge" the notion that students (Latinas and Latinos) have to assimilate to the dominant norms and values in order to be a successful student. They conducted a two-year study and interviewed 27 high school student mentees and 45 college student mentors from a program called "The Bridge". There were 31 female and 14 male college students and 11 female and 16 male high school students. These students represented various backgrounds of Hispanic heritage. Most of the students came from second- or third-generation immigrants and from poor or working-class families. The researchers utilized questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations at local high schools, and school records. The findings noted "successful college Latinas and Latinos did not assimilate in the ways the literature predicted" (p. 860). The researchers noted Latinas were very effective in not letting negative stereotypes take away from their self esteem. This was possible due to their abilities to form groups and find ways to keep each other positive and their sights on being successful. On the other hand, Latinos had a more difficult time because they always had sports to fall back on in high school, which made them feel successful.

However, once in college, it was difficult for them to maintain their self-esteem; and sometimes, the Latinos did not know how to connect or bond with other Latinos. In other words, Latinos sometimes suffered due to lack of supports. The strength of this research was the authors' abilities to compare and contrast Latinas and Latinos about their feelings towards their race and how one versus the other was able to maintain their identities and flourish as the other became a little lost and sometimes disenfranchised. Throughout this research, it was emphasized that gender and race needed to be analyzed together in order to see the difference between how Latinas and Latinos handle themselves. Two different studies would have been more productive and provided more in-depth information about each gender. Then the next logical step would be to complete and compare and contrast research study. The authors believe "policy makers need to consider ways mentoring programs address the needs of both male and female students of color since race and gender impact each in distinctly different ways" (p. 875).

According to Sadker, Sadker and Zittleman (2009), middle school Hispanic girls have a much lower self esteem than White or Black girls. Sadker et al. (2009) analyzed a report, which stated 68% of Hispanic girls were happy about themselves while in elementary school, but 30% believed this sentiment by high school (p. 108). The authors also found confidence levels dropped from 51% in elementary to 18% by high school. When asked, "I feel good about myself when I'm with my family," 79% agreed with the statement in elementary school; but only 38% felt that way in high school. From middle school to high school, Hispanic girls changed their confidence level and begin to fall into traditional roles. Sadker et al. (2009) surmised if Hispanic females come from a

traditional family, things are fine until they move into puberty. Once that occurred, the expectation was to return to the traditional role. The authors found:

> Hispanic girls look away from school and to home to see their futures, and what they see is far from comforting. Hispanic girls care for younger siblings, help with housework, and perhaps prepare for marriage while Hispanic boys earn money, enhancing the family income. Boys' value in the family increases; girls' [value] decreases. (p. 108)

Even with these possible challenges, Latinas possess much strength. These strengths include planning for their future, self-assertiveness, and not getting pregnant at an early age (Denner & Guzman, 2006; EducationWeek, Diploma Counts, 2012; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Zambrana, 2011). "Latinas are central to the future of the United States, and they bring considerable assets to the nation as well, including a rich cultural heritage and in many cases an additional major world language" (Gandara & WHIEEH, 2015, p. 7).

Educational Aspirations of Latinas

Until 1988, there had not been any significant research on the educational aspirations of Asians or Hispanics. Kao and Tienda (1998) focused their study on ". . .race and ethnic variation among gender groups in educational aspirations through high school. . ." (p. 350). This study looked at how White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic female and male participants planned for their future and wanted to know whether family influenced differed by gender and ethnicity. Their results found that Hispanic girls had educational aspirations to graduate from college at the same level of white females in grades 8, 10 and 12. Kao and Tienda (1998) found Asian students had high aspirations and believed hard work versus being more intelligent made the difference.

NWLC and MALDEF (2009) stated Latinas have high aspirations and 98% of students who participated in their survey plan to graduate high school. However, 80% indicated at least graduating from college was also their plan. This disconnect occurred because some Latinas doubted themselves and their abilities to be successful (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). According to Raffaelli and Ontai (2004), their two studies focused on how female and male Latinos were raised in their homes. Their first study indicated mothers spent more effort in raising their daughters in the traditional gender role and allowed their sons to roam freely. Their second study confirmed this belief (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). The authors confirmed traditional feminine gender role involves being submissive, chaste and dependent, while males are the complete opposite (p. 288).

Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez, and Garrett (2008) discussed four factors their seven high school participants believed contributed to their high academic achievement. All seven students were enrolled in AP or honors classes. They were also involved in church and church activities, and were actively involved in school. Six of the participants stated their parents did not complete high school nor had any college experience.

The research question for this study was, "According to the experiences of Puerto Rican 11th and 12th grade female students who were enrolled in a traditional comprehensive urban high school, what factors were linked to their high academic achievement," (p. 145). The school enrolled 1,500 students, 55% were considered very poor and 70% were students of color. From those, 15% were Puerto Rican. The criteria used were participants had to be in either grades 11 or 12 have a GPA of 3.0 and could not have previously dropped out. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The success factors included having a strong Puerto Rican identity. The participants were very proud of their heritage and did not consider themselves "acting White". Instead, if someone felt negatively about their heritage, the students became more motivated. The authors believed, ". . .this phenomenon reflected the successful utilization of our participants' ethnic identity because they were able to easily make the transition between their home and school worlds" (p.154). One participant hoped her excellent grades would be a way to show others they are wrong about "our" potential. Another success factor was the participants stated their involvement and participation in church and school and community-based extracurricular activities was very important to them. The participants also mentioned their mothers played an important role in their academic achievement. Mothers helped with homework or found resources to assist when needed. At times, mothers were also mentors or friends. The students also had caring teachers and other school staff who encouraged and influenced their high academic achievement and embraced their background. Anthrop et al. (2008) concluded with several important points, but a standout point was the students acquired their social capital from their home and community, which included church and other activities. The authors noted schools must take this into consideration and not just make assumptions based on ethnic identity and working-class background.

Another author, Rolon (2000), interviewed 10 high-achieving Puerto Rican girls who attended an urban high school. Rolon discovered students were successful because their mothers strongly encouraged them to be successful so they could better themselves economically. Second, school was a second home because they had female teachers (second mothers) who embraced their background. Third, each girl wanted to earn a

college degree in order to have a middle class lifestyle and become role models for their families and communities. Both studies demonstrated the importance of Latinas taking challenging courses, having involved parents, caring teachers, and other outside/community support.

Latina students must have some social capital in their families as a way to assist them as they go through the educational process. This social capital helps the entire family. According to Zambrana and Zoppi (2002), "Latino girls' educational disadvantage is more directly associated with family economic disadvantage or lack of aspirations of parents" (p. 46). Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) believed the cultural wealth of Latina's families was very important and can be changed into social capital with the help of teachers and others in their schools (p. 47). Latinas and their parents' educational aspirations increased when parents possessed the skills to communicate and advocate for their child.

The educational aspirations of Latinas play an important role in their lives. Whether they pursue education beyond high school is an option each Latina can make, but it is economically better for them to graduate from high school or earn a GED. However, Kao and Tienda (1998) emphasized college aspirations to be a strong predictor of academic achievement among Latina/o high school students. In the next two sections, the research focuses on middle school and high school experiences in order to highlight the importance of transition, belonging, and forming aspirations.

Middle School. Middle school is a time of transition, building self-esteem, and forming aspirations and plans for the future. In order for these things to occur, students must feel comfortable, connected, and part of a peer group (Shiu, Kettler & Johnsen,

2009). The authors believed a sense of belonging can decrease after sixth or seventh grade. Belonging can sometimes be difficult for Latino students because they may face numerous roadblocks. This descriptive study examined an AP Spanish Language class for Hispanic students in the eighth grade. This class and a similar comparison group answered survey questions on parental involvement, composition of peer group, sense of belonging at school, academic attitudes, and academic aspirations. Participants had to meet three criteria: native Spanish speakers, poor, and in the eighth grade. There were 16 Hispanic males and 42 Hispanic females. The comparison group consisted of 18 male and 6 Hispanic students who did not take the Advanced Placement course. After the 20-minute questionnaire was analyzed, the authors noted there were significant differences found in "social and external influences between Hispanic students who chose to enroll in the AP class and the Hispanic students who did not enroll" (p. 69). The students in the AP group believed they had more friends, these friends cared about each other and their grades, and the students enjoyed reading English. The authors also noted more female students enrolled in the AP class. These females believed in the interactions more so than the males in the AP class. The study found external influences were the same as the literature mentioned, such as peer group, family, and a sense of belonging. The authors stated these "influences were different and significantly more positive for the AP group" (p. 75). In addition, " students who elect to take AP courses are more likely to have positive relationships with friends who have higher academic aspirations and are more likely to continue in AP courses" (p. 77). Gandara and Contreras (2009) shared similar information about the importance of having friends or peers who are also high achieving.

Stevens, Hamman and Olivarez (2007) discussed the importance of school belonging and how the role of the teacher can influence a negative or positive environment for students. Their study investigated two questions. First, "Do Hispanic students experience a supportive school community when the teaching professionals are White?" Second, Do White educators influence Hispanic students' feeling of school belonging to, in turn, affect educational outcomes?" (p. 56). There were 434 5th and 6th graders and 21 teachers who participated in the study. A structural equation model, and rating scales for school belonging, mastery, and academic challenge were used. The findings showed potential for Hispanic students to benefit if the White teachers promote and emphasize learning and challenge. A caution was noted because the authors believe other social variables; such as peer information should be included in the study.

McGreevy (2007) completed her dissertation by examining a program called Girl Power to determine if this type of support would help to close the achievement gap of 7th and 8th graders. She looked at tutoring, opportunities for making connections with teachers and community, offering extracurricular activities, and encouraging development of healthy self-concepts may help students at risk. Girl Power was a support group put together by a staff person at a local community agency and two teachers at the school. The college students worked with the students in their math classes. There were 23 participants; 21 were Latinas. The girls participated in a variety of sessions, which included topics such as self awareness and self-esteem, group dynamics, women's rights, gender roles and society, pregnancy and STD prevention, and college career and future planning. The students also took part in a variety of educational, cultural, and fun field trips. The results were good because 77% of the girls did complete the program sessions.

Eighty-six percent of the 8th grade girls were promoted to 9th grade, and 94% of the 7th grade went to the 8th grade. McGreevy was concerned the girls did not do well as hoped on the TerraNova or math tests. However, the students did believe they had positive relations with the tutors and improved self esteem. The author questioned if starting this program in the 7th grade was too late and wondered whether another study should be conducted in an earlier grade.

At a predominantly Latino high school in Chicago, 54 Puerto Rican and Mexican students wrote an essay about themselves while in eighth grade and described how they felt they were treated by their teachers. Twenty-seven of the same students wrote again in their junior year of high school. Quiroz (2001) stated, "The two sets of narratives offer a snapshot of Latino students' view of family, school, ethnicity, and future plans" (p. 327). The author conducted an ethnographic study of the students for two school years and accidentally discovered the narratives. The students wrote the essays to provide insight for the high school counselors. Neither teachers nor counselors read these narratives. Unfortunately, teachers and counselors missed an important opportunity to hear Latino students voice their beliefs and interpretations about their educational experiences. Quiroz (2001) believed if someone listened to the Latino voices, rich information would have been found which could connect experiences, school with future goals and work aspirations. Quiroz (2001) stated, ". . . these personal accounts provide a picture of students disengaging from the schooling process. The same students who as eighth graders wanted to become a 'famous doctor,' as juniors did not shift to a nurse or some other modified position, but rather to 'if I graduate,' or 'I'd just like to get a job when I graduate'" (p. 343).

High School. When comparing students' abilities to acquire social capital as it relates to obtaining information about high school courses to take and planning for college, Prado (2008) started out with 24 students from randomly selected groups of Chinese-origin and Latino sophomores and juniors. The students came from a combination of honors/AP and/or college prep math and English classes. Parents had to be from a working-class employment level. Prado (2008) also interviewed parents and school staff. He ended up with data on eight students. This article focused on three of the eight students. He found two Chinese students from working class immigrant families were better able to find networks and resources to assist them in answering these concerns. On the other hand, the Latina who also came from a working class immigrant family had much less success in accessing the information needed. Prado (2008) argued the Latina had limited social capital. He advocated both families' institutional expertise and teachers' academic support were very important to the students' academic futures. At the conclusion of this study, Prado (2008) discussed what he called "conformist" and "oppositional" classroom discourse (p. 25). He asserted the Chinese students had teachers who readily explained the college process and answered other questions, but the Latina student had teachers who provided very little educational support. Prado (2008) contended students and parents must be able to get the assistance needed to help fulfill their plans to move onto post-secondary education. He believed this can only happen if the traditional way of schooling changes so that "marginalized students and their parents" (p. 25) are no longer ignored or alienated. He concluded by stating, "The kind of incorporation that alienated youth require cannot be framed within a conventional integrationist/assimilationist model" (p. 25). In other words, teachers and parents need to

work together to assist students in their achievement goals and not assume students can get this information on their own or only certain types of students deserve to move to the next level. This article does not spell out specific steps to accomplish what was discovered.

There is research available that maintains the importance of middle and high school students having peers in addition to family and teachers to help them navigate the system (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gandara, 1995, 2009; Gibson, Gandara & Koyama, 2004; Ream, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Students can learn vital information from their peers even when the information comes from other students who are not directly in a specific peer group. One example noted was a Latina who was standing in line to register for a general high school course when a nonminority student told her to get out of that line and register for a college prep course. This one interaction helped to change this student's perception about her abilities and to plan to attend college (Gandara, 1995, p. 74).

According to Zambrana (2011**),** there are studies that are not up to date on what is really happening with many Latinas. She stated,

> In fact, new trends show important transitions and changes. The pregnancy rates and early mothering data show strong decreases in fertility rates in the last few decades. These rates are at their lowest level. (p. 89) . . . .The educational pathways of adolescents . . . are a major determinant of social location in adulthood. (p. 90)

There appears to be a number of characteristics successful Latina students possess. Some of these characteristics are having and maintaining a positive attitude, self-motivation, high self-esteem, a close family adult, and a good working relationship with teachers who care about them (Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez & Garrett, 2008). Parent/student relationships,

community engagement and support, and positive cultural variables may also impact Latina success.

Family

Family life is very important in Latino culture and is sometimes very traditional (Gandara, 2009; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Henry, Merten, Plunkett & Sands, 2008). Henry et al. (2008) discussed the traditional culture values of familism (*familismo*), which means loyalty, obligation, and interdependence and respect (*respeto*) for self and family. These two values help to keep family life in a positive and caring mode. Gallegos-Castillo (2006) emphasized the family decides how females and males will act and what roles they will have in the family. Woolley (2009) not only emphasized family and respect, but also included education (*educacion*). Education includes formal school and also the teaching and rearing of the whole child. Both of these aspects are very important to Latino family values. Throughout research, Hispanic families have been very interested in all aspects of their children's lives. They believe education is important and want their children to do well in school and continue as far as they can go (Henry et al., 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008). However, children are expected to put the family first if assistance is needed financially or with taking care of siblings (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

The Latina, who wants her family to be proud of her, will sacrifice plans for the sake of the family. This is important in the development of their daughters and how they think of themselves. According to Ginorio and Huston (2001), researchers must look at positive characteristics and barriers together in order to understand how they all interact with each other and how they impact Latinas and their educational future.

For a number of Latinas, the traditional role may be difficult to change, especially if the fathers believe in the traditional roles. A study was conducted by Gallegos-Castillo (2006) of 22 working-class Mexican females, ages 14-18. She was curious about their background and what they thought about their future. She discovered these young ladies knew their roles were ". . . to provide services to others, to obey and be subservient to men, and to expect to be socially controlled" (p. 48). Several questioned this role and wondered why their mothers seem to be contradictory at times because they would enforce the traditional role and at other times advise the daughters not to follow this route. At times, it seemed the mothers were also trying to decide how to remove themselves from the traditional roles.

The literature discussed different parenting styles and how that may have an impact on how Latino children learn and express themselves. Gandara's 1995 study of fifty adults (thirty men and twenty women) who spoke about their educational experiences did not indicate a specific parenting style. Their mothers encouraged and fostered educational excellence and attainment. However it was noted that a number of parents utilized the authoritarian style, which was being strict, especially if the father was involved with the discipline. The other two styles are authoritative and permissive. According to research, the authoritative style is the preferred method in helping to foster academic aspirations. The authoritative style may still be strict, but parents would offer an explanation or a reason why and may include the child in the decision (p.46).

In order to help children succeed and live their dreams, a number of Latino families will work long hours and more than one job because they want their children to have a better future and life. In separate studies conducted by Gandara (1995) and

Ginorio and Huston (2001), it was noted family support was very important, but mothers were the main supporters of their daughters' education. However, if parents are uneducated and family influence does not exist, Latino girls may not be encouraged to go to college (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. 21).

Even if a parent is uneducated or poorly educated, there are strong indicators that a student can be successful if the schools provide a rigorous curriculum. A rigorous curriculum is a much more positive indicator of educational success than a family's socioeconomic status (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Henry et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important to educate families in order to get involved and help their daughters be successful.

Parent Involvement. Parent involvement has been deemed to be very important in order to help students succeed in school (Gandara, 1995; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Hill & Torres, 2010; NWLC & MALDEF; 2009; Zambrana, 2011). However, there is sometimes a disconnect between what the Latino family assumes or expects and what the schools expect or demand. When Latino families send their children to school, they assume they will be taken care of and well educated. In their minds, they believe they have taught their children to be respectful and studious and do not understand why the school does not communicate with them or get upset with them when they cannot attend a school function in the evening.

Ginorio and Huston (2001) noted there are "Home/School Cultural and Value Conflicts for Latinas/os" (p. 17) and listed several things such as the home nurtures dependency and the school believes independence is important. Another example was Latino parents as a whole do not believe it is necessary for girls to be educated as much

as boys, whereas schools expect both boys and girls to be educated. A third conflict was the home believed in achievement for family satisfaction, and the school believed in achievement for self-satisfaction.

According to NWLC and MALDEF (2009), Latinas do better in school when their parents are engaged with the school. However, in Gandara's 1995 study, the fifty participants stated their parents never became involved with their schools. These students were high achieving. Gandara (1995) surmised this was a good thing because their teachers could have formed negative judgments about the participants' parents since they had little formal education.

There are Latino parents who may not be involved with their children's schooling in ways that society expects, but it does not mean they do not care about education. For example, Lopez (2001) discussed the importance of schools changing their mindset about how marginalized parents demonstrate their involvement with the school. Lopez studied one family and learned the Padilla family believed they were preparing their children for success and were heavily involved with the school. The Padillas were migrant workers. In order to help prepare their children for the future, they always instilled the importance of an education. However, the Padillas also took their children with them to work in order for the children to experience the strenuous work and the long hours. This was their way of getting their children to understand how hard work pays off. In addition, the Padillas were also telling their children in so many words, by getting an education, they would not have to work this type of job, which incurs a great deal of physical labor.

There are reasons why a number of Latino parents do not engage with schools. Hill and Torres (2010) stated Latino parents were sometimes surprised and disappointed

their children were not learning rigorous material, experienced inequity in instructional quality, and placed in low-level courses (p. 98). These parents believed, since they were working so hard and making numerous sacrifices, their children deserved a first class education. Another reason Latino parents may not engage with schools was because they may feel uncomfortable visiting their child's school due to lack of English speaking skills.

For the past several years, there has been a large emphasis in getting all parents involved with participation at school. This seems to be critical for the Latino families since Latinas are still lagging behind other females in other racial groups. As noted earlier, one of the main recommendations from the latest White House Initiative is to involve more Latino families in their children's education. This can be done in numerous ways, such as community meetings, workshops, and evening school programs. Parents and others tend to lean towards the school for developing successful students and providing important and timely information to the parents.

Role of Educational Setting

The role of school in the early 1900's was to educate white male students for the world of work. Callahan (1962), indicated schools were to operate just like a business, a well-oiled machine that utilized efficiency and scientific management principles. Schools were to send students out into the world like robots in order to fulfill the role businesses needed. In the early 1900s, schools were being attacked as inefficient due to the amount of money being invested and the small number of students who were completing school. Morgan (2006) discussed Frederick Taylor's scientific management principles, which included shifting all responsibility for the organization of work from the worker to the

manager, using scientific methods to determine the most efficient way of doing work, selecting the best person to perform the job designed, train the worker to do the work efficiently, and monitor worker performance to ensure appropriate work procedures are followed and that appropriate results are achieved. Callahan (1962) indicated two educators, William C. Bagley and John Dewey, were against using business and industrial values because the applications of these procedures were not appropriate for schools. Callahan (1962) ended his book by stating:

> Until every child has part of his work in small classes or seminars with fine teachers who have a reasonable teaching load, we will not really have given the American high school, or democracy for that matter, a fair trial. To do this, Americans will need to break with its traditional practice strengthened so much in the age of efficiency, of asking how our schools can be operated most economically and begin asking instead what steps need to be taken to provide an excellent education for our children. We must face the fact that there is no cheap, easy way to educate a human being and that a free society cannot endure without educated men. (p. 264)

During the 1920's through 1970's and beyond, students were moved through two tracks: college bound or vocational. Students in the college bound track were usually able to take honors and AP courses and had access to other information, such as college application deadlines and financial aid. Students placed in the vocational track usually took basic classes but may not have access to vital information regarding choices after high school (Gonzalez, 2013). More minority students, including Latinos, are entering and completing college degrees. According to Gandara (2009), this movement began in the 1970's when the government, through federally mandated laws, and college recruiters encouraged and helped minority and Latino students attend and graduate from college (p. 197).

Schools have been responsible for ensuring the successful completion of high school for all students. In order to ensure more Latinas successfully graduate from high school and enroll in post-secondary institutions, Gonzalez (2013) argued the school structure, which included school size, class size, curriculum, pedagogy, and tracks, must change in order to help students understand and access what they need to be successful (p. 4). Successful completion still may not always occur due to reasons, such as teacher attitudes, school climate/culture, and leadership from the principal. These three areas are explored further in the following paragraphs.

Teacher Attitudes

All students want to be successful in the classroom, but may not display their desire for success in the same manner. For minority students, a teacher who establishes a rapport and caring attitude will encourage his/her students to do well. If a minority student believes a teacher does not like them or care about them, they will shut down and no longer communicate in class. In some ways, these students will ignore requests to participate, refuse to turn in homework assignments, and could become a problem student in the classroom. There have been studies conducted that show Asian students will be successful whether they perceive teachers care about them or not. If they believe they are learning from a teacher, they will be successful in that class. This is not the case with African American and Latino students. According to Valenzuela (1999), non-Latino teachers do not think the Latino children care about their schooling and the Latino children believe their teachers do not care about them. This act of caring is very important to Latinos. If they believe their teachers care about them, they are more likely to work hard for their teachers in order to please and not disappoint them. Other studies

have also determined if a student believes their teacher cares about him/her, that student will work hard as possible to do well in that class even if it means he/she may not do as well or even fail in their other classes if they believe the teacher does not care for him/her.

One of the issues with Latina girls who are not successful has to do with teacher attitudes or perceptions about them. According to Garcia-Reid (2007) and Zambrana (2002), teacher attitudes have a very deep and lasting impression on Latina girls. If the attitudes are not positive and caring, Latina students will not feel wanted in the classroom.

School Climate

Gordon and Crabtree (2006) believed a number of people assume school culture and school climate are used interchangeably and mean the same thing. However, there are distinctions. Rodriquez (2008) stated, "School culture is what schools do and how they do them" (p. 761). Gordon and Crabtree (2006) stated school climate ". . .has served as an umbrella term to describe teachers' perceptions of their overall work environment" (p. 223). They both also mentioned school climate is about relationships and how relationships impact the staff (p. 223). According to Gordon and Crabtree (2006), there are several components that must exist in order for a school to be inviting, engaging, and successful with students, teachers, and parents. Gordon and Crabtree (2006) asserted the principal promotes these components, but other research (Dufour, Eaker & Dufour, 2005; Fullan, 2001) indicated the leadership team and teachers should also promote these types of components. First, all stakeholders must know the mission and vision that has been communicated. Next, collaboration among teachers and staff should be fostered. Third,

teachers are encouraged to be part of the decision making process. Fourth, high expectations for teachers and students should be set. Fifth, a sense of teamwork and trust should be established and maintained. Lastly, teacher dialogue and reflection should occur through teamings, department meetings, and professional learning communities (PLCs). In the book, On Common Ground, DuFour et al. (2005) emphasized throughout all of their readings and research they have done, one common theme emerged from all of the experts. That common theme was consistently having high-achieving schools. They found schools had to have all stakeholders on the same page in order to improve student achievement. This means administrators and teachers must work together to help students learn. Teachers become empowered to share their thoughts and build from there. A PLC allots time for ongoing collaboration and learning to occur among teachers in order to figure out ways to facilitate learning and next steps once specific learning has been accomplished.

Two administrators at two different school districts who have a large Latino population believed several practices have enhanced their school-family connections, which improved student achievement. First the administrators embraced the community. Second they practiced servant leadership. Next, parents were empowered because they gained important knowledge, and myths about the school were dispelled. The administrators at both schools valued and incorporated the culture of the people and the community. Fifth, strong personal relationships were developed. Sixth, staff members were actively involved in the entire process. In addition, financial and political capitals were generated (Guerra & Valverde, 2007). When schools work closely with students,

staff, and parents in an environment where all stakeholders feel valued and part of the decision making process, wonderful results can occur.

Community Engagement. In order to build schools, which are engaging and inviting to all stakeholders, it is important to include these stakeholders in a variety of ways. Traditionally, the Parent/Teacher School Association (PTSA) represented the community because the group is comprised of a number of parents, a teacher representative, the principal and/or the administrative team. There are PTSA groups at the middle and high school levels that may also include one or two students who attend the monthly meetings. This group typically meets once a month to discuss upcoming events, ways they can support teachers/schools, concerns, and to find out important statistics about the overall school environment, grades, and other information.

In recent years, the need for deeper and sustained family-school involvement brought about an initiative to improve and expand partnerships. DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) shared the National PTA's six standards, which included implementing regular, two-way communication, providing training and advice to parents, welcoming parents into the school building as partners in their children's education, providing many opportunities for parents to volunteer, including parents in decision-making, and collaborating with other community members and utilizing those resources. Gordon and Crabtree (2006) stated "Community involvement provides an opportunity to not only tell the schools' story to a wider audience, but also to learn from the schools' customers in the community" (p. 258).

A webinar series entitled, "Achieving Excellence and Innovation: Family, School, and Community Engagement" consisted of a panel of guest speakers who discussed how

these components can improve the overall school and community (Harvard Research Project, 2010). One of the key thoughts from the webinar was that parent involvement is no longer considered a goal but is now considered part of a school's strategy. In addition this involvement should be part of a shared purpose, exist from "cradle to career" and not just a program that occurs once, but occurs during the school day, after school, at home, and during the summer because students are always learning. One speaker discussed a program that exists in New York City, which focuses on the 9th grade. They provide bilingual parent development sessions regarding college readiness.

Community Program

Enhancing Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE). The W. K. Kellogg Foundation (2007) established a national education initiative in 1997 in order to increase the number of Latinas/os to graduate from high school and enter and graduate with a post-secondary education. This initiative is located in 7 states and 13 sites. Seven states with the largest Latino populations were chosen and contain these sites.

This partnership is an example of community engagement at work in order to have a positive impact with Latino students. The partnership is geared to serve students in the P-20 educational pathway; engage parents, families, and communities; and change policy for impact. The ENLACE report (2007) stated:

> Through the implementation phase, the 13 ENLACE partnerships reached more than 116,000 *students, parents, and community members annually with direct services or participation in outreach activities, college fairs, and celebration. Specifically,* 80,455 students and 30,730 parents have been served by ENLACE since its inception. (p. 5)

The ENLACE partnership consists of the school system; community college and university partners; the community, which include community-based agencies, businesses, and religious organizations; and the Latino parents and students. There are

four areas ENLACE is providing assistance through the educational pathway. First, it is important to identify Latino students who are struggling and provide help for them in order to get them on the college prep plan. Second, students and their families must become familiar with navigating and understanding how to plan for college, including the application process. Third, ENLACE utilizes current college students as mentors in order to help Latino students stay in college and earn their degrees. Last, ENLACE wants to make sure the transition from community college to a university is seamless because there are a number of Latino students who attend a two-year program but never transfer (pp. 13-16). ENLACE developed strategies that addresses the needs of Latino parents, empower parents to be actively engaged, and to act as advocates for their families and others (pp. 21-23). Policy changes is the third area in the ENLACE model for success. The group emphasizes communicating with schools, colleges, and other partners and national agencies in order to get across the need for policy changes to be enacted. Such policy changes include providing all students with college prep courses and eliminating the financial barriers to college.

Nesman, Batsche and Hernandez (2007) conducted a case study and wrote an article discussing how one ENLACE initiative in Florida adopted a theory-based evaluation approach to help guide them through their five-year plan. This initiative focused on first-generation college Latino students in middle, high, and college levels of their education. The partners of this initiative followed a detailed process, which included guiding principles, implementation strategies, outcomes, and evaluation. Interventions and other programs were established. Some had to be abolished because there were too many to implement, and the ENLACE group had to determine which types of

interventions were the most appropriate. It is important to note the school district did complete a 3-year study in order to compare high school students who participated in ENLACE and those that did not. The study results indicated interventions were positive for those students who were moving on to college.

Leadership Implications

The role of the principal has changed from being a manager of the finances and facilities to an instructional leader who is knowledgeable, caring, involved in relationship-building with all stakeholders, and who wants to see all students succeed in school. This instructional leader must wear a number of hats; be able to communicate with all types of people; and encourage, promote, and invite parents, community members, and sometimes political types into the school building so they can observe the exciting and high-level learning that is taking place each day. As stated in the previous section, sharing decision making is important because it empowers the staff, students, and the community. Hispanic and other minority parents can feel connected and more willing to participate on some level if this type of leadership occurs in their child's school.

In the book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan (2001) stated, "The role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results" (p. 68). It is important to note the principal needs to be cognizant of the work environment in order to make sure it is a comfortable and healthy place to work (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006). Gordon and Crabtree (2006) shared the "Gallup Q Engagement Hierarchy" which is a spin on Maslow's Hierarchy. Gordon emphasized four levels on the hierarchy starting with basic needs (What do I get?), management support (What do I give?), teamwork (Do I belong?), and growth (How do we grow?) (p.

227). When these questions are answered, teachers feel they are in a good and engaging work environment. Once teachers and staff members believe the school is a positive place where teaching and collaborating occur on a daily basis, it is the hope they will be able to focus on teaching and learning.

In order for schools to be successful and a place where all students can succeed, the instructional leader must ensure all staff members are trained to be culturally responsive in their teaching, attitude, beliefs, and behaviors regarding all students. Waxman, Padron and Garcia (2003) stressed culturally responsive teaching takes into consideration the student's background and concerns, provides inclusive curriculum and promotes academic responsibility and equality. This is not the only component to ensure student success, but it is a very important one because their classrooms may have a variety of students with different backgrounds and/or cultures. The principal must model the type of communication, interaction, and relationships he/she would like to see throughout the building. The principal must hold everyone, including students, accountable to learning and teaching on a daily basis.

Bolman and Deal (2008) shared a scenario of a new principal taking stock of the situation occurring in his building. The principal utilized the "four-frame approach", which are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Each frame represented a part of the issues he was trying to resolve. Writing down his ideas in this manner enabled the principal to see possibilities. Bolman and Deal (2008) called this the "reframing process" (428-433). The authors stated, "Reframing, like management and leadership, is more art than science" (p. 433). In other words, this process allows one to see possibilities. Experience, along with possibilities, dedication, and working with the staff

will enable positive changes to occur even though changes may occur in a slower timeframe than anticipated. This type of situation is important to reflect upon because the instructional leader will need to be patient when guiding teachers through changes in the curriculum, understanding new testing protocols, and providing equity and opportunity for all students.

When looking at the concerns of Latinas, it will take time to hire and recruit more Latina teachers and guidance counselors, retrain and change the mindset of how to make placement decisions, and to provide training for teachers to utilize effective teaching practices. Waxman et al. (2003) discussed three concerns regarding the underachievement of Hispanic students. The first one discussed the need for qualified teachers and better professional development. The second concern dealt with inappropriate teaching practices. The authors asserted teachers have low expectations for Hispanic students, overused whole class instruction, and allowed very little verbal interaction with other classmates. The third concern was the term "at risk", which the authors maintained should be a label for the school instead of students (p. 135).

Waxman et al. (2003) examined positive factors that can help with Hispanic success. The authors agreed culturally responsive teacher, cooperative learning, instructional conversation, cognitively guided instruction, and technology-enriched instruction should be utilized in the classroom on a regular basis because ". . .all of these teaching practices incorporate more active student learning and changes the teachers' role. Instead of delivering knowledge, the teacher's role is to facilitate learning" (pp.137-138).

Social Capital Theory

Our educational system expects teachers to teach and students to learn. Principals and other administrators monitor and encourage these daily interactions. Somehow, parents are also expected to communicate, monitor, and participate in their children's education as well. How does social capital help or hinder these daily interactions? Field (2008) stated the main idea of social capital theory consisted of two words: "relationships matter" (p. 1).

Social capital has been used in a variety of disciplines, but has become very prominent when researchers use this theory to frame their studies regarding educational access among certain minority groups, achievement, role of the family, community, school perceptions, and relationships among society (Coleman, 1988; Dika & Singh, 2002; Field, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001).

For purposes of this study, the definitions and viewpoints of Coleman, Putnam, and Stanton-Salazar were intertwined and used as the conceptual and theoretical frameworks when discussing social capital and how Latinas acquired and utilized social capital to help them successfully navigate through the educational system.

Coleman, a sociologist, who studied rational choice theory, also had an interest in social capital and wanted to know more about the relationship between inequality and educational achievement (Field, 2008). Coleman conducted early studies, but one specific study still stands out today. Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 expected a survey to be conducted and the findings reported to the President. Coleman (1966) was charged with this responsibility. He was told to prepare a detailed report about the equality of educational opportunities that were available in public school institutions at

all levels for students of color, race, religion, or national origin. The report analysis looked at how much minority groups were segregated in public schools and whether the schools for minority children were inferior to those in the majority. The report also discussed whether the racial and ethnic groups performed differently from each other and whether these differences resulted in different educational opportunities (Nichols, 1967, p. 528). The Coleman Report was the first report to discuss the importance of results (outputs) rather than looking at the schools' inputs. The results led to bussing and other ways to try to ensure equality in schools.

In a 1988 article, Coleman discussed his concept of social capital. The definition was:

> Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure. (p. 20)

Fields (2008) shared a later version of Coleman's definition of social capital which was:

> The set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital. (p. 27)

In both definitions, Coleman examined the importance of relationships between and among people (actors). In his 1988 article, Coleman examined obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. Coleman justified his beliefs in rational choice theory and social capital because he believed, when people pursued their own interests, they were still willing to cooperate within the 'structure' of networks, provided there was a sense of obligation, expectations, trustworthiness, and reciprocity

(Field, 2008). Coleman (1988) emphasized social structures must have intergenerational closure. His example involved a group of parents and how they communicated with each other and their children in order to prevent them from going outside the community/family circle. Coleman asserted closure was necessary in order to maintain effective norms and trustworthiness. This, in turn, ensured everyone took care of their obligations and expectations (p. 28).

A particularly important aspect of Coleman's contribution to research on social capital is in his examination of the family's role and education. According to Coleman (1988), the family background consisted of financial capital (wealth/income), human capital (parents' education), and social capital (relations between children and parents (pp. 30-31). Coleman stated a child will not do as well if social capital is missing between the parent and child, regardless of the level of financial or human capital the parent possesses (p. 32). He also discussed children lose some of their social capital when parents move from one community to another. Ream (2005) also believed some students would be less likely to drop out of school if the family had social capital within the home and outside of it. Therefore, Coleman (1988) re-emphasized the importance of maintaining and using the three forms of capital for personal as well as community gain. He strongly believed in the importance of social capital in the creation of human capital.

Bourdieu and Coleman laid the groundwork for Putnam (2000). Putnam expanded on the notion of social capital by including community, trust, reciprocity, networks, norms, and civic engagement in his definition. Putnam also believed social capital was on the decline since the 1940's (Field, 2008). He worried about democracy and what was going on in the community.

Putnam added two components to social capital theory, which were bridging and bonding. According to Putnam, bridging draws people from diverse areas and backgrounds together, and bonding maintains and reinforces exclusive social behavior and hierarchy (Field, p. 36). Putnam (2000) asserted, "Child development is powerfully shaped by social capital. Trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer group, and larger community have wide-ranging effects on the child's opportunities and choices" (p. 296).

Coleman, Putnam, and Stanton-Salazar have similar definitions about social capital, but each included specific distinctions within those definitions. The application of the three blended definitions guided this study. Dika and Singh (2002) stated the term 'social capital' was first used in 1920, but credit was given to Bourdieu and Coleman for the theoretical development of the concept. Loury, an economist, was credited by Coleman and Putnam as the first person to come up with the name 'social capital' (Field, 2008). In a paper written by Loury (1972), he stated,

> The acquisition of productive characteristics by a young person is modeled as a social process; that is, interactions of home, community environment, and an educational institution convert a young person's innate capabilities into marketable characteristics. The employment opportunities of a mature individual are determined by the characteristics acquired through this social process during youth. (p. 157)

Loury (1972) concluded his paper by stating:

> An individual's social origin has an obvious and important effect on the amount of resources that is ultimately invested in his or her development. It may thus be useful to employ a concept of 'social capital' to represent the consequences of social position in facilitating acquisition of the standard human capital characteristics. . . . (p. 176)

Coleman and Putnam were two researchers credited with utilizing social capital as a way of studying problems or social concerns (Field, 2008; Ream, 2005). Coleman,

who was influenced by Bourdieu, believed social capital was a resource that could be accessed and used by everyone, not just the rich and well connected (Field, 2008). In Coleman's widely referenced article, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital", he examined how three forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms were interrelated (1988). Coleman believed "Both social capital in the family and social capital in the community played roles in the creation of human capital in the rising generation" (p. 30). According to Dika and Singh (2002), Coleman believed it was the family's duty to ensure their children had access to a better future by accepting and following specific and appropriate norms.

Putnam (2000) also believed in the meaning and use of social capital and emphasized the importance of its role in child development. He stated social capital included trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer group, and larger community (p. 296). He argued if social capital is high in a particular state, standardized test scores might also be high in that state because there is a correlation between these two sources (p. 299). Putnam, however, went a step further by discussing 'bridging' and 'bonding' (Field, 2008). Bridging occurred when people from different social backgrounds and groups worked together to meet each other's needs. Bonding occurred within these different groups when each group wanted to remain intact and loyal only to each other, such as family or close friends. According to Field (2008), bonding and bridging can be linked in order for groups to access more capital outside their specific groups and communities.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) included another component in social capital. That component was how institutional agents (schools, places of employment) could help

students gain more access to social capital and also learn how to use coping strategies in order to become empowered to do well in that institution. Stanton-Salazar discussed the forms of institutional support, which included funds of knowledge, bridging, advocacy, role modeling, emotional and moral support, and personalized and soundly based evaluative feedback advice and guidance.

In summary, Coleman believed the family needed social capital in order to improve human capital within each generation. Putnam believed not only was human capital important, but a person also needed support from close-nit groups as well as outside groups in order to access and increase the level of social capital. In order to access and increase this capital, a person must be willing to trust and reciprocate for someone else. In other words, networking and being able to move through various groups is a must. Stanton-Salazar took social capital further by discussing the importance of having vibrant, nurturing, and effective institutional agents, such as schools, in order for students to understand both the written and unwritten rules. Once the rules are understood, students are able to navigate the system and make the system work for them. This research blended aspects of the definitions of social capital from Coleman, Putnam, and Stanton-Salazar to examine and interpret the lived experiences of Latinas. Their perceptions, thoughts, and examples shared were able to explain their success and whether any supports or resources assisted them with their graduation.

Throughout the literature review, studies noted family, schools, and community are important connections for Latinas as they navigate the educational system. During their educational experience, Latinas must have opportunities to access and acquire additional social capital. Several studies utilized social capital and cultural capital or a

combination of social capital with another framework when analyzing student engagement, success in school, transitions to college, and earning a college degree (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Gonzalez, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2003; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Nunez, 2009; Prado, 2008; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Woolley et al., 2009). Woolley et al. (2009) focused on the importance of relationships, but noted teacher-student relationships in particular, were very important when it came to student success for middle school students. The authors noted, "The current findings reinforce the need for more research on the social aspects of school success for Latino middle school students" (p. 67). Garcia-Reid (2007) stated Hispanic students are able to make better decisions about their education when they have social capital within themselves, family, and peers. Perez and McDonough (2008) studied how Latina and Latino students make college choices by using social capital framework and combining it with a "chain migration" concept as their lens (p. 253). In this study, Latinas and Latinos spoke with counselors but also listened to college advice from extended family members but sometimes only relied on the advice of extended family members. It was noted schools needed to ensure entire families or family/peer networks are informed about college choices in order for students to make sound and informed choices.

Gonzalez (2013) discussed the role of social capital and its importance to academic success, but also included the importance of having a mentor who would assist in providing helpful information in order to successfully navigate high school and college. Gonzalez et al. (2003) stated, ". . . the use of social capital as a theoretical construct has augmented our understanding of the college decision-making process of under-represented students" (p. 149). Gonzalez et al. (2003) noted Latinas who were in

specialized programs or enrolled in high level courses were able to access an elite four-year university directly after high school, but Latinas who were not enrolled in high level courses only had access to a two-year college program. The authors noted this difference occurred via the accumulation or lack of accumulation of social capital and whether or not institutional agents (teachers, counselors, specialized programs) were communicating with them about college information. Nunez (2009) discussed how social capital and intercultural capital can help ". . . Latino students who are navigating the K-12 and college systems" (p. 27). Having both provides students with a sense of belonging even if the environment happened to be hostile. Nunez (2009) emphasized Latino students who are confident and have a sense of belonging will notice the environment and still be able to function in a successful manner.

Summary

Latinos are the largest minority population in the United States. Specifically, Latinas are the largest racial/ethnic female group. However, the overall population is rapidly growing and has become an integral part of our country. As such this population deserves to be recognized, respected, and provided with the proper access and tools to achieve an education and to tap into a variety of opportunities and assistance afforded to others in the United States. This has not always been the case when it comes to Latinos and education.

The historical perspective of the Latino population regarding a fair and equitable education showed they were treated unfairly, segregated, and discriminated against for a number of years. Two important cases stated segregation was unlawful, and another case maintained Latinos were protected under the Fourteenth Amendment (Grant, 2004; Nieto,

2004; Saenz, 2004; Soto, 2007; Valencia, 2011). After the 1954 Brown decision, there were additional court cases involving Latinos and their education, but they were still not considered their own ethnic group until 1980 (Zambrana, 2011).

A number of researchers believed desegregation efforts are losing ground because of court cases, such as *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle District No. 1* (PICS, 2007). This case struck down the racial integration plan this school system had in place. Orfield, Frankenberg, and Garces (2008) believed race conscious decisions by schools should continue because it would be beneficial to all students and their communities. However, Ladson-Billings (2008) believed resegregation will probably continue due to the PICS court ruling.

Several of our Presidents issued White House Initiatives for Hispanic Excellence, which investigated why Latinos are doing poorly in school and what measures could be taken to help eliminate these difficulties. Each White House Initiative put together an advisory commission to study the situation and devise possible solutions. Each commission determined early interventions with education, health, and other areas needed to occur and/or expand. Many partnerships with organizations such as NCLR, ENLACE, operate in order to communicate and conduct these interventions in the Latino communities. Students, families, schools, and other organizations are encouraged to participate. All of the initiatives are important and are working to increase the number of Latino graduates. These initiatives are also trying to ensure these graduates are college and career ready. However, none of the initiatives directly researched the unique challenges facing Latinas or communicated how to increase the graduation rates of the female Latino population. This chapter looked at a number of researchers who discussed

the importance of knowing and understanding the Latina experience and how this may impact her educational future. Latinas are the largest racial/ethnic female group in the United States (Zambrana, 2011). Research indicated a number of Latino families have traditional roles in mind for their daughters. Daughters want to please their families because family is the most important relationship in Latino culture. Balancing their commitment to family and pursuing their educational goals can be very difficult, overwhelming, and stressful. It was noted Hispanic mothers have high aspirations for their daughters, but if the family needs financial assistance or help with siblings, the daughters are expected to take on those responsibilities. Daughters who are away in college find ways to cope with these two responsibilities and the expectations from each. Espinoza (2010) called this the "Good Daughter" dilemma. His study discussed how Latina participants were able to either integrate their family and studies together or were able to separate the two in order to be successful at keeping up their responsibilities at home as well as maintaining their success at college.

Three studies also investigated the Latina experience and focused on aspirations, self-esteem, early pregnancy, gender stereotypes, family values and expectations, and schools (Gandara et al., 2013; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). All three studies discussed what they discovered when talking to Latinas. Again, the emphasis was on how the Latinas perceived themselves and what type of impact from society and family played a role in this perception. Thirty-four percent of the young ladies in the NWLC & MALDEF (2009) study answered a survey question by indicating they would probably achieve less education than their aspiration level. These "possible

selves" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001) may see the challenges and expectations and try to figure out how to balance the conflicting views of family and community.

Gender and stereotyping was a concern found by a number of researchers (Gandara et al, 2013; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Zambrana, 2011), which tended to be a barrier when it came to high school and college completion. Latinas do not have enough role models or Latina/o teachers during their educational experiences. It was also found Latinas may choose a less selective college in order to live with family and to cut down on college expenses (Education Week, 2012). Family respect, support, and relationships are very important to Latinas. Peer groups, involvement in extracurricular activities, and a sense of belonging, are also very important to them and can assist in their educational success.

The school and teachers play a vital role in whether Latinas feel they can complete the coursework and graduate from high school. Once Latinas believe their teachers care about them, they begin to feel comfortable, self-esteem improves, and they can concentrate on their studies. If the school climate is inviting and students, staff, parents, and the principal are involved in two-way communication, open door policy, and really listen to concerns, Latinas and their parents can actively participate in various aspects of the school community. The role of the principal is crucial in any school, and the principal must ensure collaboration is occurring with all stakeholders. The principal must involve community members, PTSA, businesses, and other interested groups in order to build partnerships and provide opportunities for communication, educational and informational sessions, possible after school programs, and internships and part time jobs.

Community engagement can be the glue that binds the students, parents, staff, administrative team, and various businesses together. These distinct groups come together to establish goals, build trust, generate support in many forms, and to work toward building the best school community in order to have successful students. There are a number of community agencies that work with Latino families. The Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE) Initiative, as stated in this chapter, demonstrated how a number of organizations, along with parents and other stakeholders, can work together for a common goal.

All of the research conducted throughout the literature review discussed various concerns and barriers that Latinas may face as well as attributes and other characteristics, which can lead to success throughout their educational experiences. The research also provided recommendations, which can have a very positive and dramatic result with the Latino population as a whole. There were several research articles and reports that focused on the Latino females, but more research still needs to be conducted to determine which specific recommendations articulated would work for this unique group of young women who are constantly navigating two cultural worlds.

This research study related to the topics and findings in the literature review because the study focused on the lived educational experiences of selected Latinas. The research questions sought to find out how selected Latinas made meaning of their high school experience and whether there were resources and factors that contributed to their success. Using a semi-structured interview format, the young women were asked a series of questions about their lived educational experiences. This allowed for a practical way to find out what barriers or challenges these young women faced while in high school. In

addition, this format encouraged the Latina participants to share what successes they have achieved and who assisted them with their educational experience. The social capital lens was used to determine if they had any social capital during that time and if they acquired additional social capital throughout their experience.

These young women will grow up to become our leaders in various ways. Therefore, they must know how to access and increase their social capital in order to be educated and prepared to be college and career ready. These skills will allow them to move in and out of various groups, situations, and places in order for them to move through the 21st century as confident, adaptable, empowered, and professional women. It is my hope that my research study built upon previous work and provided additional information and strategies that can be shared with other stakeholders.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Overview

Unmuth (2012) stated, "Hispanic women are more likely than Hispanic men to complete high school and college, but they still trail White and African-American women" (p. 20). According to Ginorio and Huston (2001), the 9th and 12th grade years were the most vulnerable for Latinas. If they dropped out of high school due to reasons such as moving, assisting with siblings and chores, or becoming pregnant, they typically do not return to earn their high school diploma. Gandara and Gibson (2004) contended the 9th grade was the most risky time and emphasized the need for schools to provide academically supportive peers who could help 9th graders with their transition. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to discover, understand, and interpret how some Latinas selected for this study were able to complete high school requirements and enroll in a four-year institution with or without supports.

Qualitative research provides a method of focusing on what a selected group of people have to say about a specific problem or phenomenon because the researcher is looking for understanding and meaning in the questions asked about that specific situation or experience (Maxwell, 2005). Merriam (2009) stated qualitative research can be very complex. She also asserted a qualitative method allows the researcher to uncover and understand what people have experienced. She added, "The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's" (p. 14). According to Creswell, (2007), qualitative research is important because it allows the researcher time to explore the problem.

Creswell (2007) and Merriam (2009) discussed the most common types of qualitative studies, which are basic qualitative or interpretive research, grounded theory,

phenomenology, case study, ethnography, narrative analysis, and critical qualitative research. According to Merriam (2009), she no longer identified a basic qualitative study as an interpretive study because all of the approaches listed "can be classified as interpretive; that is, the goal of the research is to understand the phenomenon and the meaning it has for the participants" (p. 34). Each approach utilizes a unique component (Merriam, 2009). However, all approaches listed contain all of the characteristics of a basic qualitative or interpretive study, which include understanding and making meaning; purposeful sampling, interviewing or observing in order to collect data; analyzing the data; and utilizing themes to present findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 38).

There have been studies completed where participants were asked to go back in time in order to reflect on a specific incident or their life history. The method sometimes used is called the retrospective method (Garmezy, 1974; Gutek, 1978; Haaga, 1986). These authors indicated there could be problems but typically very little issues with memory occurred. Gandara (1995) completed an extensive research study on ". . . the educational mobility of one Hispanic group. . ." (p. 2). There were 50 participants, 30 were Latino and 20 were Latina. She was concerned about the accuracy of information and believed there were several factors that made her believe the respondents would provide accurate data. First, the participants were very interested in sharing their lives. Second, Gandara (1995) found the participants had similar experiences, which helped with accuracy. Third, since the participants were professionals with advanced degrees, they understood the importance of accurate information. Lastly, the researcher had a similar background, which put the participants at ease.

This basic qualitative study utilized the characteristics of interpretive studies, which were listed above. This was important because the overall goal was to understand how selected Latinas made meaning of their high school experience. The participants were purposely selected based on specific criteria. This study was conducted and completed by using semi-structured interviews with 14 selected Latinas in order to understand their views about their lives, supports, networks, and future goals. By listening to their voices, I attempted to find out how these Latinas were successful in earning their high school diplomas. This study focused on a successful group of Latinas from a success rather than from a deficit perspective. The researcher found the selected Latinas very interested and comfortable in sharing their lived experiences. They were able to recall information with clarity and ease. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Latinas, currently enrolled in a four-year post-secondary institution, make meaning of their high school experience?
2. What resources and factors, if any, contributed to their success?

Studies have been conducted about Latino/Hispanics regarding their growing population as a group, concerns about their educational attainment, and drop out risk. Further studies, which focus on the lived experiences and voices of Latinas and their educational potential and aspirations, could be conducted in order to expand current knowledge and/or to uncover new information.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and ". . .is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3) . Constructionism was the epistemology the researcher selected in order to understand and analyze the lived

experiences of successful Latinas. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism is "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). Each person's view of a particular life event can be interpreted in many different ways. There is no one correct interpretation nor is there a right or wrong answer. If two people were involved in the same event, there would be more than one interpretation based upon how each person constructed meaning of that event and how each one relates to the world.

Crotty (1998) believed constructionism was always united with subjectivity and objectivity because each person will construct meaning through their personal and cultural lens. Creswell (2007) concurred with Crotty (1998) but maintained the researcher must keep this perspective in mind in order to ensure each participant's experiences and thoughts are the focus of the research. However, this study utilized the constructivist approach as the vehicle to interpret the information obtained and to ensure each participant's story was captured in an appropriate and accurate manner.

Theoretical Framework

This basic qualitative study made use of social capital theory as the framework to help answer how Latinas construct meaning on their ability to graduate from high school and continue to pursue a post-secondary education. Social capital theory was also the lens used to understand and interpret how culture, relationships, and support or lack of relationships and support assisted Latinas through the educational system. This study also sought to discover what specific resources and factors, if any, assisted Latinas in their

high school success. In addition, the study attempted to tie in whether determination and perseverance played a role in their success.

Dika and Singh (2002) stated the term 'social capital' was first used in 1920, but credit was given to Bourdieu and Coleman for the theoretical development of the concept (p. 32). Loury, an economist, was credited by Coleman and Putnam as the first person to come up with the name 'social capital' (Field, 2008). In a paper written by Loury (1972), he believed a person's social origin impacted the amount of time and effort devoted to that person's development.

Coleman and Putnam are two researchers who saw social capital as a way of studying problems or social concerns (Field, 2008; Ream, 2005). Both Coleman and Putnam believed the family had a responsibility to ensure social capital was available to their children. In addition, both authors discussed the importance of following appropriate norms and being able to bridge and bond in order to gain additional social capital.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) believed a component, such as an institutional agent, was critical in order to help students gain access to more social capital. Stanton-Salazar asserted having an institutional agent, such as a school, helped students gain additional social capital and provided opportunities to learn how to navigate the system. As a result of these opportunities, students became empowered and more confident in their abilities to cope and do well in school. He discussed the forms of institutional support, which included funds of knowledge bridging, advocacy, role modeling, emotional and moral support, and personalized and soundly based evaluative feedback advice and guidance.

In summary, Coleman, Putnam, and Stanton-Salazar stressed the importance of having social capital in order to assist the family. Families as well as individuals must communicate with close-nit and outside groups, be willing to trust and reciprocate, and be able to network and navigate in order to gain additional social capital. This research blended aspects of the definitions of social capital from Coleman, Putnam, and Stanton-Salazar in order to examine and interpret the lived high school experiences of Latinas.

Data Collection

One semi-structured interview for each participant was the method used to collect data for this basic qualitative study. The interviews allowed participants an opportunity to share their perspectives about their lives and how they made meaning of their high school experience. Creswell (2007) stressed the importance of making sure the researcher stays focused on what the participants share and be careful not to incorporate any researcher bias. As the researcher, I reminded myself to be open and remained flexible throughout each interview (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2009) discussed the importance of having good questions to ask and also suggested the researcher have a plan for data collection.

Interview Method

This basic qualitative study examined how Latinas reflected back and constructed meaning of their lives while in high school and discussed how and why they were successful. This study also asked the selected participants to discuss and describe what success meant to them. Conducting semi-structured interviews on the college campuses was an excellent way to talk with these young women because they were in a comfortable setting, which enabled the researcher to capture their thoughts, comments, and experiences. "An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose . . . and

becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 3). Rubin and Rubin (2005) discussed how responsive interviewing enables the researcher to obtain vital information from interviewees based upon the "interviewees' interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 36).

Creswell (2007) stated "The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (p. 20). The researcher completed one in-depth, semi-structured interview with each of the 14 participants. Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Before starting the interview, I established rapport with each participant by explaining the purpose of the research study and why they were chosen. Each participant read the consent form and agreed to continue with the interview. The researcher explained what hoped to be gained from the study and asked each participant if she had any questions. Probing questions were used as needed to elicit more deeply felt answers. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher asked if there was anything else the participant would like to share. Then the researcher thanked the participant and gave her a $5.00 gift card as a token of appreciation.

An interview protocol was designed and used in order to extract good, interesting, and informative answers during the interviews. (Appendix A) (Creswell, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The two research questions, social capital theory, and the components contained in the concept map helped to determine the interview questions. The interview questions encouraged participants to converse about their experiences and guided the flow of the interviews to make sure the "concern" was thoroughly explored and answered (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Probing and follow up questions were used

appropriately and carefully to keep the conversation flowing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Questioning techniques were utilized in order to access deep and rich descriptions, which led to emergent and unexpected themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher conducted one to two interviews a day. I allotted 45 minutes to one hour between the interviews in order to write down any notes, questions, and to complete any basic analysis. During the first few interviews, I discovered more time was needed to revamp a couple of questions and make other interviewing adjustments, such as skipping or combining a question or asking a question in a different manner, which allowed the participants to talk at length without interrupting with another question.

All interviews were conducted using a digital recorder. Before the first interview, I thought about and wrote down questions such as, "What will I learn about the participant? Will the information be useful? What if the participant does not give me much information? Will I be patient enough to give sufficient wait time?" I also acknowledged there may be a few bumps along the way, but reminded myself that I would persevere and the interviews would go well. Memo writing occurred before the beginning of each interview. I also noted my excitement and gratefulness for the opportunity to interview each participant. As soon as each interview was completed, the researcher wrote a reflective summary of what transpired during that time (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The reflective summary allowed the researcher an opportunity to jot down any additional comments or questions in order to clarify something a participant stated. The researcher transcribed several of the interviews, and a professional transcriptionist completed many of the interviews. The researcher reviewed each transcript and reflective notes in order to recapture the information from each participant and to check for

accuracy. All interview notes, transcripts, and reflective journals were saved on a flash drive and locked in a secure location. Any hand written journals and memos were also kept in the same secure location.

Each completed transcript was emailed to the specific participant in order to give each participant an opportunity to review the information. Participants were asked to email their comments within a few days. Member checks were completed via email in order to ensure accuracy, appropriate interpretation, and to verify the information gathered throughout the interviews. Four participants made corrections, clarified, and/or elaborated on their original responses. The researcher sent a second email to three participants as a friendly reminder. All 14 participants followed up with either a confirmation that the transcript was fine or made adjustments. The interview questions used are listed below.

Interview Questions

During the interview sessions, the researcher asked deep and thoughtful questions in order to find out how the participants viewed their educational experience, defined success, and other information that was important to the study.

The following interview questions are listed below:

Self:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What three words describe you?
3. In what ways has your Latina identity influenced you growing up?
4. How would you define “success” for yourself?

Family:

1. Tell me about your family background.
2. What three words describe your family?
3. How did the role of your family impact your school experience?

School:

1. Tell me about your school experiences from elementary through high school.
2. Describe your friends and teachers you had while in high school.
3. When did you first think about going to college?

Community

1. How would you describe your neighborhood?
2. What was it like for you when you were growing up?
3. Tell me about any community activities you participated in while growing up.

Site and Participant Selection

Site. The researcher sought in-person interviews in order to make contact and have closer access to participants and their stories and personal experiences. Initially, the researcher sought permission from three post-secondary institutions within the district where employed. The researcher was familiar with the institutions and knew each one contained at least one Latina or multicultural student group that met on the respective campuses. I was unsuccessful in securing permission and was not provided a reason for the denials from these institutions. Next, the researcher reached out to three additional post-secondary institutions, which also had at least one Hispanic, Latina, or multicultural group on each campus. Each institution was located in a different school district in the

Mid-Atlantic region. The researcher sought permission by communicating with a diversity or multicultural officer from the institutions. During each phone call, the diversity or multicultural officer was excited about the research study and gave permission during the phone conversation. The researcher met two of the three facilitators in person. Each school representative received a site permission letter requesting permission to interview on his or her campus (Appendix B). The letter included a short overview of the research and listed the selection criteria to be used to identify and recruit potential participants. The researcher also emailed each representative a recruitment letter to be sent to prospective participants (Appendix C). The prospective participants emailed the researcher. I verified the selection criteria before accepting each potential participant. The researcher confirmed each selection and scheduled interviews via email or phone conversation. The interviews were conducted on the specific campus each participant attended at that time. This was important because the researcher wanted each participant to feel comfortable in her surroundings.

Selection of Participants. In the United States, there is a growing trend and concern that many of our Latinas in high school may not complete high school and/or not move onto post-secondary education. The Education Week, Diploma Counts Issue (2012) stated middle and high school young women would like to attend college but do not believe they will get there due to a number of reasons and challenges**.** The challenges could be cultural, family belief system, financial, and other issues related to the student's self esteem, confidence, and educational level.

For this study, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling or criterion-based selection. In order to obtain rich data, it was important to establish specific criteria

(Merriam, 2009). The criteria for this study focused on three areas. First, the selected Latinas graduated from high school or earned a GED. Second, the participants were at least 18 years old. Third, the Latinas selected at that time attended a four-year university. The criteria listed were important in order to find out how the particular participants constructed meaning from their high school experience. The age expectation was used in order to obtain consent directly from the participants. In addition, the participants needed to be enrolled in a post-secondary institution because that specific criterion was contained in the first research question.

The study explored and discovered reasons these young women were successful and had them explain or share what they experienced and lived through during their high school years. The study hoped to discover specific moments, factors and supports, if any, that assisted the Latinas while they were navigating the educational system.

Sampling. Criterion-based selection technique was utilized in order to identify participants who had the desired criteria listed earlier (Creswell, 2007). This was important to note because the researcher sought to interview participants who could provide rich information that could possibly shed light on the phenomenon in question (Merriam, 2009). The researcher sought participants from three sites and communicated with the multicultural or diversity director at each site. Each multicultural director sent out the recruitment email to prospective participants based on the criteria listed by the researcher. The researcher piloted the interview questions with three college students to check for understanding and appropriateness. These three students provided valuable feedback. Each participant in this study was interviewed at a time and place convenient for her. Each participant provided her own pseudonym.

Procedures. "As the instrument of the research" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83), the researcher must be cognizant of how the participants are approached and treated. Before any interviews took place, the researcher followed The George Washington University Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Each post-secondary institution received a copy of the IRB approval document, along with the site permission request and recruitment letter. It was not necessary for the researcher to seek individual IRB approvals from each of the post-secondary institutions.

According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), "In common interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15+/-10" (p. 113). The researcher interviewed 14 participants at a location and time convenient for them. I believed I reached saturation at 12 interviews, but two additional students requested to participate. Therefore, the researcher included their interviews. Before, during, and after the interviews, the researcher wrote thoughts, questions, concerns, and other notes in a reflective journal.

Pilot Interviews

In order to ensure questions were appropriate and understandable to the participants, a short pilot study was conducted. The researcher conducted three 30-minute interviews with three Latinas who were currently enrolled in two different community colleges, which were located in the mid-Atlantic region. During the first interview session, the participant asked the researcher to define a word she did not understand. The first participant also did not understand one of the questions and suggested the question be reworded or removed. After the first interview, the researcher listened to the recording and noticed one small section was hard to hear because there was a loud noise in the background. The researcher also rewrote one of the questions.

The second interview was conducted at the student's part time job. Her supervisor provided a quiet office. This participant also thought the re-worded question was difficult to understand, but enjoyed being interviewed and asked if a friend could be interviewed. A date and time was set up, but the friend was unable to participate due to her work schedule.

The third interview was conducted in an office on a community college campus. This interview went well and the student provided the researcher with detailed and interesting information about her family background, educational experience, and goals for the future.

The pilot study enabled the researcher to practice interviewing skills and determine whether the questions provided relevant, valuable, and rich data. The pilot study allowed each participant to provide feedback to the researcher. In turn, the researcher was able to make adjustments with the interview questions. Each participant received a $5 gift card for his or her willingness to participate.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) suggested looking at qualitative data by starting with the specific and moving to the general. In addition, Creswell (2007) believed this process of data analysis required the researcher to create and organize files; read, begin to code, and write memos; describe personal experiences and essence of the phenomenon; develop statements, themes and categories; and determine how to interpret and represent the data (pp. 156-157).

Once all interviews were transcribed, the researcher listened to each recording to check for accuracy and to begin preliminary reflection and analysis. One transcript was

read at a time, and I jotted down thoughts and questions as well as circled and highlighted words, phrases, and underlined key sentences. The researcher also referred to the reflective notes before and after the interviews to assist in determining important ideas and possible categories. This information enabled the researcher to start preparing for the data analysis.

Saldana (2009) stated "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). The researcher followed this protocol for each participant's transcript and completed the pre-coding process (Saldana, 2009). The researcher read each transcript several times and utilized the pre-coding process to ensure important and significant statements were highlighted, circle, and underlined. The researcher used pre-codes that emerged from reading and reflection upon each transcript. Once the researcher felt confident the pre-coding process was properly carried out, first cycle or open coding was used. I kept an open mind while looking for key words, phrases, quotes, or other important statements from each individual transcript. I tried to capture words and/ or phrases from a cultural perspective. The researcher did not put a limit on the amount of codes that could arise. As a result of the first cycle coding, 100 codes were revealed (Appendix E).

The second cycle coding method utilized pattern coding in order to help collapse or condense the number of first cycle codes into broader categories or themes. Creswell (2007) suggested identifying five to seven general themes (p. 153). Merriam (2009) believed categories or theme should *be responsive to the purpose of the research, be exhaustive, be mutually exclusive, be sensitizing, and be conceptually congruent* (p. 186).

I incorporated a number of steps during the coding process. First cycle coding was used. After first cycle coding was utilized on each transcript, the researcher wrote down thoughts and ideas in the margins of each transcript. Third, the researcher wrote analytic memos about the process, which included questions I had about possible broad categories or themes that might be used, and any questions or thoughts I had about the participants. Written reflective memos were written as needed. Fourth, the researcher analyzed each transcript in order to look for more information and to take another look at initial codes in order to begin to figure out emergent themes from the 100 codes noted. Fifth, the researcher analyzed the data again in order to collapse the 100 codes to 60 (Appendix F). This task required me to write analytic memos about whether I should utilize the categories represented in the concept map. The decision was to place the 100 codes under the appropriate categories. If a code could potentially fall into more than one category, the researcher returned to the transcripts and went through the analysis process. This process occurred several times until the researcher felt confident in the decision made. Codes that were similar in meaning were collapsed into one code. Sixth, by utilizing the second cycle coding method, I continued to look for patterns or similarities and was able to collapse the codes to 25 broad categories or themes. Each category or theme contained a definition (Appendix G). Using Atlas.ti, I produced a code list which included definitions to allow me to highlight appropriate and useful information as well as quotes. Once the appropriate data were coded in Atlas.ti via the 25 codes, I sorted the data by the same number of codes. Several analytic memos were written to determine how the 25 codes would be grouped into emergent themes. The patterns and similarities were noted, and the following themes emerged: 1) self identity, 2) family influences, 3) educational

experiences, 4) advocacy, and 5) community connections (Appendix H). During the final step in the analysis, I took the major themes and reviewed and analyzed them by using the Concept map (See Figure 1). This was included because it was important to analyze the information in order to see how the participants' lives may or may not have been impacted by their families, themselves, schools, and communities. In addition, further analysis determined whether or not there were any resources or supports that contributed to the participants' success.

During this entire process, I wrote analytic memos and kept track of the coding process by saving each set of codes on a word document. The researcher communicated with a peer debriefer several times throughout the coding process. We discussed how I arrived at my decisions. During one of our discussions, the peer debriefer asked questions about how and why a specific theme was named. We discussed the definitions and the concept map, how the codes were grouped, and the discovery of the emergent themes listed above. The findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Subjectivity

My father typically worked two jobs, and my mom raised the children. As the oldest of eight children, I learned very early about the importance of family by helping to take care of my siblings and being responsible for establishing and implementing the weekly chores chart. Both of my parents instilled the values of caring, honesty, hard work, and trust through their examples and dedication to each of us. My father graduated from high school, but my mother's education stopped at the end of sixth grade because she had to take care of her six younger siblings. Both parents expected each of us to graduate from high school and to earn a college degree. The five daughters accomplished

both goals, but the three sons did not earn any college degrees. However, my three brothers demonstrate their great work ethic each day.

I have been an educator for 30 years and worked in a variety of school settings with varying cultures and populations. Six of these years have been as a middle school principal. As an African American female, I also bring a specific perspective about educational experiences in a public school environment. I know what it is like to look and feel different in a classroom environment from a Catholic school experience in grades 1-8 through a public high school. During my high school experience, I met with a counselor once during my senior year, and the counselor told me to accept becoming a secretary. There was no discussion about the possibility of college or other opportunities for me. Following my high school graduation, an African American counselor was hired. As a result of this occurrence, three of my sisters benefited. The counselor met with a number of African American students and hosted several meetings for parents and their children in a local community church. The counselor discussed and explained the college application process, financial aid process, and possible scholarship opportunities. This counselor took the time to go over certain forms, answered many questions, and was available in the evenings. My sisters and others received valuable knowledge by being able to access the social capital my family was lacking.

I struggled with how to pay for college and ended up working full time for six months, attending a community college, and working two part-time jobs. I graduated with an associate's degree and went to work full time. After several years of full time employment and being married for one year, I enrolled in a four-year university and earned my bachelor's degree in education. I taught at an all girls private high school for

three years, earned my master's degree; and in 1988, began teaching at a public high school in a local school district.

After several years as an assistant principal at a local middle school, I moved to a high school position and became interested in the problems and concerns of Latino students. Each morning during cafeteria duty, I noticed a group of Hispanic students either sitting in the back or front of the cafeteria speaking Spanish. When I approached them to say hello, the students would stop speaking and would look at each other. This occurred every morning. On several occasions, I would see some of the same students wandering the halls or getting to class after the bell. At some point, my principal brought a 9th grade female student to me and stated she was caught returning to the building at the end of the school day and was under the influence of alcohol. A number of Latina students would arrive to school and leave to attend "skip parties". The police became involved and would sometimes return students to the school. I noticed the unexcused absences negatively affected their grades and their parents became upset and did not trust the school. This really troubled me and I wanted to figure out a way to solve this issue. As a result of these concerns, I wrote and received a three-year grant. A part time Hispanic female liaison, who was hired through some of the grant funds, two colleagues and I were able to put together a program that assisted Latino parents and their students on how to navigate the school system. This program consisted of pertinent topics, such as attendance, how to check grades, parent/teacher conferences, summer programs, and other related information. We met with parents and their students each month. The program grew, includes female and male students, and is still operating at this particular high school.

The young Latina women I worked with just happened to be on my caseload. However, I became passionate about working with them because I believed they were being ignored in our school, in their classes, and by some of their teachers and classmates. They seemed invisible, and I could see myself in them because I was ignored in some of my high school classes. I felt invisible. I was determined to try to assist them in realizing they had someone to talk to and a future ahead of them

As an assistant principal, I firmly believed my responsibility included much more than processing referrals, conducting observations, and holding parent conferences. My excitement and joy was found in working with students who did not always realize their potential for success. I was able to work with a number of students to encourage them to seek tutoring, try honors level classes, and to join various clubs. In addition, I wrote many college recommendations and sometimes worked very closely with the guidance counselors when it came time to schedule classes and/or to discuss possible colleges and scholarship opportunities. It was always a joy to see the smiles on students' faces when they were accepted to colleges and/or received scholarships they thought they would never see.

Even though I am not a Latina, I believe I can establish rapport, trust, and be open to hearing their lived experiences. I will work diligently to limit and manage any bias during this research study. However, as the primary instrument of this research, I believe my experiences will be invaluable in this process.

Trustworthiness

In order to be able to communicate with the participants and to have a valid qualitative study, the researcher established a rapport with the participants and was open and honest with the purpose of the interviews. The researcher ensured all information

would be kept confidential and maintained in a secure environment. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed the researcher must ask him or herself how he or she will go about making sure this happens. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed the researcher should ask him or herself four questions that involve truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (p. 290). However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) further discussed the terms and stated they related to a quantitative study versus a qualitative study. The terms better suited for a qualitative study, which encompass trustworthiness, were discussed below.

Member Checking. Member checking was another way to add credibility to the research study. This method was used to determine whether the information obtained via interviews is accurate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed this method "is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314).

Each participant received their transcript via email and was provided an opportunity to review her transcript. Participants were given several days to inform the researcher whether corrections, changes, or additions needed to be done. Most participants responded with a day or two stating their transcript was accurate and they did not have any changes, which needed to be made. There were several participants who clarified a misinterpretation and/or added more information to their transcript regarding a specific question or questions. Only three participants received a second email as a friendly reminder to review their transcript and return their comments to the researcher.

Reflexivity. I realized the importance of establishing an appropriate relationship with the participants in the study and to acknowledge one's own values and biases throughout the research. Creswell (2007) emphasized inquirers must acknowledge these elements because they "may shape their interpretations formed during a study" (p. 177).

Maxwell (2005) reminded researchers that relationships formed with participants are complex and constantly changing and can have an impact on the participants as well as the researcher. Maxwell cautioned by stating it is impossible to eliminate the researcher's influence, but the researcher must realize "what is important is to understand how you are influencing what the informant says, and how this affects the validity of the inferences you can draw from the interview" (p. 109).

In order to keep things in perspective, I wrote a memo before and after each interview. The researcher conducted no more than two interviews per day in order to have time to write down thoughts, capture other observations, and plan what to do in the next interview. These steps were taken in order to check for any bias and to ensure documentation throughout the interview and analysis process.

Throughout this study, I was very cognizant of my background, culture, truths, values, and biases, and reflected on these on a constant basis. I wrote analytic memos and maintained a daily journal in order to question, reflect, and analyze information gathered through the interviews. By following these guidelines, my integrity was maintained.

Transferability. The researcher introduced each participant in a vignette format in order to describe and share parts of the participants' background, personal and educational experiences, and snippets of their actual thoughts and comments during the interviews. This information was pulled directly from the transcripts. Specific details and quotes from the participants were shared throughout the findings and placed under the appropriate theme or themes. When a researcher provides rich and thick descriptions about the setting and participants, readers will be able to determine if they can relate to these experiences and transfer this information to another setting or environment (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the difficulty for the naturalist to establish external validity. Instead, the naturalist can only describe the situations and discuss findings at the time they occurred. The authors stated, "Whether they hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue, the resolution of which depends upon the degree of similarity between sending and receiving (or earlier and later) contexts" (p. 316). Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated the burden is on the next researcher who wants to replicate the study with another population. However, by providing as much detailed and rich descriptions as possible, including discussions on the various emergent themes, and the researcher's interpretations of those themes, the researcher is incorporating validity into the results of the research (Creswell, 2009).

Dependability. The researcher ensured her study was dependable and credible by using the triangulation method. The researcher used completed transcripts, member checks, before and after reflective interview notes, and written analytic memos. The researcher believed this information was appropriate and followed the procedure shared by other researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the use of the inquiry audit, similar to an accounting audit, as a method to prove dependability. The six Halpern audit trail categories are listed a**s** follows: 1) *raw data*; 2) *data reduction and analysis products*; 3) *data reconstruction and synthesis products*; 4) *process notes*; 5) *materials relating to intentions and dispositions*; and 6*) instrument development information* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 319-320).

As another way of ensuring integrity and dependability, the researcher conducted four peer debriefing sessions with a colleague. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated "It is a

process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). The researcher maintained an ongoing dialogue with a colleague about the study and the process utilized to extract rich and thick data from each transcript. The colleague and researcher discussed and compared the themes that emerged in order to determine if the researcher's thoughts and early interpretations of the data made sense. In addition, the colleague asked questions, made suggestions, and confirmed the emergent themes.

Human Subjects and Potential Ethical Issues

Since the participants were at least 18 years of age, the researcher did not need to ask a parent or guardian for permission to interview. The participants were fully aware of the reasons they were participating and why the researcher asked various questions. In a written letter, the participants knew The George Washington University IRB approved the procedures and questions for this research study. Participants provided the researcher with a pseudonym as another layer of protecting their identity throughout the research study. All data from this study was kept confidential and secured. The researcher informed the participants the data would be destroyed at the appropriate time.

Summary

This research study provided me an opportunity to discover and examine how a selected group of young women made meaning of their high school experience. Conducting interviews was the methodology chosen to elicit their thoughts about their lives, hopes, and aspirations. These findings are discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, the

results, interpretations, and recommendations may lead to further exploration about how more Latinas may be successful in their personal and educational endeavors.

Chapter 4 - Results

Overview

This basic qualitative study explored and examined the lived high school experiences of Latinas who are currently enrolled in a four-year university. The researcher also investigated whether the participants, while navigating the system, were successful in graduating from high school with or without supports. The researcher asked two research questions:

1. How do Latinas, currently enrolled in a four-year p ost-secondary institution, make meaning of their high school experience?
2. What resources and factors, if any, contributed to their success?

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in order to discover how these participants made meaning of their experiences. This chapter discussed the research findings and emergent themes by utilizing social capital theory as the lens and a concept map containing the following categories: self, family, school, and community.

Participant Information

This study used a criterion-based selection technique to identify participants (Creswell, 2007). Fourteen participants volunteered and qualified for the study because they identified as Latina, graduated from high school, were at least 18 years old, and were currently enrolled in a four-year institution. Each participant assured me she was at least 18, but not all provided their exact ages. One in-depth semi-structured interview occurred with each participant, which resulted in 250 pages of interview transcripts. The participants were enrolled in three universities located in the mid-Atlantic region. Five students are currently enrolled as freshmen, four as sophomores, and five as juniors. Each participant chose her own pseudonym at the beginning of the interview, and only one

provided a reason as to why she chose a specific name. That participant stated she chose her name because it was going to be another relative's nickname, but that never occurred. These names were used throughout this chapter.

Each participant is a full time student. The participants were evenly split as commuters and residential students. Thirteen of the participants are first generation college students, and one participant is a second generation college student. Two participants immigrated to the United States at the age of 5, one at age 7, and one participant immigrated at the age of 14. The remaining 10 participants were born in the United States. The researcher did not seek recent immigration status as a criterion. While this study ended up with Latinas from immigrant families, a future study could be conducted to explore this criterion in more detail.

Table 3 displays the pseudonym of each participant, parents' country or countries of origin, level in college, and major. The participants who emigrated from their countries with their families are noted with an asterisk. The second generation participant is identified with a plus sign. The table lists the participants in the order each one was interviewed because there were no major similarities or findings by country of origin or college major. However, three of the five participants with origins from El Salvador noted they are very close-knit families, tend to share meals together whenever possible, speak by phone almost daily, and partake in family activities.

Table 3

Participants by Pseudonym, Country of Origin, Level of school, Major

Pseudonym	Parent's/ Parents' Country(ies) of Origin	Level in College	Major
Sacajawea*	Columbia	Sophomore	International Affairs
Danielle	El Salvador	Junior	Global Affairs
Jenny	El Salvador-Guatemala	Sophomore	Accounting
Katie*	Bolivia	Freshman	Pre-Med: Chemistry
Vanessa	Guatemala	Junior	Global Affairs
Lisa	Dominican Republic-Mexico	Freshman	Criminal Justice
Mary	El Salvador	Junior	Public Health
Naomi*	Peru	Junior	Criminal Justice
Valentina*	El Salvador	Junior	Public Health
Patricia	Honduras	Freshman	Mechanical Engineering
Roxanne	Mexico	Sophomore	Public Health
Rainne	El Salvador	Sophomore	Biology
Alyssa	Dominican Republic	Freshman	English
Angela+	Peru	Freshman	Biomedical Engineer

*Born in country of origin. +Second generation college student.

The researcher established rapport with all of the participants, but took a little more time with two participants who seemed to be shy. One participant gave very short, quick answers, and another participant answered each question with one or two sentences. Gentle probing questions were used throughout the interview process but were essential and used in these two situations. All of the participants seemed interested in telling their stories. One interviewee thanked me for conducting this research before we began the interview, and she shared that was why she wanted to be included in this research topic.

Each participant's story was important and unique because she shared information about herself, family, upbringing, beliefs, and expectations. The participants also provided insight into what they think about themselves, their abilities, educational experiences, goals, and how they defined success. The next section will present a short summary about each participant's life.

Vignettes of Each Participant

Sacajawea. Sacajawea was born in Columbia and immigrated to the US with her mother at 5 years old. She believes her parents were divorced when she arrived to the US. Sacajawea enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESOL) for a short time and then was placed into the Gifted and Talented (GT) program while in elementary school. Sacajawea voiced, "I was very loquacious as a child." She was able to quickly grasp the English language. Her mother later remarried and Sacajawea has a strong relationship with her stepfather. Sacajawea stated her biological father ". . . never provided for me at all", but she sees him as a "friend". Sacajawea also shared her dad and stepdad ". . . have a wonderful relationship." She stated she had a "pretty good childhood" and comes from an upper middle class upbringing. She attended 9th grade at her local high school, but the family moved to the Virgin Islands during her 10th grade year. Her experience there transformed her life, and she made the decision to go away to college instead of planning to attend the local state college. When the family returned to the states, Sacajawea really focused on her studies and took Advanced Placement (AP) courses, passing 15 of the AP exams. She graduated with the most AP courses and countless awards. She is currently a sophomore, lives on campus, majoring in international relations.

Danielle. Danielle was born in the US. Her mother and father immigrated to the US from El Salvador at 15 and Mexico at 19 respectively. Danielle has visited both

countries. Danielle was placed in ESOL, but never believed she belonged in the program because she could speak both Spanish and English. She enjoyed math in middle school because it was easy for her. Danielle always felt like the "token kid" in her community because she did not know other Latinas. She struggled with depression during her freshman year in high school, but her parents were very supportive and sought help for her recovery. As a dual enrollment student, Danielle graduated from high school with an Associate's degree in liberal arts as well as a high school diploma. Danielle calls her parents every night, and they spend a lot of time together. Danielle is a junior living on campus. She plans to graduate from college next spring with a degree in global affairs.

Jenny. Her parents were both about 20 years old when they came to the US. Jenny's mother is from El Salvador and her father is from Guatemala, however, Jenny was born here. She has both a younger brother and an older sister. Jenny described the neighborhood she grew up in as poor, though her elementary school was very diverse. She participated in various educational opportunities throughout elementary and high school. Jenny shared, "I've always liked math since I was in elementary school." Jenny and her family have dinner together every Sunday and as much as possible during the week. She is a sophomore and a commuter student who works part time. Her major is accounting.

Katie. Katie emigrated from Bolivia to the US with her parents at the age of 5. Her family is undocumented. She is an only child and was not allowed to speak English at home. Katie was in the ESOL program for two years. She loves her Bolivian culture. Katie was typically the only Latina in her honors and AP classes. She kept her undocumented status a secret throughout her education until it was time to apply to

colleges and scholarships. She participated in a college program for minority students while in high school. Katie was a member of several honor societies and graduated from high school with a 4.2 grade point average (GPA). She was asked to share her college essay at high school graduation, and she shared her undocumented status. In the closing portion of her essay, she stated, ". . . some people may view my parents as criminals, but I view them as my heroes because without them I wouldn't have these opportunities and wouldn't be here at school and college." Katie is proud to be a Dreamer and appreciates the Executive Order called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which provides temporary protection and can be renewed every three years. She is currently a freshman and commuter student, focusing in pre-medicine.

Vanessa. Both of Vanessa's parents came to the US from Guatemala at the age of 22. Vanessa goes to church every Sunday, and the values of the Catholic Church are very important to her. Vanessa was in ESOL classes during kindergarten, and she shared, "I never speak English to my mom." However, she indicated her mother would like her to do so in order to practice her English skills. Vanessa participated in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program from 8th grade through 12th grade. She has an older sister who lives at home, works full time, and goes to college part time. Her parents and older sister help Vanessa financially in order for her to attend college on a full time basis. Vanessa is a junior, majoring in global affairs, and commutes to college. After graduation, she plans to join the Peace Corps. She changed her major from nursing to global affairs in order to help people in the "humanitarian" relief side rather than medicine.

Lisa. Lisa was born in the US. Her mother emigrated from the Dominican Republic at age 23, and her father emigrated from Mexico at 14. She has an older and a younger sister. The older sister did not go to college. She stated she grew up on the poverty level. Lisa considers herself Catholic and very religious. She made a decision in third grade to make something of herself as a Latina. She was not going to allow her culture to prevent her from being successful. There were a lot of ups and downs in her family, and she grew up translating for her family and feeling like the "leader of my family". Lisa attended a magnet high school and graduated with a 3.7 unweighted GPA. She is currently a freshman, lives on campus, and works as a student aide in one of the offices on campus. In addition, she works as a shift leader at a fast food restaurant during official breaks from school.

Mary. Mary was born in the US. Her parents emigrated from El Salvador at the ages of 16 and 17. Her parents met at 19 and had her older brother at 20. Mary shared she believes growing up Latina made her shy and scared to approach people in middle and high school. Her family is very important to her as well as her Catholic faith. She stated, "Spiritual success is very important to me." Mary told me her faith gets her through the troubled times. Mary shared her family gets together every weekend. Due to her health concerns, Mary shared "My mom will cook my week's meal[s] every Sunday." She stated she talks to her mom and dad every single day. Mary shared she is also very interested in research and wanted to participate in this interview in order to share information and to understand the process. Mary is in her third semester at the university. She is a junior, majors in public health, and lives on campus.

Naomi. Naomi emigrated with her parents from Peru, along with an older brother when she was almost 15 years old. Two older siblings remained in Peru. She shared her experience with the ESOL program and felt she did not belong in this program. She tried to get out of the program, but was denied. Instead of remaining in the program, she began cutting school and this continued for two years. She returned to Peru to see her sister graduate from school and decided she wanted to graduate as well. When Naomi returned to the US, she settled down and began to do well. She was chosen to be part of a tutoring program and received assistance with her schoolwork on a regular basis. She attended a community college for four years and earned an Associate's degree in criminal justice. She became involved with her church two and half years ago. She is currently a junior, majoring in criminal justice, commutes, and works part time.

Valentina. Valentina came to the US with her mother and younger brother when she was 7 years old. Her parents never married, and her father remained in El Salvador. She grew up in low socioeconomic circumstances. Valentina shared her background includes both bloodlines from Europe and a Native American tribe of El Salvador called Nawat. Her family keeps an oral history about their ancestors and heritage. Valentina was enrolled in ESOL from second through the fifth grade. She was placed in a high level math class in 6^{th} grade, which boosted her self esteem. During her 10^{th} grade year in high school, a traumatic social event changed her life, which caused the lost of her Hispanic friends. Valentina eventually made friends with other classmates who helped bring clarity and understanding to her regarding her future. Valentina had two major health issues while in college and had to drop out twice. As a result of these issues, she was forced to change her major. She volunteers as an EMT at a fire department, works as a part time

nanny, and carries 16 credits at school. Valentina is a junior, majoring in public health. She is also a commuter.

Patricia. At the age of 18, her mother came to the US from Honduras. Patricia shared she does not know much about her parents' backgrounds. Patricia believes her father was born in Jordan, but is not completely sure. Her parents divorced when she was seven. Patricia has not seen or heard from her father since the divorce. However, she and her two siblings, a brother and sister, visit Honduras every so often. Patricia shared she moved a lot during her elementary years, and comes from a low economic background. Middle school was easy for her. Her mother remarried and the family moved to another state. Patricia indicated all of the moves made her a quiet person. Her 10th grade year was not easy because she was not used to the environment in a different state. She enjoyed her honors and AP classes, as well as her STEM classes. College was not an option in her family because she was expected and determined to attend. She is currently a freshman living on campus, and is majoring in mechanical engineering.

Roxanne. Roxanne identifies herself as Mexican-American. Her parents immigrated to the US at approximately 19 years of age. Once her family was established, they helped other family members come to the US. Roxanne indicated she comes from a low SES background. She was enrolled in ESOL during kindergarten and first grade. Roxanne stated she grew up with Black culture and never saw many White students. She and her brother knew school was a priority, and they were expected to "give back". She felt high school was not difficult and did well. She also stated she stopped going to church during her rebellious teen years. Roxanne shared she was very disappointed and confused when all of her college applications were rejected. Her parents were

disappointed as well, but insisted Roxanne should work and pay rent. She became disillusioned and unsure of herself. The situation caused a rift between her and her parents. She moved out of her parents' home and sometime later decided to attend community college. After some soul searching, Roxanne decided to apply to a four-year university. She is currently a sophomore, works part time, and commutes to school. She is majoring in public health.

Rainne. Both of Rainne's parents emigrated from El Salvador and did not finish college. She was born in the US, but her family went back to El Salvador to live for approximately two years. When they returned to the US, her family moved around a lot. Roxanne considers herself a "bit sheltered" because she was never allowed to hang out, attend parties or sleepovers. Her parents believe no one has "absolute freedom". She explained a Spanish word, Libertizage, means fake freedom. Rainne did well in high school and graduated one year early. She attended community college for one year and is currently a sophomore majoring in biology. She stated she chose this major because she remembers her grandfather and grandmother being diagnosed, at different times, with serious illnesses. She also loved her AP biology course and shared, "He [professor] loved it and he made you love it, and I think from that point I fell in love with that." Rainne commutes to her classes.

Alyssa. In her 30's, her mother came to the US when she was pregnant with Alyssa, and her biological dad remained in the Dominican Republic. Her stepdad came to the US when he was 15 years old. At 18 years old, Alyssa began contact with her birth father. Alyssa attended a bilingual preschool and was enrolled in GT classes throughout elementary school. She attended a prep school during both middle and high school.

Alyssa admits she has some confusion about Black students and Latinos who identified as Black. She shared high school was hard and stated "I think it was the first time where I was really academically challenged, and that was really hard for me, especially since I had gotten into this program . . ." Alyssa shared she comes from a low SES background and lived in a neighborhood of color, mostly Mexican. She lives and works part time on campus. She is a freshman and majors in English.

Angela. Angela's parents emigrated from Peru. She and her sister were born in the US. Angela is a second generation college student because her dad earned his bachelor's degree in the US. Angela shared her left arm is shorter than her right arm possibly due to an infection when she was an infant after receiving the Hepatitis B shot. Part of her growth plate was removed during that time. Angela passed an exam, which enabled her to be in the GT program in elementary school. She enjoyed middle school but was teased about her arm. In her 8th grade year, she made a decision she would no longer listen to the teasing. She graduated high school with a weighted GPA of 4.5. She worked part time during her first semester in college, but quit the job in order to spend more time studying. She shared her concern she sometimes has about her darker skin color. She also stated she was concerned "people think that I was able to get into this university because I am Latina, and there aren't that many Latina women who are aspiring to be engineers or in any type of engineering field." Angela majors in biomedical engineering, lives on campus, and is a freshman.

Summary of Vignettes

The vignettes of each participant were provided to share a synopsis of their life and experiences to the present. Sharing their life experiences is significant because it is important to see whether or how their lives interconnected with their family, school, and

community. These connections or lack of connections shed some light into how they made meaning of their high school experiences and whether any resources or factors contributed to their achievements.

Introduction to Themes

The participants shared their educational experiences and other thoughts about their lives including their hopes and dreams for the future. The researcher used social capital theory (Coleman, 1966, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) as the theoretical perspective and the lens to examine and interpret Latina educational experience and success. While analyzing the interview data, the researcher pre-coded, and completed first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) stressed the importance of pre-coding each individual transcript. During the pre-coding stage, the researcher jotted down thoughts, circled words or phrases, wrote down one- or two-word descriptions, and added comments or questions. In addition, I highlighted significant statements. Open coding was utilized throughout the first cycle coding. I continued to look for key words, phrases and quotes as well as words or phrases to assist in understanding a cultural perspective. Reflective and analytical memos were written throughout the process in order to assist the researcher in finding emergent themes from the 100 codes generated. The second cycle coding method utilized pattern coding which enabled the researcher to collapse the codes to 25 broad categories or themes. A number of analytic memos were written to assist in collapsing codes, to reflect on questions generated, and to ask more questions in order to clarify codes. After coding and analyzing the data numerous times, findings included several overall themes. The themes are (a) Latina identity, (b) family influences, (c) educational experiences, (d) advocacy, and (e)

community connections. These five areas will shed light on how participants made meaning of their experiences, what enabled them to navigate the system, and how they defined success.

Latina Identity

This first theme evolved after looking at a number of words and phrases that pertained to the participants and their views about them. Participants were asked to describe themselves in three words, which gave the researcher a picture of how each participant viewed herself. The participants were also asked to discuss their Latina identity. Some of the participants forgot about their identities growing up. Still others either identified early or identified later in their educational experiences. This section provided several quotes depicting selected self descriptions, shared positive and negative Latina identities, and definitions of success.

Self Description

Throughout the interviews, semi-structured and open-ended procedures were used in order for participants to respond freely to questions. The first question was a positive way to encourage them to discuss themselves, their backgrounds, and/or their families. Most participants were eager to share during the interviews, but two participants were very shy. In these two cases, the researcher informed the participants they could share whatever they liked or could move to another question. The researcher utilized probing questions, which enabled these participants to incorporate some of the information while answering other questions.

In order to gather rich data, all participants were asked to provide three words or adjectives to describe themselves. There were a wide range of words used, which depicted the participants in positive, strong, and vibrant terms. Eight participants included

ambitious, diligent, motivated, passionate, or resourceful as one of their three word descriptions. Valentina, Patricia, and Angela stated they were ambitious because they have educational goals they want to pursue beyond their bachelor's degrees. When asked why ambitious was chosen, Valentina stated:

> Ok. I would say I'm very ambitious. . . .I wouldn't say it's ambitious in a wrong way, like a negative connotation. I would say more in a positive way. . . .I've always just sort of thought one step ahead of what I'm doing right now and always prepare for that step ahead.

Patricia, who would like to work for NASA after graduate school, summed up her reason for being ambitious by stating, "I have a plan for where I want my life to be and I'm not going to stop at anything to get it." Angela was very succinct and stated, "I think I'm also very ambitious because I wouldn't be here [college] if I didn't strive as much as I did and I didn't have the parents that I did."

Alyssa, Angela, and Sacajawea stated they were passionate. Alyssa, who came from a low income family, described herself as "passionate just because I'm really passionate about things that I care about. So, if there's something that I'm really interested in, it's like a very big deal for me, and it comes up in almost everything that I participate in or that I do." Angela chose passionate to describe herself because she said, "I think a lot, I feel a lot." Sacajawea was not always passionate because she thought her life was already planned. After her stint at a private high school in the Virgin Islands, Sacajawea became more serious and excited about her plans for the future. She stated,

> Um, I want to say, recently passionate. I've become very passionate. I don't know if I would use this as I was growing up because I lacked a conscious of passion. I grew up with friends who were very much into lacrosse or into tennis or something, but I just bounced around and didn't really focus on one thing. I was focusing on that it has to be a sport or something. But recently, what I'm studying here and the work I'm doing here I do feel very passionate about that now.

Danielle, Katie, and Roxanne chose diligent, motivated, and resourceful respectively. Danielle stated, "Ah, I guess now more so, diligent. I try to use my time more wisely to make sure I get things done." Danielle had to use her time carefully in high school because she was in a dual enrollment program and graduated from high school as well as earned her Associate's degree in liberal arts. She maintains the same discipline in order to graduate from college next spring. Katie shared her thoughts and stated,

> Ok, um. I would say I'm very motivated, um, because I always push myself in courses. I take the harder courses rather than the ones I know I can do really well in. Um, like I said a little earlier, just watching my parents work long hours that just motivates me to do well in school. And, um, no matter how hard, you know, a task will be I'll get it done somehow.

Katie's motivation comes from within because she knows how much her parents sacrifice each day in order for her to go to college. She seems to want to do well in order to make her parents proud. On the other hand, Roxanne demonstrates being resourceful by outwardly looking for solutions. She stated,

> Resourceful definitely coming from low income SES background. If we couldn't make it one way, we had to do it another. There was always a solution to a problem. I never was the one to just give up. I had to work my way around, you know, if I can't get to point A from point B directly well maybe, I can go around. I've always just felt like there's a way to do something and I can find a way. No matter how many steps it takes, there's a way to do something. I don't give up. I always find a way. I always find a way.

Two other participants, Mary and Lisa, chose open-minded as one of their words for self descriptions. Even though Mary is majoring in public health, and Lisa is majoring in criminal justice, they both seem compassionate and want to help others. Mary shared, "Open minded because I would like to try to be able to put myself in people's shoes to try to understand them." Lisa provided more details and stated,

> For open minded, to me I've worked with a lot of people from many different backgrounds. Um, different backgrounds being I've worked with children who have been abused. I worked with children whose parents are in prison, people who grew up poor, people who grew up rich, people who are still rich, and people who abuse drugs or any other substances. To me I really don't think it matters what the person has. To me just be open to the type of character they do have. Since I have worked with people with different backgrounds, to me, if you don't have an open mind, then you're never going to get anywhere in life because you're never going to work with someone who is just like you.

One participant, Rainne, is very determined to pursue her goals. She graduated from high school a year early. When her counselor asked why, she stated, "Because I don't want to waste time." She has her plans laid out and described herself as being stubborn and stated,

> I'm very stubborn, and that comes from having to be the only girl in my family I think and being told that I couldn't do things when I was younger. I think if you wanted to make me the angriest, it was to tell me I couldn't do something when I was younger.
>
> They have this saying in my country. I'm trying to remember exactly how to translate it. But they would tell children over there that if you try to tell me I can't do something, I'll show you. The saying goes, "You tell me I can't climb that tree. Watch me. I'll go do it. The hard part will be trying to get me out of the tree," is the saying. "I'll be staying there all day just because you told me I couldn't." And I think that's kind of been an old motto of mine like try and tell me I can't do it and I'll show you.

These specific self descriptions were chosen because the participants displayed a powerful sense of self and a strong belief in achieving their goals. However, all of the participants provided positive self descriptions. Table 4 lists all of the adjectives used by each participant.

Table 4

Descriptions of Self

Participant	Description #1	Description #2	Description #3
Sacajawea	International	Open	Passionate
Danielle	Diligent	Creative	Unafraid to Ask Qts
Jenny	Shy	Detailed Oriented	Respectful
Katie	Motivated	Caring	A Leader
Vanessa	Kind	Respectful	Loyal
Lisa	Outgoing	Spontaneous	Open Minded
Mary	Thoughtful	Open Minded	Caring
Naomi	Active	Curious	Smart
Valentina	Ambitious	Worrier	Active
Patricia	Quiet	Ambitious	Trustworthy
Roxanne	Creative	Resourceful	Proud
Rainne	Proactive	Compassionate	Stubborn
Alyssa	Passionate	Charismatic	Organized
Angela	Passionate	Extrovert	Ambitious

Positive Latina Identity

In order to find out how the selected Latinas in this study made meaning of their high school experience, the researcher thought it was significant to ask them their thoughts about how they viewed themselves and whether or not they considered their Latina identity while children or growing into young adults. When asked this question, I received interesting and divergent narratives about being a Latina. The participants felt one of three ways: 1) identified as being Latina early in life, 2) forgot they were Latina or did not think about it during early years, or 3) identified later in life.

Four participants, Mary, Naomi, Valentina, and Patricia, stated they were very much aware of being Latina early in life. Each young woman shared her feelings about being a Latina. Mary shared she was confident but shy. She stated,

> Being a Latina shaped my growing up by knowing that I was not a majority, a group of the majority. I was not of a particular skin tone. I don't think it affected my confidence but it did make me very shy and very scared to approach people.

> Especially in my middle school and high school, I was probably the only Spanish person in the school, um, of my grade level.

Naomi felt very comfortable in Peru and stated she had no concerns about her future. When she came to the US at almost 15 years old, she wanted a new beginning. She also knew she needed to work hard and believed being a proud Latina would help her achieve her goals. She shared,

> The positive is that I know that being Latina is strong. We are, I would say, united. We already know what or how hard life it is. So we, I guess, in myself, being a Latina, I know that I can do what I want because I will never give up. I love my roots. I love my culture. I love that I am from that part of the continent.

Valentina acknowledged she is proud to be a Latina, but she is cognizant of other cultures. She noted traveling through those cultures can be stressful at times. She also shared her culture makes her feel happy and safe. Valentina voiced,

> Well, growing up, you pretty much have two cultures. You have your culture that's at home, and you have your culture that's outside of the home. Personally, being a Latina has impacted my life in a positive manner. It has given me a sense of belonging. I have been able to trace my roots, see where my ancestors have come from and where we are now. . . . Acculturation in America never ceases for me as a Latina. I am constantly bombarded, especially at [university], with different cultures, different thoughts, and different ways of living. While accepting and learning from all these cultures at a slow pace, I take a step back and I am grateful for being able to belong to such a huge group, to my ethnic group, to being Latina. My culture is also somewhat of a safety net, my home. After having gone through a stressful day where sometimes I can't relate to many individuals or they can't relate to me on a personal level. When I come home and I am greeted with Hispanic music, food and overall family warmth. And it makes me happy.

Patricia shared her Latina identity is her whole life and a safe haven for her even though it takes extra effort to feel that way. She shared it is difficult to feel like a Latina since attending college and not having Hispanic friends available on campus. However, Patricia has found a way to cope with her feelings. She stated,

> I don't really know what it's like not identifying as Latina. . . . It's this sense of community that I really love. That, the music, and the food. Those are my three

> favorite things about being a Latina. It happens here [the university] when I go to the diner. I will order my food, and the woman behind the counter will ask if I speak Spanish. We would get into conversations about where our families are from. . . .So it's really nice knowing that they are there to talk to if need be. I'm not that great at speaking Spanish, but it's one of those things I feel like I need to do. . . .Being away from home because of college has really made me feel very separated from the culture. I don't ever eat authentic Latin food unless I go out of my way to get it. I only ever listen to Hispanic music when I finally get to sit down to do the homework. It takes a lot more work now to feel as though I'm Latina.

Sacajawea, Jenny, and Katie told the researcher they did not think much about their Latina identity when they were younger. The three participants were immersed in their culture on a daily basis. On the other hand, Danielle shared she forgot she was Latina because she was trying to fit in with her school.

Sacajawea was born in Columbia and came to the US when she was five years old. She loves her culture, and her mom maintained the Spanish language at home. She emphasized being a Columbian versus being a Latina. Sacajawea shared,

> I don't know. Growing up I don't think I was very cognizant of my Latina identity. Maybe because I feel like the word "Latina" is something that, it's a very American construct. . . . So, I always grew up feeling very Columbian definitely. Would go back to Columbia. Loved Columbia. Spoke Spanish at home.

Jenny and Katie both grew up in Latino neighborhoods and felt comfortable in their surroundings. Therefore, they did not think about their Latina identities. Jenny stated, ". . . my elementary school was very diverse. So, I didn't even think about what it meant to be a Latina." Katie shared, "So, when I first came to the US, I didn't really see myself as different from anyone just because there were a lot of Latinos in my school and in my community." On the other hand, Danielle forgot she was Latina because she was trying to be part of the same community, which was her school community. Danielle shared,

> In school, I forgot I was Latina and seeing myself as just like the other kids that were around me. Over time, I was speaking Spanish less and adapting to the customs and traditions my friends had. . . . it just kind of felt like I was supposed to take on somebody else's culture and customs.

On a different note, Roxanne did not identify as being Latina at all because she was not quite sure where she fit. She identified with Black culture, including the music and vernacular. She shared her school was a majority minority school. She voiced,

> As far as my journey goes, growing up in [named county] I didn't really identify – I mean I had Latino friends, but I mostly grew up with Black culture. . . .So it was either I was too American to be fully Latina or I was too Latina to be fully American. So what I found in my experience was that well, if I couldn't be either or the other, the next best thing that I was surrounded by was Black culture. So a lot of my life has been influenced by Black culture. And I find that that's also something that a lot of people share that we don't really grasp onto our own roots until later.

These same participants felt somewhat oblivious about their identity until they reached points in their secondary school experience. Then they realized and identified as Latina. Sacajawea realized the impact of identity when it was time to apply to colleges. She stated:

> Within my Columbian culture, I, so, my mom is White and my dad is Black and I never, ever recognized this or thought this as something until my maybe last year of high school when I was applying to colleges and having to check something off in a box and being here [university] is very homogenous and it's very stifling.

In middle school, Danielle and Jenny realized they were "different" when one made a friend with a Latina and the other noticed more White students in the school she attended. Danielle voiced, "Not until middle school, when I had a friend who was from Argentina, did I start speaking Spanish again." Jenny shared, "When I got to middle school, for some reason there were more White kids. That's when I began to realize what it meant to be a Latino. I wasn't like other kids. I wasn't White or Black so I had to find my identity."

Katie noticed she was different when her family moved to areas that were more Caucasian. She felt comfortable because her command of the English language was very good. However, she did notice her Latina identity more in high school and shared, " Later in high school is when I kind of saw being Latino as being more of a positive thing rather than a negative. Specifically, at the Hispanic College Institute, it just empowers you to embrace your culture, where you come from. . . ." On the other hand, Roxanne shared she is now more appreciative of her Latina identity because she took the time to learn more about her culture and heritage. She voiced,

> Like now, I've been more in touch with my color and my identity. And it's also in part thanks to my African American friends who have taught the line of appropriation and appreciation. So now it's like okay, I'm Mexican American and I need to identify with that. I can appreciate culture but it's another thing to appropriate, which I've come to find.

The participants listed above shared how they came to identify themselves as Latina. Some took longer than others due to not thinking about it or forgetting about their identity in order to blend or get along with the dominant culture at a specific point in their lives. If the participants did not identify as a Latina early on, they were able to notice their difference, identify and embrace it, and become proud of that heritage in order to pursue their goals and proceed with their lives. Even though there are many positive ways to view Latinas, some of the participants believed it was important to discuss the negative stereotypes about Latinas.

Negative Latina Identity

During the various interviews, several participants shared their feelings regarding negative stereotypes about being a Latina in school and in their neighborhoods. Angela, Danielle, Jenny, Lisa, and Naomi shared their concerns or personal stories about the

negative images of Latinas as portrayed in society. The negative stereotypes trouble these young women, but they are determined to dispel these thoughts and beliefs.

Angela discussed the age difference with her younger sister. When she is out with her sister, she is stereotyped as having a child at such a young age. It especially bothers her because people do not know her, but they make negative assumptions about her life just because she is a Latina. Angela stated,

> And now it's just more like just the fact that I am Latina. It's like I feel like there's such a stereotype towards that. My little sister, she's 11 years younger than me and me walking around like I would babysit her 'cause I'm obviously much older. And when I go to a store, people automatically assume that she's my daughter, and that will never be true. That is my little sister.
>
> I remember one time I was 13, 14 and I've always looked older for my age, but I was young and my sister had just been born a couple years ago and she was probably two or three. We were in Target and my mom went to go to the restroom, but she gave me her credit card 'cause we were already in line. So she's like if it doesn't go just wait for me and I'll probably come back and sign. . . . So she was in a stroller. We came up to the register, and you could tell the way that she had looked at me like she shook her head at me like she was ashamed at the fact that I had a daughter, but it wasn't even my daughter.

Danielle made friends with a student from South America when she was in middle school because the student spoke Spanish. She also noted she did not make friends with other Latinas because "I never really identified with the other Latino people at my school." Danielle shared earlier she tried to identify with her school community. As Danielle continued talking, she shared the following:

> I remember in high school there was these two girls in my art class speaking Spanish and talking about their boyfriends or whatever. A couple of months later she came back to class and told the teacher she couldn't finish because she was pregnant. Later I saw them both at the mall with their babies in strollers. I never really identified with the other Latino people at my school.

After getting her depression under control, Danielle began to have a more positive outlook on life and her future and did not wish to be around any negative

situations. On the other hand Jenny shared she never experienced any traumatic experiences. However, on her part time job, she was surprised when an older Latina employee asked her negative and stereotypical questions. She stated,

> When I first started working my first job, I work as a food runner. . . . One of the first questions I was asked was "Are you married?" And "How many kids do you have?" I wasn't old enough, but I don't blame her. That's the stereotype that Latino women have kids at an early age and being married. . . . I don't agree with it obviously because I have other goals. . . .Yeah, there are these stereotypes I don't like or agree with. Maybe there are things that people don't even think about who are not Latino. They don't think about it. As a Latina, when I'm asked how many kids do I have. Ewww, that's not who I am.

Lisa and Naomi acknowledged the negative views about Latinas getting pregnant at an early age are troubling, but both believe they will dispel that stereotype. Both also believe they have to work extra hard to overcome the negative labels. Lisa is confident she will be successful. Lisa shared,

> Being a Latina female, most people assume that I'll get pregnant at 16 and I won't graduate high school. There is just so many standards already set for us, and so many things we are expected to fulfill in society. That's not the truth and I want to break that stereotype that people thin k Latinas are just here to get pregnant at an early age and, I don't know, scam off the government, you know, not graduate high school. . . . It's definitely been hard because people will say, "Do you know English?" Some people will say, "None of your sisters got pregnant at 16?" Even at my church, I had brought my boyfriend to church one day. I had people come up to me and saying, "Are you going to be the next 16 year old who's pregnant and you're just going to hurt our reputation as Hispanics?" I want to disprove that. . . . So, being a Latina woman is definitely been hard because there are already pressures set by society, but you just got to break them down and it makes you work harder. . . .

Naomi agrees the stereotypes can impinge on a person. However, she believes acknowledging they exist, refuting those stereotypes, and setting goals can break them. Naomi plans to work hard to achieve those goals. She shared,

> The negative was that since I'm considered a minority, there's always the stereotype that we are going to get pregnant. Sometimes they ask me if I had kids or how old is your child. Just because I'm Latina doesn't mean I am going to have a child now. That has affected me. Being Latina has affected me that way because

> of the stereotypes. In order for you to be considered something, you have to work extra hard. That's a negative side I would say.

Definition of Success

The word success can have varied meanings for different people due to a number of factors. Those factors could be age, upbringing and background, SES, and outlook on life to name a few. All 14 participants were enrolled on a full time basis at a four-year institution. However, their definitions of success varied from graduating from college, moving away from their community, attaining independence, being financially secure to being happy in whatever they are doing. Sacajawea believed success was moving away from her hometown because she believed she would be stuck with the same friends and attending the state college. She stated, "I rarely go back home – only to see my mother. The people are still doing the same things, still hanging out with the same groups. Still, um, you know, they haven't left that mindset." Her time as a 10th grader attending an affluent high school in the Virgin Islands opened her eyes to other possibilities. She concluded by sharing, "I . . . definitely got to see two worlds." Rainne shared, "Success for me is being able to do what I love and to be the best at it. . . .But success to me is to also not ever stop wanting to learn and to be comfortable, to be able to supply for myself."

Two other participants believed being successful meant achieving a specific goal. Both plan to obtain college degrees, and acknowledge that it will take commitment and effort. Jenny may or may not pursue a career. She stated,

> First. . . .I think I'll feel successful once I finish college because I know I would have accomplished something that takes effort and hard work. So, not necessarily a career but just being able to complete something like a college degree, which is part of being successful.

Angela agrees obtaining one or more degrees will help her to be successful. She would also like to be married and have a family. Angela believes there should be a balance in order to live a fulfilling life. She shared**,**

> When I achieve success, I believe that I will have my degree. I will be, hopefully, in research maybe in a lab. In order to do research, I'd have to have my Ph.D. So, if I got that that would be incredible for me. Success is me living a happy life with a husband and children and a career that I'm proud of.

Valentina discussed the importance of measuring success one step at a time and in different intervals. She believes short- and long-term goals should be set and celebrated. This viewpoint could be from her ambitious, but worrier side. She voiced,

> Success. . . . I know some people define success as, you know, money-driven success, but I feel like with me, I define it when I reach my goal, however high or low that goal may be, however short term or long term that goal may be. Um, that's "successful" to me. Whenever I have an exam and, you know, short-term example. . . I'm always clicking on my computer screen, trying to see if my teacher uploaded the grade. And if I get a really good grade, that's success for me. That's what I brag about. And not brag about to everyone, just to the close people. And it makes me feel happy.

Alyssa, Roxanne, and Patricia come from low SES backgrounds. Their desire to be financially stable in order to be successful makes practical sense to them. They want to be self sufficient, independent, and free of financial worry. Alyssa stated,

> I think I personally equate success with money, with having a certain amount of money, and I'm not sure what the numerical value would be, but just having enough money to buy certain things, so being able to not worry about paying rent every month or having certain things in your wardrobe.

On the one hand Roxanne desires to be financially stable, but also wishes to be independent and make her own way on her own terms. She shared her father stressed the importance of being able to take care of oneself. Reality occurred sooner than expected when her parents demanded she contribute to the household if she was not going to attend college. Roxanne vocalized,

> To me success . . . would culminate in being independent. The one thing my father always instilled in me was if something were to ever happen to my family, at least we'll know that you'll be fine because you'll be independent and you don't have to depend on anybody else for whatever it is that you need. So to me, that's always stuck with me that if I am independent and I can provide for myself and take care of myself, then that is a success.

Due to many moves, Patricia lived a nomadic life throughout her elementary experience. Her mother and other relatives always discussed money concerns. It seems Patricia has carefully planned how she will become successful. She voiced,

> I want – success for me would be living day-to-day and not having to worry about how my family's gonna do. . . . Right now I'm a mechanical engineer major. So, I mean, ideally, I've always wanted to work with NASA. So that's been my end goal since day one. . . .I guess that's kind of my success as well. Finding a job or being in a position where I'm happy. Where it doesn't seem like every day is, "Ugh. I'm going to work." Right now I'm just trying to take it step by step. Graduate college, get a job, work my way up to NASA.

Earning money, having a career, being able to take care of themselves and future families are important to Mary and Lisa. However, they also emphasize the importance of remaining faithful to their religious beliefs. Mary shared she does not need to earn a lot of money to be happy and successful. She stated,

> Success to me would be to one, be able to hold a job that I love. It doesn't have to be the six figures to me. It's just something that can keep me moving and can sustain my family for the future. I wouldn't want a family until I have that background support because I've always had that while growing up. This job would be one where I'm working with the community. . . .Success would also be sustaining my Catholic faith. Spiritual success is very important to me.

Lisa shared she had a troubling home life and sometimes worked many hours while in high school in order to assist with the finances. She also helped look after her younger sister. She is a strong believer in her religion and believes her faith will help her become successful. She voiced her thoughts by stating,

> Ah, success for myself would be being in a place where I'm happy with everything that's in my life. What I mean - everything in my life, my education, my family, my health, um, and my overall life. Right now I have had moments of

> success, but I'm not living in success right now. I feel like when I graduate college, I will have another moment of success, but I won't be living in success either. I feel like when I've done everything I can, when I have accomplished the many goals I've set for myself over the years, and when I know there's nowhere else I can go, you know. . . . My faith with God is still strong.

Danielle did not always think or worry about the future because she lived day by day and was not sure if she would make it very far into the future. She now believes she has come a long way since being depressed and knows it is important to focus on the positive. Her goal is to remain positive each day. Danielle expressed her feelings about success as:

> Um (laugh). I guess success for me would be staying positive everyday and making the most out of any situation whether it be good, bad, or whatever it may be. It's not really build expectations for myself, and I guess just take whatever happened as whatever it was.

Being happy and passionate are important to Vanessa and Naomi. Vanessa shared "I think it's just living a happy life and living what you like." Naomi stated, "I would define it as doing what you want and doing something you're passionate about."

The participants shared their views about themselves in very positive and vibrant terms. They believe Latina identity, their character, and other attributes help to define them, their abilities to be strong and resilient, and proud of their heritage. Ginorio and Huston (2001) emphasized the importance of how Latinas perceive themselves and their future. When Latinas have a strong sense of self, their heritage, and are confident in their abilities, they have better opportunities to graduate and attend post-secondary institutions (Antrop-Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Gandara et al., 2013).

One of the concerns some of the participants shared was the fact that some people continue to view Latinas in a negative light. Sometimes they are seen as having deficits that could negatively impact their lives and also negatively impact society as a

whole. Barajas and Pierce (2001) noted their study found Latinas were successful in not allowing negative stereotypes to impact them. The participants in my study shared they will continue to ignore those types of comments, work hard, and pursue their goals with their heads held up high. In other words, they will defy the stereotypical view of Latina women.

Crisp, Taggart and Nora (2014) defined "academic success outcomes as behaviors necessary to accomplish students' academic goals, including course completion, course grades or grade point average (GPA), persistence in higher education, transfer to another postsecondary institution, and certificate of degree completion" (pp.2-3). The participants in my study provided different definitions of success which offered a glimpse of what these 14 participants thought about their lives and what they hope to accomplish for the future. Even though all of the young women are currently in college, they have varied ideas about what success means to them and what physical or spiritual resources and supports they needed to feel successful.

When asked to describe their parents, the participants used words such as supportive, hard working, driven, loving, and strong. The participants shared a great deal about their families. In the following section, the researcher provides findings on what the participants shared and how the family may have influenced them throughout their lives.

Family Influences

Family and its influence on someone's life is the second theme to be discussed. This theme came about as a result of a variety of comments made throughout the interviews. While analyzing transcript data, I noted numerous references to family background and upbringing. Participants also shared information about family beliefs and

expectations. A couple participants talked about being the "good daughter" based upon family expectations. In addition, a couple of participants stated their parents also expected them to give back in order to help someone else.

In order to encourage the participants to share their thoughts about their families, the researcher asked the young women to use three words to describe them.

Family Description

During the interviews, participants were asked to use three words to describe their families. The depictions of their families opened a window into how the participants viewed their parents and families. There were certain words that stood out from the rest of the list. These words included loving, supportive, loud, and ambitious.

Those participants who described their parents as loving recalled a feeling of closeness and each family member loving and supporting each other. Sacajawea shared, "We're very loving towards each other." Even though Sacajawea did not go into much detail, she emphasized throughout her interview how much her parents cared for her. She especially shared how much she loved her mom because she was a strong single mom during Sacajawea's early years.

Breaking bread and spending time together are ways families can demonstrate how much they love and care for each other. Danielle and Jenny both shared these sentiments when describing their parents. Danielle stated, "I guess loving, together - we spend a lot of time together. I call them every night to say goodnight and kind of catch up." Jenny mentioned her parents are "loving". When asked to provide an example, she shared, "Yeah, we have dinner every Sunday, every night of the week as much as we can."

Being supportive can mean a variety of things such as caring, loyal, and encouraging. All participants expressed some level of this feeling about their families, but a few specifically stated they believed their parents were very supportive of them and their lives. Sometimes there can be hardships in a family, but it does not mean the support stops. As Mary confirmed in her statement,

> Supportive, because like I said, we have our ups and downs both economically, business wise, and personally just like any other family. . . . We always have in our mind that no matter what is going on things will fall into place after. That is also the work of God. So, we will always support each other no matter what's going on.

When parents work hard and make sacrifices for their family, there may still not be enough money to do the things they would like for the children. However, parents tend to find a way by prioritizing or sacrificing something else. According to Lisa, "My parents were always very supportive. Even though we didn't have the money all the time, they would sacrifice whatever they had to in order to make sure that we'd prospered."

All of the participants mentioned or alluded to the fact their parents immigrated to the US in order to make a better life for themselves and their families. Their parents demonstrated this commitment through hard work and support. Another way parents could be supportive was trying to find out educational information when they did not know it themselves. Katie voiced,

> My parents have always supported me in everything I do, all activities, but most importantly school. They couldn't help me as much as they wanted to, but they would try to find the answers to questions that I needed answers to when it came to applying for colleges. . . .

Families can be described in many different ways, but some of the participants described their families as loud. Describing a family as being loud could have positive as well as negative connotations. Yet, these participants viewed this description in very

positive and caring terms. Patricia, who is a very quiet person, shared her family was always loud. She laughed when she stated,

> My family likes to talk over one another. We'll be at a family gathering and you won't be able to hear the music, which is already playing at full blast because they're all trying to tell their story of their day, what happened, or a phone call that they had with so-and-so, or how they want to brag about their children. They love to do that.

Patricia also told me "I love it. I guess I grew up with them being loud. So, it would feel weird if they weren't. They do help me bring me out of my shell." The fact her family is large and loud is good for Patricia because she knows she is loved and feels comfortable shedding some of her quiet nature when she is around them. Alyssa is not shy or quiet and, in a matter-of-fact way, described her family as being loud. She said, ". . . they're very loud people at all times." In this case it does not matter if there is a get together or not.

Another participant, Danielle, who seemed shy or reserved, readily shared her family was loud, but she was referring to her immediate family. Danielle also shared the family gets silly at times and likes to tell jokes. They are very comfortable with each other. She stated,

> Loud (Laughter). When we're together we get really loud. Yea, ah, even my sister, like when she's watching television, she will just shout at the television. My mom and I start talking louder and things like that. It's just, you know, we're like a little unit.

At times having a loud family and extended family together at the same time can become a little boisterous when one is not sure what to expect. Some close families tend to know a lot about each other. This can sometimes be a concern because there tends to be a mixture of emotions depending on the topics brought up or discussed. Roxanne shared,

> You never get bored. When you're around my family, either because everyone is saying their two cents regarding someone's particular business or because we're celebrating, and it gets so lively and there's just such good energy. It's wonderful. . . . There's either going to be laughter or there's going to be yelling, and there's going to be shouting. There's going to be crying. There's always something going on. It's never stagnant at all.

The family descriptions were very interesting and enlightening because the participants showed a range of emotions when sharing information about their families. The descriptions regarding loving, supportive, and loud were shared because the participants shared very vibrant, insightful, and honest images about their families. Table 5 lists all of the words used to describe each participant's family.

Table 5

Descriptions of Family

Participant	**Description #1**	**Description #2**	**Description #3**
Sacajawea	Nontraditional	Loving	Close
Danielle	Loving	Strong Bond/Con	Loud
Jenny	Supportive	Loving	Driven
Katie	Supportive	Hard Working	Role Models
Vanessa	Hard Working	Very Giving	Very Religious
Lisa	Crazy	Loving	Supportive
Mary	Close	Supportive	Focused
Naomi	Ambitious	Strong	Could not think of one
Valentina	Resourceful	Supportive	Hardy
Patricia	Loud	Very Big	Interdependent
Roxanne	Big	Complicated	Lively
Rainne	Nurturing	Proactive	Strict
Alyssa	Loud	Opinionated	Traditional
Angela	Happy	Ambitious	Faithful

The participants felt they came from close-knit families even though there were trying or difficult times that occurred for several of them. Each participant revealed her parent or parents are very dedicated to the family, instilled the importance of getting a good education, and believed their hard work and sacrifices made for their children would pay off in the long run. The descriptions in word form provided images that could

be seen or imagined as each participant communicated with the researcher. In the next section, the overall theme of family background and upbringing in the household will be discussed.

Family Background/Upbringing

Family Background/Upbringing is a sub theme in my findings regarding family influences. This sub theme was chosen because the participants stated family life is very important to them. This is true for Latino culture based on other research (Gandara, 2009; Ginorio &Huston, 2001; Henry et al., 2008; Woolley, 2009). The participants shared memories of growing up and talked about their parents' work ethic. All 14 participants mentioned their parents came to the United States (US) in search of a better opportunity for themselves and to raise their future families. Parents came to the US as young teenagers or young adults at various times. The ages ranged as young as 14 to early 30's.

The majority of parents met and married in the United States. Five participants informed the researcher they came from families with a low socioeconomic status (SES). Two considered their families to be from a middle/upper middle class SES. Sacajawea and Valentina immigrated to the US with only their mothers, at ages 5 and 7, because parents divorced or never married. Sacajawea indicated her mom was great at being a single mom when she was young and she thought her mom was very brave to venture out on her own with a small child. She stated,

> I guess my first few years of life she was like a single mom and I definitely saw her as that, but didn't think anything of it because she was so great at it. She's such a strong person. . . . Very strict growing up. . . . She was very demanding of me but for really good reasons.

It is interesting to note Sacajawea's mom did remarry an American man and moved to a nicer area in the state. This provided the family with an upper middle class lifestyle.

Valentina's mom was single when she came to the US as well. Valentina indicated she did not know much about her father or his family because there was limited communication with that part of the family. Contrastingly, Valentina shared her mom came to the US with the intention of marrying a former friend from El Salvador who already immigrated to the US. Valentina shared how poor they were and the fact they lived in very cramped quarters. Her mother ended up getting out of the abusive relationship and finding an apartment for herself, Valentina, and her brother.

Even though the circumstances were different, both parents of these two participants stressed the importance of getting a good education and had high expectations. Both parents provided a strict, but nurturing, home environment. Valentina's mom reminded her of the heritage she came from whenever Valentina felt like giving up or frustrated with her life.

Almost every parent of the participants was either a legal resident or US citizen. Katie immigrated to the US with both of her parents when she was 5 years old, but the family still remains on undocumented status. Katie's parents have a very strong work ethic and work long hours. Katie shared at one point her mother worked three jobs.

Almost all of the moms worked in either restaurants or did domestic work. One mother worked in the government for 25 years. Mary's mom works with her husband in his construction business they have owned for 20 years. Mary shared,

> My parents both work in the construction business. My parents worked very hard to establish a small construction business. . . . I help too. My brother works there too. . . .It's a family-owned business, and we work very hard to keep [it] because that's what we live from.

There are other dads working in the construction or landscaping business. Another example of parents working extremely hard would be Rainne's parents. She stated, ". . .

My mom only had to work two jobs the most I think living here, and my dad took off with his business. . . . My dad's a contractor. He's like your all-around handyman, but he has his own business." Even though her parents work very hard, they instilled the importance of knowing where one comes from and being grateful for the opportunities one has in the US. Roxanne shared her parents have a very strong work ethic that encompasses their entire life. She voiced,

> Yeah, they left home very, very young and just that work ethic is something that always been instilled in them and something that they still carry on to this day. That's been the focus of their lifestyle, their parenting, everything. It always can be traced to their work ethic.

Angela's father worked hard and earned his bachelor's degree. He currently works as an executive in the Information Technology field. Her mom works as a sales manager and has been with the same company for over 20 years. She shared,

> They are an inspiration to me because they came from Peru but they came from very poor, very small parts. And even though they struggled like legality issues and whatever, any type of boundaries that they had to overcome in order to get here they were able to do it. And not just do it but succeed here as well.

All of the participants discussed various aspects of their family background and upbringing. One of the things that emerged was the fact the families are very close knit and caring toward each other regardless of any situations or circumstances. This strong bond and connection comes from that love and closeness and the belief they are fortunate to be in this country. One example of this love and care came from Angela when she stated,

> My parents love each other so much. . . . And they love us so much and it comes out consistently. I don't think I would be here if it weren't for that at all. . . . We don't listen to what other people have to say. . . .We know who we are and there's nobody else that can tell us any different than that.

Another example of love and care is the strict and sheltered upbringing some participants expressed. At times Rainne wondered if she missed out on things such as, parties or sleepovers, but knew she would not be allowed to go. She accepted and followed her parents' rules. Rainne voiced,

> We don't go anywhere without anybody. If I have to study and there's a family party, they won't go 'cause I can't go unless I plead with them, like, "Go. Go. You guys will be more helpful if you're gone." We don't go to dinner without each other 'cause my dad hates that.

Rainne did participate in family parties. Similarly, Angela shared she was allowed to attend family parties and would sometimes invite her best friend to join them. She believes not hanging out helped her stay away from drugs and alcohol. Angela shared, "As Latinas we definitely party within our families. . . .And that's how I grew up going to those parties all the time 'cause every kid's party always turned into an adult fun party."

Another demonstration of love, care, and being together is sharing meals. Jenny, Mary, and Danielle stated their families have dinner as often as they can. This gives them time to communicate with each other, discuss their lives, have the benefit of each other's company, and to enjoy the food.

The families are very appreciative for the opportunities to be successful and to provide for their families. One or more parents may work more than one job to make ends meet and will go without in order for their child to participate in a field trip or to apply to college. Lisa stated her parents would try to make sure she attended field trips or other opportunities by telling her they would find a way to pay for the expenses.

Parent occupations tended to be in the restaurant, landscaping, and construction businesses. These types of businesses can be very demanding and require long hours. However, several parents have been able to establish and maintain businesses with

consistent help from spouses as well as their children. The participants are very proud of what their parents have accomplished through sacrifice, hard work, and diligence. Rainne shared, "I think I've been shaped a lot by my parents." Her parents emphasized the value of education and hard work. In order to help their daughter succeed, Katie's parents took whatever jobs they could. She stated,

> They will do whatever job is given to them. They will not only complete it but will do it to the best of their ability. There's never been a point in my life they didn't give me something I needed. . . .Even when we didn't have a lot of money, they have always provided me with what I needed. . . .I feel like I've been really blessed growing up.

This section provided examples of positive family backgrounds and close-knit upbringing from the participants' points of view.

The participants are proud of their heritage and their desire to fit in US society on their terms. Regardless of SES status, parents' occupations, work ethic, or family environment, all of the families continue to believe and strive for the American dream. Their beliefs will be discussed in the next section.

Beliefs – "The American Dream"

> The American dream that we were raised on is a simple but forceful one – if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you.
>
> President Bill Clinton, Speech to Democratic Leadership Council, 1993

Throughout the interviews the participants expressed why their parents left their countries and family members in order to immigrate to the US. Each participant shared her parent's story about their sacrifices and how she plans to focus on education and other goals in order to have a good, productive, and successful life. Katie, who is undocumented, shared why she worked so hard in high school and almost gave up hope to attend college because of her status. She was able to apply and attend college with

assistance from her guidance counselor and the DACA executive order. Katie shared why she works so hard,

> My dad always touched on how he wanted a better future for me; and we came here for all of the opportunities, specifically educational opportunities. If you ask both my parents what their American Dream is, they will always say for my daughter to be a professional in the US.

Angela is a second generation college student, and she told me her dad worked very hard and took college classes. He earned a college degree and now works in the IT field. She stated, "My dad's very smart and he's very intelligent. That's why he's probably like my American Dream inspiration story that I always will love to tell." Since her dad was able to earn a college degree, Angela understands what she must do and shared,

> They've [parents] definitely pushed me very hard. B's were bad in my house, that's for sure. C's were for crying. D's were don't even think about it. It was A's and then a couple B's here and there. And it wasn't like it was discipline, like they had ever touched me or hurt me or anything. It was for me and they knew that, they're like, "No, I know you can do better. If you want to get anywhere, you've got to get this." So it was not forced or anything. Like I said, I'm ambitious too so I definitely wanted to be great in school as well.

Valentina stated her mom did not earn a college degree. However, she saw how hard her mom worked and how much she endured in order to make a better life for her and her younger brother. She also talked about the importance of education and why her mother set high expectations and encouraged her to strive for the American Dream. Valentina shared,

> Money was tight a lot of times. I remember in the summers, it became even tighter, to the point where we would have to literally check every corner of the house for coins to get bus fare. . . .My mother also volunteered at a used store over the weekends because she would get a discount.

Their living arrangement consisted of living in one room. This arrangement was not very good due to an abusive relationship her mother had with a friend she ended up marrying.

Once Valentina's mother removed herself and the children from that situation, she was able to locate a place for them to live. Valentina shared,

> And then we moved to a one-bedroom apartment, which wasn't much. . . .And once we got our visa – I mean – sorry, once we got our green cards, - our residence. . . .I was around 12 years old. . . . It meant the world to us. It meant that we were that much – that step further to becoming independent and to achieving whatever American Dream that may be.

In order to make ends meet, sometimes the oldest sibling will sacrifice their goals and future in order to assist the family in getting a sibling into college. Vanessa shared her oldest sister works full time, and sometimes she feels guilty that she is able to go to school full time while her older sister works full time and goes to school on a part time basis. Vanessa stated, "They have always worked in order to help me go to school. So by them working, school was not put in the background because it's always been first for me because of them."

The main part of the American dream seems to be the importance of obtaining a college degree. A college degree is considered a success. This success assists in making the road easier in order to have a career and earn a good living. Mary vocalized,

> Ah, and my parents always tell us that the greatest, um, like the greatest inheritance they can leave us is our education. So, they really take into importance our education. So they always made sure that, you know, we were taking our education seriously and understanding the value of education.

Sometimes parents may disagree on parenting strategies or other topics, but all agree on getting the college degree. Lisa shared her parents ". . .both knew in America if you didn't have a college degree you weren't going to be successful in life. To them their idea of success was graduating from college and getting a good job." Lisa also shared, "Well, ever since I was young, my family, cousins, my mom and my dad always told me school was the best thing I could ever do in my life." Rainne shared a similar sentiment and

stated, “My family, they always, always, always have their eyesight on college. They always thought that I could do anything I wanted to.” Sacajawea voiced a similar comment by stating, “So, my mom was very demanding of me while growing up. . . . So, she made it a big deal for me to get my education.” Patricia stated there was only one option in her family and voiced,

> I think it’s just been something that my mom has implemented since I was very tiny. It’s been, you’re gonna go to high school. Then you’re gonna go to college. Then you’re gonna get a degree, and you’re gonna get a job. So, for me, college has always been the next step after high school. There was no other option. I don’t really know what else I would be doing.

Roxanne emphasized, “My family always instilled in me and my brother that we had to go to school and get good grades.” She also shared, “Family always lives vicariously through us and our educational experience.”

One family worked out a schedule that would allow the parents to work while the grandmother took care of the participant. This arrangement did not cost any money and the participant was taken care of by a loving family member. That family member could go to work after the parents arrived home. Jenny mentioned,

> My parents worked during the day. So she [grandmother] would take care of me. . . .They all work at restaurants. . . .Yes, oh like I said she was a teen mom. So growing up she always kept us away from the boys. That was like a rule and she was very protective of us. My father was too busy. My mom is like the head of the household. Whatever she says goes. She kept us away from boys. She always told us we have to work hard and to go to school because that’s the only way we can prosper. So for her, going to school is the only way to advance.

As you read above, the students were expected and in most cases wanted to fulfill the American dream. Parents came to the United States to seek a better life for themselves, work very hard, and to ensure their families received a better education. All of the parents worked long, hard hours but continued to dream, expect, and push their children to succeed in the educational environment. The parents continue to work hard to

help support the participants through college. The thoughts were their children would earn their college degrees and be able to land a job or career, have a better life for themselves and the next generation. In addition, a few participants stated their parents expect them to give back in order to help someone else. These expectations made sense but a few of the participants worried about whether they would be successful and if the process of giving back was still expected of them. The next section describes how the participants viewed their role in the family.

"Good Daughter"

The participants shared in various ways their pride, love, and gratitude regarding their parents' efforts to secure a better life and educational opportunity for their families. Part of the family background and upbringing includes a strong work ethic and the expectation that every family member will do what is necessary and right when the time comes. For Latinas, that means being a "good daughter". The family background and beliefs and expectations all have a bearing on whether the Latina is a "good daughter." By good daughter, I mean there are certain responsibilities that go along with being a Latina, such as taking care of younger siblings, translating for parents, working a part time job in order to help support the family, and any other responsibilities that the family deems necessary. Latinas tend not to question this role. They accept it and act as expected.

Since the value of a college education is placed very high on the priority list, the participants do not want to displease their parents. Mary told me how disappointed her parents were when her older brother dropped out of college. Her parents always dreamed she and her sibling would be successful in this endeavor. She stated,

> When my brother dropped out of college, my parents were very devastated. . . .I guess it created that mindset that, you know, I want to be able to make my parents proud. I want to be able to make them happy. . . .I feel like that it's the least they deserve for me to complete.

Mary informed me she wants to be in college and this is something she had thought about since she was very young. However, it is now more important she succeeds because her brother did not fulfill that expectation.

If there were younger siblings, the older daughter may be responsible for their well being at a certain point in her life. For example, Patricia began caring for her younger siblings after school at the age of 13. She shared, ". . . .I had to make sure that they were okay every single day, were fed, got home from school, did their homework until my mom got home from work; and then I got to relax." When asked how she felt about the responsibility since she also had to maintain good grades in school, Patricia included,

> I definitely feel that being responsible for my siblings while my mom was at work definitely made me grow up and mature at a very young age. It became a regular part of my life. . . .I grew up needing to be aware of what was going on around me to make sure that my siblings weren't in danger of being harmed; or that if they needed anything, I would be able to step in quickly and help. This trait has stuck with me, and I like to think it's a good skill to have. . . . I'm actually quite glad it happened.

Patricia shared she had a positive childhood and saw her responsibility as a skill to be used throughout her life. She also seemed proud that she was able to help the family. Conversely, another participant also had to watch over a younger sibling because of the family's dysfunction. Lisa stated,

> So they [parents] had constant fights about parenting things because they both were brought up in different homes. . . . I had to set examples for my younger sister because my older sister ended up, I guess, going on a bad path getting in with the wrong friends. So at the age of 13, I had to make sure I was doing the right thing so I could get into the right high school, but at the same time watching over my eight year old sister and making sure that she's growing up ok and that

> she's not being hurt by my parents' arguing. . . or my sister's bad paths in life. So it was hard.

Another responsibility that may arise for some Latinas is the need to translate for parents who do not speak English. This responsibility can, at times, shift the adult role to the child, which causes the child to grow up quickly. Lisa communicated this was her responsibility at eight years old. She voiced,

> Growing up with two parents who don't speak English is hard, especially when you're in school and you have to fill out all these papers and forms. You have all these back to school nights and parent nights. It's kind of weird when you have an eight year old accompanying you having to translate. It was hard because at one point I kinda had to become the leader of my family.

At a certain point in school, Lisa began filling out forms and just had her mother sign them without any explanation. According to Lisa, her parents trusted that she was doing the right thing and making the right decisions regarding her education.

Being a good daughter can be very uplifting, but it can also be a burden that one may not be ready to handle or accept. Two participants shared their thoughts about how they had to be very responsible during a crisis in the family. One took it in stride to a certain degree, and the other one resented the request and inwardly and outwardly fought about this expectation.

Lisa's mom became ill when she was a 10th grader. Mom asked Lisa to get a job, which would eliminate the need for parents to pay for any of Lisa's needs. Lisa was also asked to take care of her younger sister. Lisa shared,

> I was working 40 hours a week at Burger King as a sophomore and going to school full time. . . .As soon as I got off the bus, mom would drive me straight to work. I'd be there until 10 or 11 [pm] and working weekends. . . .I paid for my cell phone . . . my food and clothes. So there was more money for the bills and for the hospital bills.

A similar situation occurred to Roxanne when her mom became ill in her sophomore year. She was not asked to hold down a job as Lisa was expected to do. However, as the daughter, she was expected to take care of her mother's needs and maintain her grades. Roxanne stated,

> . . . I was expected to take care of my mother and look after my mother, but I wasn't ready. . .to look after her. I thought that was something that I would do after I graduated from school, after I had my family. Like that's when it would be my time to look after mom and make sure mom was okay. But being 15, . . . I wasn't ready for that. Just seeing her in that state, I felt bad but at the same time, I wasn't ready to help her.

Both Lisa and Roxanne expressed concerns about the expectations, but each handled them differently. Lisa was surprised she survived the balancing act of worker, student, and caretaker, but she believed in a higher power. In a serious but content tone, Lisa voiced, "Til this day, it still surprises me that I was able to push through. Then again I dedicate that to my faith throughout. . . .Thankfully, my mom was able to get better after the surgery." On the contrary, Roxanne was bitter and angry because she was not ready for the responsibility. She stated her family and aunts were very displeased with her attitude and wanted to know why Roxanne was not taking care of her mother. Roxanne also shared her aunts made a point of reminding her she was the daughter and the eldest child. The aunts emphasized the younger brothers were watching her and would follow her lead. Roxanne stated,

> I remember my family and my aunts were very open about their disappointment with me. . . . As far as they were concerned, once I was a teenager I really needed to start looking after my family and seeing if there was a way that I could help. . . .Not only did they want to see the good student with the college bound dream, but they also wanted to see the good daughter that would help out around the house. . . . I wasn't ready to be a good student, daughter, and caretaker.

To make matters worse, Roxanne also shared she was going through a rebellious stage at this point in her life and was very resentful. It is interesting to note Lisa went

through a rebellious stage around the same time but not because she resented taking care of her mother. She stated she wanted someone to pay attention to her as a result of all of the things occurring at the same time.

The participants shared how hard they worked in order to graduate and start a career or continue on through graduate school. Several of the participants stated why they chose a particular major. One participant, Vanessa, voiced her parents wanted her to major in nursing because she will always have a job and can start contributing to the household after graduation. Vanessa started out with a plan to earn a nursing degree, but changed her mind after visiting her home country. She now majors in global affairs and plans to join the Peace Corps upon graduation. However, she felt guilty about her decision for two reasons. First, she is not following the plan laid out by her parents. Second, her older sister works full time in order to help Vanessa stay in school and assist her parents with household bills. Both parents and the older sister expected Vanessa to work after graduation. She shared, "I felt like it was my responsibility after I was done to start helping out. I really want to do the Peace Corps. If I don't do it now, I'll never be able to do it later." Vanessa stated she recently spoke with her sister and shared her plans. According to Vanessa her sister told her she could follow her plans because she and the parents will be fine and will not need her to work right away. Vanessa also shared her father is aware of her plans and she is in the process of telling her mom.

The selected participants in this section discussed how they handled or tried to balance being a "good daughter" with what they want out of life. In a couple of instances, trying to balance this expectation was somewhat daunting. However, one participant handled it well, but kept her feelings inside; and another participant verbalized

her displeasure at having her teenage life interrupted with adult responsibilities. This participant questioned the good daughter role because she was not ready for the role, did not think she needed to take on that responsibility, and wondered aloud why her mother's sisters would not take over while she was ill. In both cases, the two participants rebelled to a certain extent. Another participant was very willing to help take care of her siblings and shared the experience provided her with lifelong skills.

Being a good daughter can be viewed as a normal part of the Latina experience and as a way of giving back to the parents for all of the hard work and sacrifices made for their daughters' benefit. This is an important part of the family background, upbringing and their beliefs. There are different ways to give back. In the next section, giving back examples will be explored.

Giving Back

There is a quote from the Bible, which says, "To those whom much is given much is expected." This quote came to mind when listening to participants who discussed giving back and why their parents think it is important to carry out. The phrase giving back may connote different things to different people. For some people, giving back means once a person reaches a certain level in life, it is that person's responsibility to turn around and extend a hand to another person in the family, extended family, or to a stranger in need. If a person is a teenager in high school, it could mean giving back in the form of tutoring or community service. Sometimes a family will perform a service in the community, work with others from their home country, or provide other acts of giving back. For some of the participants, the act of giving back simply means to help parents with the mortgage, other household bills, or obtaining a job, which would allow a person

to effect, change on a larger scale. A person who does give back could also be seen as a role model in the family, school, and the community.

One of the things Roxanne remembers about her family beliefs besides going to school and to college was a responsibility to give back in some way. She believes it is stipulated any Mexican-American who is also first generation must find ways to give back to each other as well as younger generations in order to strengthen the families now and in the future. Roxanne stated, "And my mother would always say once you have a career and you're a successful woman, you might help us out with our mortgage or you might work in the government, and you're going to make immigration a lot easier for everyone else." Lisa also recalled her mom telling her the same thing, but her mom expected the family to give back to the community through community service activities.

Another way to give back is to volunteer time to a specific organization. Valentina volunteers as an EMT and gives 12 hours of her time per week. Katie volunteers at a hospital and has given over 1000 hours. In addition, Katie volunteers every year at a Hispanic academy foundation because she enjoys working with younger Latinas and believes it is important for younger Latinas to have role models who look like them. During the four-day program held last year, Katie worked with seven students in a variety of activities that are organized by the foundation. Students learned about FAFSA and SAT's, discussed issues that are important to Hispanics, and performed a skit. They were also able to compete for scholarship money. Katie would like to volunteer again and plans to apply to this foundation again this year.

There are still other ways to give back and Vanessa believes going into the Peace Corps will be a great way to help people and to give back. Naomi, on the other hand,

currently volunteers at her church in order to help students who may have questions about the college process or how to keep good grades. She seems to find this type of volunteering enjoyable because she stated, "I am always advising or helping them."

The above volunteer activities were shared with the researcher and are examples selected participants are currently doing or plan to do in the future. All of the participants volunteered or completed community service in a variety of ways during their high school years. Volunteering or giving back is an important part of their upbringing and family beliefs.

These findings are similar to previous studies which discussed the importance of family life in Latino culture, which included respecting cultural values of the family, displaying respect, and getting a good education (Gandara, 2009; Gandara et al., 2013; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Henry et al., 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Parents are willing to do whatever it takes to provide ways to assist their daughters in their educational pursuits. This includes formal education and family values (Woolley, 2009). A study conducted by Gallegos-Castillo (2006) indicated 22 working-class Mexican females, ages 14-18 knew their roles in their families but began questioning these traditional roles. Conversely, the participants in the current study knew what was expected of them but were still able to pursue their goals with full parental support from both parents and in some cases extended family.

The participants were fully aware of their parents' American dreams and understood the sacrifices made in order for them to pursue their aspirations. The young women were expected to be "good daughters" (Espinoza, 2010), and did not want to

disappoint or displease their parents. They shared various examples of their good daughter roles, which included translating, taking care of siblings, and working part time.

According to a community relations coordinator who mentors Hispanic females, she believed Latinas automatically have responsibilities they are expected to complete as soon as they are born into their families (Education Week Diplomas Count, 2012). In this current study, all participants understood and believed the importance of fulfilling their parents' expectations because their parents are working very hard to ensure they have a better life in the US. The American dream pursuit also entails giving back to the family, someone else, or to the community. This expectation also comes from the family belief system. The next section will present information about their educational experiences.

Educational Experiences – College "No Matter What"

All of the participants expressed they graduated from high school and enrolled in college in order to pursue their dreams and to fulfill their parents' expectations. These selected Latinas shared their educational experiences from elementary through high school. During their educational journey, each participant shared how much she wanted to learn and always enjoyed school for the most part. Some had better experiences at different phases of their education, but all think their mindset about education first started with their parents because it was imprinted on their minds at an early age. This mindset and their abilities helped propel them to college. The participants hope more opportunities will become available to them in terms of earnings and career opportunities.

The selected participants discussed whether they had positive and caring adults and other role models who assisted in their educational journey. They shared their experiences regarding honors and advanced placement courses, whether they participated

in extra-curricular activities or worked part time. The participants voiced their opinions about friends and/or peers, and belief in their own abilities to succeed.

Six participants were enrolled in English as a Second Language classes (ESOL) from a range of one to five years in their elementary schools. One additional participant enrolled in ESOL during her high school experience. Twelve participants shared they took a number of honors and/or advanced placement (AP) courses. One of the 12 participants earned her AA degree while in high school because she completed a dual enrollment program. Another student spent four years at a community college and earned an AA degree in criminal justice. Two other participants attended community college for one year. One of the 14 participants graduated one year early from high school in order to begin her college education. A number of participants either enrolled in a specific program at school to assist with college preparedness or were involved in a tutoring program. One student discussed her involvement in a college prep program that began in 6^{th} grade and ran through 12^{th} grade year. Each of the participants revealed they had at least one caring adult who saw potential, encouraged them to do their best, gave advice, and suggested they apply to colleges.

In the next section, the participants shared their educational experiences in elementary and secondary levels. They discussed their feelings about friends and peers; and shared whether they were involved in any special programs at school. The participants talked about their college aspirations and the college process and whether they had any caring adults who were willing to assist them. All of these areas tie together and will show how the participants made meaning of their high school experiences,

successfully graduate from high school, and enroll in a four-year post secondary institution.

Early Education Years – Elementary

For several of the participants, part of their elementary school experience was a time for learning English. Sacajawea, Danielle, Vanessa, Valentina, Roxanne, and Katie were enrolled in ESOL classes. Each participant could not remember all of the details, but each of the named Latinas seemed to have a unique experience. Sacajawea stated,

> When I moved to the US [at age five], I was in ESOL for an astoundingly very short amount of time. I learned English very, very quickly. I don't really know why that is. After they determined I learned English so quickly and spent very little time in ESOL, they tested me for gifted and was in gifted classes in elementary and middle.

Katie also came to the US at five years old. She was in the ESOL program during kindergarten and first grade. However, when the family moved, she was tested again for ESOL. She shared,

> They took me out of it and put me in the regular classroom setting. In 5th grade, I moved to my school in [city] where it was primarily White. They had me tested because they felt that I needed to go back into the ESOL program after so many years. I took the test and passed it with a really high score. So, I didn't need to.

Vanessa remembers being in ESOL but shared she almost failed. She was required to view a video and reconstruct the Lego building that was on the video. Vanessa still remembers what she looked like during that time. She communicated her ESOL experience by stating,

> I almost failed kindergarten because I was in ESOL because Spanish was my first language. They [the school] didn't really want me going on to first grade without speaking English. They thought I still needed ESOL classes. . . .I was only in ESOL in kindergarten.

It is interesting to note Vanessa, just like Katie, was retested during her 5th grade year because her teacher thought she had a speech impediment. Vanessa said she passed the

test and the person who tested her agreed with Vanessa that her English was fine. Vanessa shared, “That was weird. . . .I was in normal classes and spoke English very well.”

Valentina immigrated to the US when she was seven years old and was in ESOL for four years. She stated, “I came to this country when I was seven years old, and I went to the entire elementary or pre-k to12 school system here, but I actually started in second grade. [I was in] ESOL from second to fifth grade. . . .”

Roxanne stated she only remembers being in a pull-out program but did not understand why she was being pulled away from her class. She felt confused about the program. She also wondered whether her parents knew about the program. Roxanne shared,

> So going to elementary school I remember being in the ESOL program, though, I didn’t know that’s what it was at the time. I just remember I kept getting pulled out of class to go with this lady and read from these books. And she would always correct me on certain words. She was like “Say that word again but you have to pronounce it this way”. And I was confused. I’m like I don’t understand why I’m being pulled out.

Danielle, on the other hand, did not believe she should have been placed in ESOL in the first place because her parents told the new elementary school she spoke both Spanish and English. She thought her English was very good. She tried to inform her teacher about the mistake but no one listened. She voiced,

> So, they [school] took the initiative to put me in ESOL. I spent a couple of years in that. I felt I wasn’t supposed to be there. I saw other kids in there who didn’t know English. Sometimes there would be rowdy kids who didn’t want to read or sit down in class. It kinda felt like, I felt misplaced. . . .I felt like I knew English just as well as any of my other classmates and didn’t feel like the activities we did in that setting were necessarily helping me in any way like filling in any gaps that I would have had or they thought I had. . . . I remember telling the teacher and other people that I know English, and I didn’t need to be here, but they said that it was something because, ah, because I didn’t grow up speaking English, something like that. They said that I’d just stay there.

Naomi came to the US when she was almost 15 years old. She was the seventh participant who took ESOL classes, but she did not begin until her 9th grade year. Naomi also did not believe she should have been placed in ESOL. Her experience will be shared in the high school section of the findings.

Several participants described other experiences they had in elementary school. Two participants attended two different types of schools. One was a bilingual preschool and the other was a dual language school. Alyssa attended a bilingual school and noted there were no ESOL classes. She shared,

> Elementary school I started kindergarten not really knowing any English or much English. I went to a bilingual preschool. . . . The focus on making sure that the students were bilingual wasn't really there, so it was bilingual in that most of the teachers, if not all of them, were bilingual, but it wasn't like a focus. So, if a student spoke only Spanish, it wasn't really like they had to learn English. So, I only spoke Spanish. And in kindergarten no one spoke English. So I just kind of had to figure it out, and it was nice.

Lisa's experience was a little different because she attended a dual language school. The students were taught in both Spanish and English. Lisa spoke Spanish and learned English at the school. She vocalized her experience by stating,

> When I first went to elementary school, it was a dual language elementary school. We learned Spanish one day and English the other. I picked up English really, really fast. It was a mix of kids of different races. You just didn't have to be Spanish. It was to teach kids Spanish. So that was easy for us. We just had to learn English. I picked it up very quickly. After my first year, well between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, I learned English pretty well for being five years old. Going to school every day with people speaking English, you can pick it up easily watching tv shows and things like that.

Two participants discussed how comfortable they were when they attended their elementary schools in their neighborhood. On the other hand, when the families moved to a less diverse area, Katie and Mary shared how they felt different from other students

when they moved from a diverse elementary school to a less diverse elementary school. Katie was bullied, and Mary was fearful. Katie stated,

> When we first immigrated here we lived in [city]. I went to [name] elementary school, and it was a very diverse school. . . Then we moved to [city, state], and it wasn't diverse at all. I was like one in four Latinas in my classroom setting. I never got bullied in my old school, but I started getting bullied because of my race. I talked to my parents about it, but my dad said it was a better school for me. I noticed that after years later.

Mary also felt comfortable in her skin and heritage at her first elementary school. However, Mary believes she became less comfortable and a little fearful when her parents moved to a rural area. Unlike Katie, she was not bullied but felt out of place and a little frightened. She shared her experience in the following manner:

> When I was in elementary school, I think I didn't struggle with, you know your color or your race because I lived in a community where there were a lot of Spanish people. And a lot of my friends were Spanish. I had a wide range of friends of different ethnicities and different cultures. I was used to that, you know. You don't really notice the differences. . . .Towards the end of elementary school, we moved to a rural area in the state. In this rural area, there are not a lot of Spanish people. The majority is Caucasian. I think, like, from the moment on I felt a little displaced entering 5th grade. It was in October, in the 5th grade to this new school where there were not a lot of people I could relate to, all the professors. There was kind of not much diversity. So I was displaced and a little scared because things were different. That's probably where it started, my whole fear of approaching people. I remember I was very talkative as a kid.

Unlike Katie and Mary, Jenny enjoyed her entire elementary school experience. She liked the diversity and thought her teachers looked out for her by introducing her to different opportunities. She also enjoyed her math classes in elementary school and discussed what she liked best during that time. Jenny shared,

> My elementary school was very diverse. . . .I feel like I had teachers that really liked me or feel that I had some sort of potential because I was always chosen to go on these more enriching fieldtrips, I guess you could call them to like ABC News Studio or the US Capitol. Things that weren't for every student. . . . But, I was usually chosen and they were super fun. I didn't realize it but, I think that was their way to trying to help me, you know, broaden my horizons. . . . There were also these special math classes taught by, um, this one teacher who did special

> gifted classes. So, we like played the stock market. It was me and four other boys. That's also something I was chosen for.

One participant, Patricia, recalled moving to a new elementary school every year. She recalled these experiences are why she is very quiet to this day. However, she did mention that her school experience "hasn't been bad". As she spoke, she became a little emotional. She stated,

> Moving really affected me. It affected me hard. . . . Before that I had just moved through elementary school. So, every year I went to a new elementary school in a new town in [State name]. Other than making me quiet, none of them [the moves] really impacted me the way that moving to [another state] did. . . So yeah, moving to a completely different state, where I didn't know anyone [made me feel] alone, especially since none of my family lives down in [State].

As previously stated, the participants had interesting and sometimes unique experiences in elementary school. The selected Latinas who shared their experiences at this time in their lives had to learn English and adjust or deal with new learning environments. Several adjusted to a new environment more than once. With each adjustment, the participants had to learn how to cope and communicate while learning at the same time. The participants continue to share their stories from their secondary education experiences in the following section.

Secondary Education -Middle School Experience

Middle school is a time when many students are growing, experiencing emotional and physical changes, and trying to fit in with their surroundings and peers. It is also a time when adolescents are trying to figure out who they are and what they may want to do in life.

Throughout the interviews I learned a great deal about middle school experiences from the participants. The experiences ranged from lack of nurturing, being easy, and having difficulty in transitioning. Rainne shared her experience and stated her middle

school was not nurturing and did not offer other programs. She also communicated her school was diverse, but Hispanics were seen in a negative light. Others assumed all Hispanic parents were landscapers or cleaning ladies, and all girls would get pregnant before the end of high school. In order to combat some of the stereotypes, Rainne voiced, "I would volunteer in the morning to tutor kids who were having issues. It was the funniest thing ever because the kids who were making fun of you because you were different needed the help the most." In a slightly different vain, Angela thought middle school was difficult for any student because of puberty and other changes one is going through at that age. She was bullied and teased because one of her arms was shorter than the other. She shared,

> And it wasn't until I got older like 12 years old when I got into middle school that you could really notice a difference because I would get a growth spurt and everything else would grow except for that arm. And in eighth grade, I broke down when kids were laughing at me, pointing at me. And they had done this before. It was just this one time that I could not handle it anymore. . . .But it was in eighth grade that it clicked. That it was like, 'Angela, you can't think about what they have to say. They don't know any different.'

Middle school can be trying at times due to what the two participants shared. However, Jenny voiced she had a difficult time transitioning in 6th grade because she did not know the teachers. By 7th grade, though, she felt comfortable. She explained,

> I had a hard time transitioning my 6th grade, transition year. I really had a hard time, I guess, maybe because I didn't know the teachers or staff. . . . By 7th grade, it was super easy because I was comfortable by then. So was 8th grade. . . .

On the other hand, some students do not have any difficulties and begin to realize their potential and shine during this period of their lives. Although Valentina initially felt intimidated by certain students, she was the type of student who enjoyed her middle school years. She took pride in her accomplishments, and realized she was a very capable student. She shared,

> At the end of that sixth grade, she [the teacher] put me in the more advanced. In seventh grade she put me in pre-algebra. And in pre-algebra, I was already meeting the standards of eighth graders, so I was a year ahead. And I was with a lot more Caucasian students, which now doesn't intimidate me. But back then, that intimidated me a lot; and to the point where then, in eighth grade, I was in algebra. . . .There was barely any Hispanic kids in there, barely and. . . African American kids either. And for me to be placing really high up in these math skills, especially without having a tutor, without having any sort of help at home. . . .It meant a lot to me.

In addition, Valentina provided an example when she was able to complete a math problem that other students were not able to do. She stated the students she worked with thanked her for solving the problem. This made Valentina proud and she said, "So that just boosted up my self-esteem, that I can do academic work, that I do have this potential, and that I am not less than anybody."

As you can see from these examples, several participants experienced a variety of educational settings, thoughts, fears, and beliefs in themselves. In the next section, participants shared their high school experiences. They also discussed their friends and peers.

High School Experience

The high school experience is an important time for students to plan and/or finalize plans to graduate, enroll into college and/or go out into the workforce. All of the participants recalled their high school experiences with ease and were very happy to share their thoughts with the researcher. The interviews gave each participant a chance to reflect on this time in their lives. The interviews also gave each participant an opportunity to acknowledge the role their parents, teachers, and other adults played in their decisions to graduate and attend college.

Twelve participants took honors and/or AP courses in high school. Several participants participated in extracurricular activities and/or volunteered at various places.

Some of the participants did seek assistance from their teachers and/or guidance counselors. Some of them also received words of encouragement from their teachers. Participants, such as, Roxanne and Lisa, experienced navigating the system on their own in some instances because their parents could not assist or they did not see a need to ask for help. Naomi did not care for her initial experience in high school. On the other hand, Sacajawea, Alyssa, Danielle, and Valentina reflected on a "watershed moment" that changed their lives.

Patricia, the participant who moved a lot during her elementary years, moved to another state due to the family's financial opportunity. She had to adjust not only to a new area, but also adjust to a school that was not diverse. She shared her high school experience by stating,

> The high school I went to was predominantly White. Most people there, their families were farmers, and back in [home state] no one had a farm, and my school was pretty diverse. . . .There were a lot of different cultures and background. . . Here in [new named state], or at least where I had spent the last couple years, grew up with one another. So everyone knew what was going on in everyone else's life. I took honors classes every single year and then senior year I decided to take AP classes. . . . For the most part, I did pretty well. I was able to get straight A's. The only class I struggled with was AP literature. . . .I pulled a B in that class, which I was pretty happy with that.

Conversely, Katie, the undocumented student, had a great academic experience because she focused on her studies. Her mom did not believe in participating in after school activities. Her mom believed in a "school to home" mindset. However, Katie did belong to a number of honor society clubs. She shared,

> A lot of people were surprised at how well I did in school. In my senior year, I told people about my immigration status; and they were surprised then because they would never expect an undocumented Latina student to be graduating with such a 4.2 GPA. I was vice president of National Honors Society, president of the International Club. I graduated with honors. I graduated with 10 or 12 chords. I was in math honors society, science honor society, history honor society. I was in every honor society, even art honor society.

Roxanne attended two different high schools. One was very diverse and the other was very upper class and homogenous. She noticed the differences in students and wondered how things would have been had she been able to remain at the high school that had more offerings and a better reputation. In addition, Roxanne was used to doing things on her own, such as parent/teacher conferences. She stated,

> You know just always I was in charge. I would just tell my parents to sign here for permission slips and this is what I'm doing, and I was always the one in control of that. If I wanted my parents to come to parent-teacher conference night, I would let them know. If I didn't, then I just simply didn't let them know.

On a similar note Lisa was also independent in the sense she completed school forms and had her parents sign them. In addition, she attended a magnet high school and did not inform her parents she had a difficult time transitioning nor did she let them know when her grades dropped. Lisa shared,

> In high school, it's kind of where I set my parents aside. They didn't go to any back to school nights or parent conferences or anything like that. Any forms that had to be filled out, I filled out all the forms and just got my mom to sign them. . . . My parents never really had a problem with it. They just assumed I was doing the best thing that was right for me. . . . Freshman year was kind of a hard transition because I went to the magnet school. . . . I kind of plummeted in school, but my parents never new. They assumed my report cards were always 3.5's and higher. They never checked. . . . Junior year was supposed to be really hard. I took a step back and only took one AP. . . .In my senior year, I ended up taking three AP's and doing really, really well.

Watershed Moments

Several of the participants had "watershed moments" or events that changed the trajectory of their lives. Sacajawea used this phrase to express how she felt when she moved to a private, prestigious school in the Virgin Islands. She saw the difference between her public school in the states and what she experienced at the school on the island. She stated,

> And then I went to a very wealthy private school and lived there for about 10 months. After that we moved back to [state], back to the exact same high school. And I guess you could say this was a watershed moment or event in my life. . . .I feel like I got the best of both, um not the best of both worlds but definitely got to see two worlds. . . . And so, when I moved back to [state], same friends, same people I grew up with, but very, very different. We were no longer on the same page. . . . I didn't want anything to do with them and was hoping to reconnect with my friends in [Virgin Islands], and that's when I decided I wanted to go [college] far away.

Alyssa had a similar experience in that she believed a special program gave her a different perspective on where her life could change. Share shared, **"**I applied to this program called Prep for Prep; and in a very dramatic phrase I'll say that Prep for Prep changed my life." She continued to share her experience by stating,

> High school was hard. [Laughter]. . . .I think It was the first time where I was really academically challenged, and that was really hard for me, especially because since I had gotten into this program and I had – I was the only one in our family here that went to private school, it was a very big deal, I think. . . .And so, for me just the general concept of me struggling academically was hard to bring up. . . . I got a few tutors. I ended up doing fine, but I was just very nervous about how to approach that.

Danielle, who experienced depression in high school and was not sure what her life would look like, completed a dual enrollment program. She shared her guidance counselor told her about the program. She gave this option some thought and decided to pursue it. She voiced,

> I guess that's when I started thinking about, um, you know, if I took those classes then I'm working towards some goal. That goal is college and transferring credits. . . . I can do this regardless of however old I am. . . . I got to a point where I accumulated a lot of credits, and so I decided why not just finish and do my associate's. That took a lot more planning than I thought because you really had to work with both the high school and the community college. . . . There was no real program in my school and nobody really knew anything about both. That was really left up to me. . . .

Danielle received help with her schedule from her mother. Then she would speak with her counselor in order to have the schedule set up. Danielle shared she realized she

knew what direction she was going. She also shared her guidance counselor informed her that the school district wanted to interview her because of the dual enrollment. Danielle stated, "The school district, decided to follow what I had done to get my associate's to make a plan for other students to do that. They came in that week and my mom was all excited. It was on tv."

Being able to expand one's outlook can come from a variety of ways. The previous participants experienced this awakening through travel to colleges, attending a magnet or prep school, and through a specialized program. Another way to develop can be through taking challenging courses.

Valentina shared taking Spanish courses in high school helped her feel comfortable and learn more about her culture. In addition, she took AP courses in Spanish Language and Spanish literature. Taking these AP courses helped to give her a different perspective about her culture and her life. She shared,

> And that just opened my eyes to a whole 'nother world, especially literature. . . .I was very sort of – my mindset was just very narrow at that point; and once I took it, it just expanded my mindset to see the world outside of [named] High School. At that point, also, my teacher encouraged me to take other AP courses. . . .And I took AP Chemistry.

Naomi, on the other hand was initially very unhappy with her high school experience because she was placed in the ESOL classes during her 9th grade year. This was also her first time in a public school in the US. Naomi communicated to me she felt insulted and requested to be removed from the class. She shared,

> The system put me on classes that were below my level, and I didn't like that. I tried to ask my adviser why they put me into such low level. . . . I wanted to learn something more. I wanted to start a new life. I wanted to be, um, smart. I wanted to learn new things. . . .That was impossible because they were, like, you are from a developing country so we think that you should be in these classes. So, I got upset about that and I started skipping classes. . . .

After visiting Peru in order to see one of her older sister's graduate, Naomi realized her dilemma. She told me she needed to regroup in order to graduate from high school. Therefore, Naomi made a decision to finish her high school education in order to move on to college. She stated,

> I realized I had lost two years of my high school education. Then I started writing and doing my assignments. My senior year was the first time that I read a book in English and I finished it.

The participants' voices shared interesting experiences while in high school. A couple had no issues, two had transition difficulties, and one really struggled. Several participants learned a great deal about their abilities when they were exposed to new opportunities. All of the participants graduated and moved on to college.

While in school, the participants had a variety of experiences when it came to friends and peers. Each Latina had at least one friend or peer they could count on for support. For the most part, these friends and/or peers tended to pursue similar opportunities. The following section provides a glimpse into their lives and how they navigated the system with or without friends during different points in their educational journey.

Friends and Peers

All of the participants discussed their friendships from elementary through high school and shared their thoughts about the types of friends and/or peers they knew. A few discovered they had friends of only one race. One participant met her first White friend in elementary school. Another participant had friends who came from a variety of racial or ethnic backgrounds. Sacajawea shared,

> My friends regarded me as the smartest one. That was my redeeming quality because I was the only Latina when all my friends were not. I was pretty and my boyfriend was, like, White. So it wasn't weird and because I was smart and

> wasn't like your typical Latinas that give Latinas a bad name. Like super attitudinal or what some people would call ghetto.

Roxanne shared she met her first White friend in either first or second grade. She did not really understand the racial difference per se, but knew the student was different. She based this difference solely on hair color. Roxanne shared,

> And she was just the sweetest girl and her mother was a substitute teacher at the school. And I was like, yay, I have a friend, but she was just a friend. She wasn't like my White friend or anything of that sort. I was still young. But I did realize that she was different from me, but I mean as far as that goes. I mean, I was just like she has blonde hair and I have black hair.

Roxanne continued her conversation to inform me she made other friends as she was going through elementary school. She stated,

> I remember I started to develop more friendships with Latinas. But what was different I remember was some of them were Mexican, some of them from El Salvador, Guatemala, but I remember the one thing was hair. And my hair has always been this bushy, gets voluminous-in-the-humidity hair. . . .But they had the most beautiful straight, straight shiny hair; and I always wanted to have really, really straight, straight hair.

Alyssa shared she had a lot of White friends, but in middle prep school, she stated she only had Black friends. As she moved through the grades in prep school, she had less White friends. This change in friendships could be as a result of her participation in the minority only after school prep for prep program. Her reasons were,

> I think as I got older and as I got closer and closer to senior year, I started having less and less White friends, which was kind of just me giving up, I think, on having to explain certain things or being out of my comfort zone and having to, I think, help people get things I thought they didn't get or – So, I just kind of stopped pushing myself really, I think. I kind of gave up on being outside of my comfort zone. I figured the people that I'm friends with should be people I'm comfortable around. . . .

Rainne discussed how a group of friends can decrease over time and that a person does not have to have a lot of friends. She vocalized, "I had two best friends in high school. Just two. I mean 'til the very end. They're completely different. One is Latina as

well." Angela had a similar experience and stated, ". . . .I just had my best friend who's still my best friend now who I had ever since fourth grade; and I didn't need anybody else. I was content." Katie also stated, "I had one best friend in high school." In addition, Katie also shared,

> I was usually the only Latina in my honors and AP classes. So, people would make jokes about them and call them the "Latino kids". If they were talking to me, they would say, "No offense, but…." And just keep going. I'm never the type of person, if something is wrong, I'll say "Don't say that." Once I told them yeah what they are doing is wrong, but it doesn't mean because they're Latino that's why they are doing it. I would tell my friends.

At a certain point in a student's life, friends can change or evolve over time due to any number of factors. Sometimes, though, a person may have friends for life. Vanessa was excited to talk about her experience in making friends and was excited to inform me they are still friends. She stated,

> My friends are still my best friends 'til this day. Actually, I knew them but I got close to them in high school. We're all Latinas. We're the three Musketeers. A lot of my friends were Latino, but I did have a lot of English-speaking friends, non-Latina friends as well. I remember there would be some non-Latino people. They would love our culture and would try to go out and eat our food. They would take Spanish just because they just loved our culture. I did have more Latino friends than non-Latino friends.

At times making friends can be difficult especially if one is going through a transition based upon moving out of the area to a new environment or attending a different type of school. Patricia had difficulty transitioning in her second year of high school because she moved from one state to another. She stated, "After sophomore year, I was able to make friends. It kind of just started off as an accident and then it just tumbled into a great group of friends that I've got now. . . ." Lisa also had difficulty making friends because she was accepted into a magnet high school and had to figure out how to make new friends. She shared, "All of my friends from middle school did not get in.

They were really smart, but their grades weren't always the best. . .So it was hard making that transition to find friends who I liked. . . . You feel like a new kid."

Mary, on the other hand, did not make many friends or participate in any after school activities. Her mother believed in the "school to home" mindset, which meant one goes to school to learn and return home to study, not to hang out. Mary accepted this expectation and concentrated on her studies. Mary voiced,

> I didn't make too many friends. . . .Then in high school, I spent time not outside of school. If you were out with friends, you were up to no good. . . .I didn't really care for it. I was just focused on school to be honest. So I kind of just stuck to myself. I had two close friends. I've lost touch with them now, but we were fairly close back in high school.

Naomi, the student who immigrated at almost 15 years old, stated she did not make many friends. She believed the Latino students were into activities she did not care about. Naomi also shared she got along better with African American students. She communicated,

> I didn't get along much with Hispanics in my school. They had different views from me. . . . They always wanted to go party or, um, something different than me. . . . There was no connection. I would get more involved with Black African Americans.

Valentina had an interesting outlook on friends and continued to hang out with friends who probably were not the type of friends she needed in her life. This continued until a situation negatively impacted her reputation among her Hispanic friends. As a result of the negative situation, she lost her Hispanic friendships. She stated,

> Growing up in – or in high school, my freshman year, I had really hoodlum type friends, actually. I actually had two boyfriends that . . .were gang members. Um, and I remember I would always hang out with them before school. . . .And they would try to influence me to do things. They tried to push me into doing weed. They tried to push me into doing alcohol. But something in the back of my head always told me that that was wrong, and I just knew that was wrong. And I saw how they would skip school and how they would always be dazed, and I knew that wasn't something I wanted to do, let alone, I was scared to do that. . . . My-

> one of my ex-boyfriends, also Hispanic, also a hoodlum, went out with my best friend. But I always felt as though she was very gullible. . . . She would always be swayed by different opinions. . . .He tried to kiss me and I went to her and I told her that. What I didn't know is that she had lost her virginity to him that same night. . . .So, it just created a huge mess, to the point I lost her, I lost him, I lost a lot of my friends – a lot of my Hispanic friends. . . .

After this incident occurred, Valentina shared an ugly note about her was written on a bathroom stall and she was upset and embarrassed. After it was cleaned up, she realized she would have to make new friends. She shared, "I started hanging out with the 'band geeks' and I started hanging out with people that were in the capstone and the magnet programs. And they just took me in." Even though Valentina was already enrolled in AP courses, she shared she realized these new friends had it together, and she began to look at her future in a different and more positive light. Valentina emphasized, "So, I thank God every single day that that whole mess of letting go of my friends had to happen so that I could come into contact with other type of people that had different sense and different priorities."

Quite a few of the participants shared different experiences about how they formed, maintained, or changed friendships. Each participant figured out who and what types of friendships would work best for them and adapted when necessary. These participants noted their friendships did or did not change their perspective on their goals. In the one instance, the participant realized her reputation was damaged, but was able to make new friends, which in the long run helped her to place more focus on education and educational goals.

College Aspirations

Many of the participants stated in various ways "college was never an option". It was the only option. When discussing their families or college aspirations, this type of

phrase came up numerous times. Vanessa stated, “I never not thought about going to college. My mother always told us we were going to college so it was never an option.” Similarly, Mary noted, “. . . it was always thought that I was going to college. . . .There’s really no other plan.” Alyssa shared, “I never really thought about going to college. It was kind of a given. It was an expectation.” Katie also voiced a similar sentiment. She stated, “I think I have always thought I am going to go to college. My dad never really gave me the option not to.”

On the other hand, Lisa made a decision in third grade to do well in school because she felt she had something to prove because her family was the only Latino family in her neighborhood at that time. She stated, “No one really knows that we are here. . . .I’m going to do well, graduate top in my middle school . . .go to the best school. . .and go to [university] and I’m here.” Another participant, Sacajawea, shared even though her mom expected her to go to college, she did not take going to college seriously until 10th grade. All of the participants knew they were expected to attend college.

The only obstacle in some cases was how to pay for college, but parents were willing to do what it takes no matter what. In the meantime, the participants worked hard to earn good grades and make their parents proud. During one interview, Roxanne shared her parents did not require her to do any housework or chores if she had homework to complete. Other participants alluded their jobs were to maintain good grades. However, this was the expectation whether the participant assisted in the home or held a part time job.

The participants gave the impression they were very proud of their accomplishments and were willing to share how they were able to navigate the system.

All of the participants had aspirations of attending college. Some knew at a very early age and others discovered their desire at a later point in time. While in high school, all but two participants took honors and AP classes, and several joined various clubs. Two participants shared they participated in honor societies. A few participated in extra-curricular activities with the expectation these types of activities would help them get into college. One participant stated she was not allowed to participate in after school activities because her mother believed in "school to home" mindset. The participants sought advice from parents, teachers, and friends regarding the college process. A few were involved in special programs, such as AVID, math, science and engineering academy, Prep-to-Prep, a college partnership program, a university, or received tutoring from an outside entity. In the following section, the participants voiced what they learned about themselves and the college going process through these programs.

Special Programs

There are high schools that not only offer honors and AP courses but also offer specialized programs. These programs may vary by title, length, and types of students, but are set up in order to help students navigate the educational system by providing adult support, strategies to maintain good grades, and assist students in the college process. The first program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) will be discussed.

Vanessa participated in the AVID program from 8th through 12th grade. She shared the program offered a class each year. In her 8th grade year, the program focused on getting students ready for the rigors of high school. In 9th and 10th grades, Vanessa took the PSAT's. While in 11th grade, she was required to prepare for and take the SAT's

and she shared, ". . . looking at colleges you wanted and starting the applications. . . . In 12th grade, we had to apply to five schools and apply for scholarships." Vanessa informed me these tasks were requirements and students received grades. She thought the program was easy.

Another in-house program that emphasized STEM was called the math, science and engineering academy. Because Danielle enjoyed math, she applied and was accepted into this high school program. She explained, "It's a two-year program that you can re-apply for the other two years." Danielle completed two years and shared this program helped her ". . . formed a sense of self and these are the people I'm taking classes with. This is sort of my designated group." Danielle decided not to complete the final two years of this program because she was no longer interested in becoming an engineer. She switched into the dual enrollment program instead and graduated high school with an associate's degree.

Two participants attended different high schools but were also involved in special programs outside of their schools. Both programs encouraged getting good grades, attending college, provided college tours, and supplied other assistance. Both Alyssa and Katie shared they appreciated and enjoyed the programs.

At the end of her fifth grade year, Alyssa applied and was accepted to a program called Prep for Prep. She communicated the program started in 6th grade and students attended after school and on Saturdays. She stated, ". . . It's pretty intense. . . .You're allowed one absence per the whole program. So like, you have to be really committed." Alyssa shared the program was specifically for minority students and once admitted to this program, ". . .You're in it for life." At the end of her 6th grade year, Alyssa again

participated in this program during the summer. She then began her high school career at a private prep high school. However, as she already shared, Prep for Prep continued to play an important role in her life. The program provided SAT practice sessions, assisted her with writing/critiquing her college essays, and paying the college application fees. In addition the program sponsored overnight college trips, and Alyssa shared, "my first real college experience".

Katie participated in a college program outside of school. This program was for minority students. Katie stated, "What it did for me specifically, it gave me all the answers my parents couldn't give me about college." The program provided free college trips and paid for all college applications fees. Katie also learned about her early college acceptance through the program. Katie stated she had an advocate who checked on her periodically to see how she was doing in school and whether or not she needed anything.

Another outside tutoring group worked with Naomi and other Hispanic and African American students. The program involved tutoring students in order to assist them in doing well in high school and helping them move on to college. Naomi shared she was tutored before classes. She stated, "It was motivating because I knew they would come to the high school . . . and would give you one hour and thirty minutes. They would tutor you in math and English and then leave." Naomi indicated the people were very nice and always provided breakfast. She remembered attending one trip. She also remembered the program helped her complete the FAFSA and search for scholarships. Naomi shared, "I applied to five scholarships from them. It was small amount of money for scholarships, but it was still something." In addition, Naomi told me the students were

paid for attending the tutoring sessions, and the program also gave students money as a graduation gift.

Not all participants were involved in specialized programs. They attended high school, took their studies seriously and graduated. However, there was one student who took the SAT's at the age of 13. Lisa stated she took the SAT's through a university program. She also participated in a number of field trips to different universities. Lisa shared she always enjoyed school and was determined to attend a magnet high school, and she did achieve that goal. Jenny on the other hand attended Latino leadership conferences. She was actively involved in a minority girls' group at her high school, which included discussions about how to get into college, how to pay for college and how to stay in college. She was also in a Latina leadership club in both middle and high school. She stated she found it to be "very empowering".

The participants shared a variety of their personal stories about their college aspirations and what they did to maintain grades. Those who did participate in special programs indicated they were very appreciative of the additional assistance they received because typically their parents could not help them. The next section provides information on the college process some of the participants undertook.

College Process

Earlier in Chapter 4, family beliefs were discussed. Every participant knew their parents wanted them to achieve the American dream. In their parents' hearts and minds the only way to achieve that dream is to graduate from college. Rainne shared her parents told her, "You will go nowhere if you are not educated. . . .That little piece of paper that say [you] graduated from here, that is your golden ticket. That is your ticket to get on any plane to go anywhere that you would ever want to go."

In this section several participants shared their college process experience by telling who helped them, who did not, and who went through the process on her own.

While in the Virgin Island school, Sacajawea noticed ". . .you had a college counselor, you knew you were going to college. . . ." However she believed in her home state, schools left you on your own to figure out the process. Therefore, her stepdad assisted her through the college process. Sacajawea shared,

> In terms of the college process, my stepdad was there all along the way, whereas my mom was kind of like, she didn't really understand it. It's very cultural. In Columbia you don't leave the house at 18. You leave the house when you get married.

While Sacajawea's stepdad helped her research, visit, and apply to colleges, Roxanne stated one of her teachers encouraged her to ". . . really emphasize that I was Mexican American. . . and really talk about that experience." Roxanne assumed because she was a good student, a minority, took AP courses, and participated in several clubs, she would only apply to Ivy League schools. She did not include any safety schools nor did she seek out a counselor for advice because of a previous disappointing experience. She was rejected by every school. This experience caused her to feel like a failure and to question the "good daughter" expectation

Participants who were involved with special programs received a great deal of assistance from advocates which enabled them to experience a smooth college process. Alyssa shared, "They advised me in ways that the, I think, college advisors at my high school didn't. Even though they were very good at their jobs, I don't think that any of them were very prepared for helping kids of color in . . . their college process."

Danielle and Angela stated they did not receive much assistance from the counselors at school. Both participants spent time at home researching and discussing

plans with their families. Therefore, they already knew what they wanted to do after high school and did not need much support from their guidance counselors. Danielle shared,

> I guess I met with him every year two or three times a year, especially in my senior year. . . because I was only taking two classes at the high school at that point. . . .Signing off on this form or filling out that form. . . .Not necessarily figuring out what I wanted to do because I had already done that at home.

Angela also shared her counselor did not really help her either because she already knew what she wanted to do and where she wanted to go. She and her family started discussing different colleges when she was young. She stated, "I just kinda did my research and knew what was what."

Two participants informed me they did communicate with their counselors. Patricia said, "The only thing my guidance counselor really did was sit me down and take me through how to go about applying for college, which was really nice. Jenny shared, "I was really close to my counselors. They were more easier to talk to for some reason."

One unique situation occurred with Rainne. She sought out her counselor to discuss her reasons for wanting to graduate a year early in order to begin college sooner. The counselor asked Rainne to think about it first. Rainne returned with the same determination to graduate early. The counselor and the parents met, and the principal approved the request. Rainne shared, ". . . my counselor was a big reason I could graduate in three years".

Rainne was successful in her quest to graduate a year early from high school because she believed she was ready to begin her college career and had permission from her parents. Roxanne, however, wanted to leave high school in 9th or 10th grade and attend college in another state in order to earn an associate's degree but was not able to obtain this opportunity for herself. Roxanne shared she did not believe the counselor put

enough effort in getting the information needed. She also stated, "I think the other school wasn't really being cooperative or responsive. . . .I'm like well, I guess I'll just have to do everything myself then." Subsequently, Roxanne shared she admitted to herself she just wanted to get away from her parents at that point in her life. Conversely, when it was time to apply to colleges, Roxanne only listened to one teacher who told her to emphasize that she was Latina. Since Roxanne listened to the teacher and relied on herself instead of seeking assistance from her guidance counselor, she was rejected at every college. Roxanne revealed her disappointment when she was not accepted to any colleges. She voiced,

> So when your whole life has been you have to go to college, you have to repay back the struggles of your parents, and get that career and show them that all of this has not been in vain. When I got all those rejection letters, I just had a breakdown. I'm like well, what am I supposed to do now? This was what I was supposed to do and a lot of that part defined who I was. . . .But it just was a very bad time because I felt like I had failed.

The participants shared their educational experiences from elementary through high school and were able to articulate positive and negative situations that arose during that time. Sadker et al. (2009) shared middle school Hispanic girls are happy with themselves in elementary school but believed they lose confidence by the time they reached high school. The selected Latinas in my study discussed their educational experiences and found themselves adjusting, learning, growing, and enhancing their confidence levels. NWLC & MALDEF (2009) confirmed 98% of Latinas have high aspirations to graduate from high school but found 80% stated they would graduate from college. A disconnect seem to exist between aspirations and self doubts in the NWLC & MALDEF (2009) study. The participants in this study also discussed their parents'

expectations for how far they needed to go with their education in order to become successful. All parents expected their daughters to graduate from college, secure jobs, and begin careers. Parental support and encouragement were found to be very important in other studies (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Henry et al., 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008; Rolon, 2000).

Twelve of the 14 participants took honors and/or AP courses, and some participated in a variety of activities throughout their high school experience (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Gandara et al., 2013; Rolon, 2000). Several of the participants were involved in programs which provided more opportunities to expand their horizons and prepare them for college (Gandara et al, 2013). All participants had at least one peer or friend who was available to help them throughout their educational experiences (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gandara, 1995; Gandara, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

All participants knew college was in their future and, with the assistance of family, teachers, peers, and programs, they were able to graduate and enroll in a post-secondary institution. Gonzalez (2013) asserted schools must change in order to assist students in understanding and accessing the knowledge required to be successful. Crisp, Taggart & Nora (2014) found the results of their systematic review "suggest that Latina/o students' college experiences are directly influenced by academic experiences and performance prior to college" (p. 14).

Advocacy –Importance of Caring

Students spend a great deal of time at school where they learn to get along with peers and make friends with students. This is also an important time for them to feel supported by a caring adult at their school. Each of the participants named at least one caring adult who crossed their paths while in middle and/or high school. Whether the

caring adult was a counselor, advocate, teacher, or administrator, the person seemed to leave a positive mark on that specific participant.

Most of the participants discussed how one or more teachers made a difference in their lives. Danielle shared she had a drama teacher who was "kinda like a mom" because she encouraged her to follow her dreams. By working on the drama productions, Danielle noted she learned valuable time management skills. Her teacher who taught Japanese was also a special teacher to Danielle because she saw that teacher as a "motherly figure". As a result, Danielle is pursuing a minor in Japanese language and hopes to complete a semester in Japan. She stated she visited both teachers during her winter break. On a similar note, Roxanne said her advisor in the Shakespeare club helped her with "my creative side. . . .I never thought I would do theater, and she would encourage me to read for plays and just really get outside my comfort zone."

Angela shared she remembered her third grade teacher who was very "bubbly". She also stated, "She was my first Black teacher and she was so happy to see us all the time. . . .She was always so inspirational and she always picked me up." In that same vein, Sacajawea noted she had the same Black teacher in the 6th and 8th grades, and she "taught me how to write". Angela also stated her chemistry honors teacher and her anatomy teacher were very caring and helpful to her. The chemistry teacher was very strict, but Angela liked the fact he pushed his students. She also thought he was funny. Sacajawea believed "6th and 8th grades had the most influence. . . .She [teacher] was so strict and expected so much from all of us."

Vanessa had both Latino and American teachers and had "really good relationships with my teachers. They were really nice." Valentina shared her Spanish

teachers were Latin and she believes, ". . . .They really influenced me. . . .They saw some sort of potential in me." Valentina also communicated having a Latin Spanish teacher made her feel great and comfortable. She noted her Spanish teacher suggested she take AP classes. When Valentina had problems in the AP chemistry class, her Spanish teacher advised her to not drop the class; and Valentina sought assistance from the AP chemistry teacher. Valentina also shared she liked her middle school math teacher who she thought was from Jamaica. She felt the teacher was "jolly" and "loving". She also believed this teacher saw potential in her abilities and expected her to participate in the class.

Rainne shared her thoughts about her biology teacher. She thought he was a good resource, and he wrote a college recommendation for her. She stated, "I actually still have contact. . . .He emails me occasionally. . . ." Lisa shared her genetics teacher "was the best". Mary stated she was afraid of her teachers but did like her English teacher because "she thought I had some potential. So I wanted to please her". Naomi remembered a teacher told her she was his best student and would say,

> 'Hey, have you seen my best student? She is the best.' I was like I don't have all A's why you're saying that. But yet he would always say something like that. I guess he saw I was really trying hard on my senior year. . . .He'd ask, 'Where are you thinking of going for school?'

The participants mentioned above spoke highly of their teachers. According to the participants, these teachers made a point to establish rapport, encourage and offer support. Katie spoke about her guidance counselor and stated her advocate and guidance counselor were "both the most supportive teachers I had in school." She also stated,

> The counselor always went out of her way to find scholarships I could apply to. She called [university] because they were asking for my social security number and it [application] wouldn't move from the step. She figured out a way for me to apply without having to fill out that part.

The majority of participants had at least one caring adult in their life during their education. There were a couple of students who shared their guidance counselors were not very inviting or were cold to them. For example, Naomi stated, "They [guidance counselors] were not nice. . . . They didn't care. . . .She would always give me bad news or tell me to come the next day." Roxanne noted her high school counselor was not helpful when she tried to find out information about attending college after 10th grade in order to earn a diploma and an associate's degree. She stated, ". . . she pretty much gave up right there and then." Roxanne believes this experience caused her not to seek help from the counselor when she decided to apply to colleges during her senior year. Roxanne stated, ". . .I'd been used at that point to doing everything on my own. . .You know just always I was in charge. . . ."

The participants identified several types of teachers and counselors who assisted them and made a difference in their lives. Only two participants shared negative experiences. However in those two scenarios, those participants still had at least one caring adult.

In a couple of instances, the participants not only talked about caring teachers or guidance counselors but discussed other caring adults who assisted them with the college process. Rainne and Alyssa discussed the type of support they received from an advisor or advocate who made a difference in their lives. Overall, the participants seemed to have positive experiences with various caring adults.

Rainne shared there was a female advisor who spoke several languages and met with Latino students and their parents. During the meetings, the advocate would discuss having a vision for going to college. The advisor was very outgoing and Rainne stated,

"If you would see her in the hallway, she would always come and she would always hug you and kiss you on the cheek and greet you like she was your grandma." Rainne also shared two mottos the advocate would say to students such as, "The sky's the limit. . . .Don't be ashamed you're Latino." Alyssa's experience was a little different. Her relationship with an advocate began in middle school. She noted, "Prep sent a counselor to every student that they have to meet with them once a month. . . .And we talked about like how I was doing in school and how I was doing socially and my family life." Once Alyssa began the prep high school, she still had access to her prep advocate. When she began struggling academically, the prep advocate made sure she had tutors. Alyssa was also able to apply for scholarships through the Prep for Prep program. In addition, Alyssa shared she was able to speak with a diversity officer at her high school and remembered this was a "safe haven" for students.

Gandaras and Contreras (2009) stated "many studies have shown that teachers hold lower expectations for students of color than for white students and that these lowered expectations can result in diminished achievement" (p. 83). Research from Garcia-Reid (2007) and Zambrana (2002) indicated Latinas will not be successful if they believe their teacher attitudes are negative and uncaring. The act of caring is very important to Latinos. They will work very hard and do not want to disappoint their teachers if they know the teachers care about them (Valenzuela, 1999). This type of caring requires relationship building, which means both students and teachers must give and take (Valenzuela, 1999). According to the participants, having a caring adult made a lasting impression on them. They expressed their appreciation for the support the caring adults provided.

While in high school, most of the participants discussed their communities where they lived and whether they participated in community activities at school and/or in their communities. The fifth and final theme is called community connections. Community service through school or through the family can be seen as giving back as a way to thank those who assisted the participants while they navigated the school system. The findings from this theme are presented in the next section.

Community Connections

The participants discussed growing up in their neighborhoods. Patricia shared she moved a great deal during her younger years. She stated, "I didn't really participate in any community activities." The majority of the participants were able to provide more detailed information about their neighborhood surroundings and whether they participated in community activities. Half of the participants shared they participated in community events or activities.

Danielle shared her dad started a Mexican traditional holiday celebration at the local fire department. Danielle stated, "It was geared in getting the community together and teach younger people about the Posada . . . the birth of Jesus Christ and Joseph and Mary finding a place to stay." Danielle volunteered by handing out candy, hot chocolate, and presents. She emphasized she always felt like the "token" kid. Once other Latino families became involved in the celebration, she got to know them and felt much better about her neighborhood. Katie dances in a Bolivian dance group. This group is engaged in fundraisers, and Katie volunteers to assist in the fundraisers each year.

Mary stated she grew up in a safe neighborhood and connected by attending the neighborhood church. She also noted she was an altar girl and worked with students. On a similar note, Naomi became connected with her community about two and half years

ago when she joined the church. In addition she works with students in church who may have questions about improving their grades or the college process. Like Mary and Naomi, Valentina teaches Sunday school at her local church and volunteers at the local fire house. Lisa shared every Thanksgiving and Christmas her family took food to the local food bank and helped serve the food. Lisa was also a youth group leader in her neighborhood church. The youth group donated food and made sandwiches to give out to the homeless.

The other participants shared they moved around frequently when they were in elementary school. Therefore, it was difficult to feel connected to a specific neighborhood. Once they settled into a neighborhood, some of the families were involved and some were not involved in any community activities. In one example, Alyssa remembered in elementary school, her mom was very active in the parent-teacher association. Jenny enjoyed her neighborhood and rode bikes and participated in church school. Sacajawea and Angela lived in nice, suburban upper middle class neighborhoods and remembered having nice neighbors. However, both stated their families were not involved in any community activities.

A variety of organizations have established family-school involvement or community engagement initiatives in order to connect and improve relationships with families, communities, organizations, and to enhance educational and other opportunities for students. DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) discussed the National PTA's six standards for accomplishing this goal. Another program entitled, Enhancing Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE), was established in 1997 to specifically work in

areas with large Latino populations in order to engage parents, families, and communities in assisting Latino students in their pursuit of education.

Two Additional Emergent Themes

Religion. During the interviews several participants referenced their beliefs in religion and the important role religion plays in their lives. These comments emerged when the researcher asked participants to talk about themselves or their family background, definition of success, or involvement in any community activities. For example, Mary shared her definition of success would include her Catholic religion. She stated, "Success would also be sustaining my Catholic faith." Mary also voiced, "My parents . . . are the ones who taught me the value of religion, who taught me my morals, who taught me to, no matter what, just always be confident." Alyssa indicated "most of our family is Catholic and . . .there's a lot of time spent in the church." Alyssa emphasized she was active in Sunday school and youth group, but stopped attending in the 10th grade. Lisa shared her parents allowed her to choose her faith, and she chose Catholicism. Lisa stated,

> Growing up the way I did in poverty and things that happened in my life. I think without my faith I wouldn't be able to get through what I did. I think that because of my faith, I'm able to survive here in college and I am able to do what I need to do to finish and to get my degrees.

This unexpected emergent theme could be developed further. This research would be significant in order to gather more detailed information about how religion may or may not play an important role in Latina educational success. See Chapter 5 for additional information.

Hair/Skin Color and Complexion. This second unexpected theme emerged when the researcher asked participants to talk about themselves, how their Latina identity

influenced their growing up, or school experiences. Three participants shared their concerns or views about hair and skin color and/or complexion. Roxanne shared she did not identify as a Latina because she grew up in a certain area and attended a minority majority school. She surrounded herself with African American friends. Roxanne stated, "So it was either I was too American to be fully Latina or I was too Latina to be fully American." She continued the discussion by informing the researcher that her life was "influenced by Black culture". Angela, on the other hand, was concerned and shared, "Also being darker, that's always been hard." Alyssa admitted her confusion about African Americans. She voiced,

> Prep for Prep is only for students of color, but it was mostly Black students, and that was my first real introduction to Black students who weren't Latino, and so for most of my life up until that point I had equated blackness as another subsection of being Latino because the only Black people I knew were Latino.

This information was very intriguing and deserves further investigation. Additional research may discover how Latina women feel about their hair and skin color and whether these feelings about their identity impact their personal and professional success and well being.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four provided the reader with information about the lives of 14 Latina participants who are currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution. The themes discussed included (1) Latina Identity, (2) Family Influences, (3) Educational Experiences, (4) Advocacy-Importance of Caring, and (5) Community Connections.

The 14 participants characterized themselves using various descriptive words or adjectives. When discussing their views about their Latina identities, some stated they always identified as being Latina, a few said they forgot about their Latina-ness, and a

few stated they identified as Latinas at a later time in their lives. Some of the participants thought it was important to share a few of the stereotypes about being a Latina. Even though these stereotypes are known in society, these participants strongly believed they will not succumb to these negative traits.

Family is very important to the Latino population. It is so vital that parents instill family values and beliefs at an early age in order for their children to understand why they immigrated to the US and why they work so hard. The family "American dream" is well known to each participant. All of the participants voiced their parents expected them to attend college because it is not an option. It is an expectation. Once they graduate from college, the participants stated they are expected to land a job, begin their career, and give back to their families and their culture in order to uplift the next generation. In a couple of examples, parents told the participants they expected them to help with household bills, such as the mortgage, once they graduate as a way to give back to the parents.

As females, the participants shared their thoughts about being a "good daughter". A few of the participants stated they wanted to please their parents and make them proud. This means the participants helped out in the home or tried to make sure they maintained good grades which meant they needed to focus on school and not hang out or slack off on their education. In two instances, two participants had different feelings about having to become a caretaker, good daughter, and a good student when their mothers became ill.

The participants shared their educational experiences from elementary through high school. Several participants noted their families moved quite a bit during their elementary years, which had an impact on them, but did not necessarily have a negative impact on their early education experience. Seven of the participants shared their

experiences in ESOL classes. Most were only in that program for a very short time. During their middle school years, many of the participants learned more about themselves and improved their self esteem. Some were placed in advanced classes and experienced other interesting and helpful activities that exposed them to a world of opportunities.

The high school experiences included taking honors and AP courses, participating in extracurricular activities, taking SAT's, applying to colleges, and completing their community service hours. The participants shared their college aspirations as well as their experiences with the college process. Many of the participants graduated with excellent grade point averages, and some won scholarships for college. Each participant shared she had at least one caring adult in elementary, middle, or high school and/or all three levels of education. According to the participants, the caring adults really encouraged them to do their best, and in some instances, assisted them with the college process. At least two of the participants stated they remain in touch with their caring adult.

Half of the participants indicated they had good and positive connections with their neighborhood. They shared various ways, such as participating in church, taking on leadership roles in church, and assisting other students with questions about grades and the college process. In addition, a couple of participants discussed their roles in volunteering in different community events in their neighborhoods. Overall, the participants enjoyed living in their communities and connecting with others.

Two unexpected themes emerged from the data analyses. Several participants expressed how much their religion meant to their lives. Three other participants shared

their concerns and feelings about their hair/skin color and complexion. These two themes are recommended for further research in Chapter 5.

Connection to Theory

The findings presented in this chapter connected to social capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This theory emphasizes the importance of families and individuals having access to social capital and the ability to utilize that social capital to communicate with others. In addition, individuals must be able to network and navigate with a variety of groups and institutional agents in order to gain additional social capital.

Using the four categories from the concept map, the participants from this study demonstrated they acquired a level of social capital from their parents (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The parents arrived in the US knowing they would need to work hard to provide better lives for themselves and their children. The family beliefs, work ethics, and aspirations were instilled into the participants at a young age. This is consistent with the family influence theme. The educational experiences theme underscored their varying abilities to communicate with their teachers and peers regarding their coursework, other curricular interests, and outside opportunities. Each participant discussed at least one significant adult in school who was interested in their well being and their future. Communicating with an advocate on a regular basis was another method to network and navigate the institutional agent, or school, in this case (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

All of the young women participated in service learning activities while in high school. These activities provided opportunities to develop community connections. In addition some of the participants were active in community activities with their families, which provided another source of social capital and community connections. However,

several participants also worked with an advocate or special group/program outside of school. This opportunity impacted them in very positive ways. Therefore, the conceptual map listed in Chapter 1 (Figure 1) changed to demonstrate how all participants gained additional social capital through educational experiences, and some participants increased their level of social capital and community connections by having an outside advocate. The four components remain the same, but an advocacy circle now demonstrates how having an inside and outside advocate positively impacted the young women's self identity. The adjusted conceptual map (Figure 2) is shown below. Being able to utilize and acquire additional social capital enabled the participants to navigate the educational system.

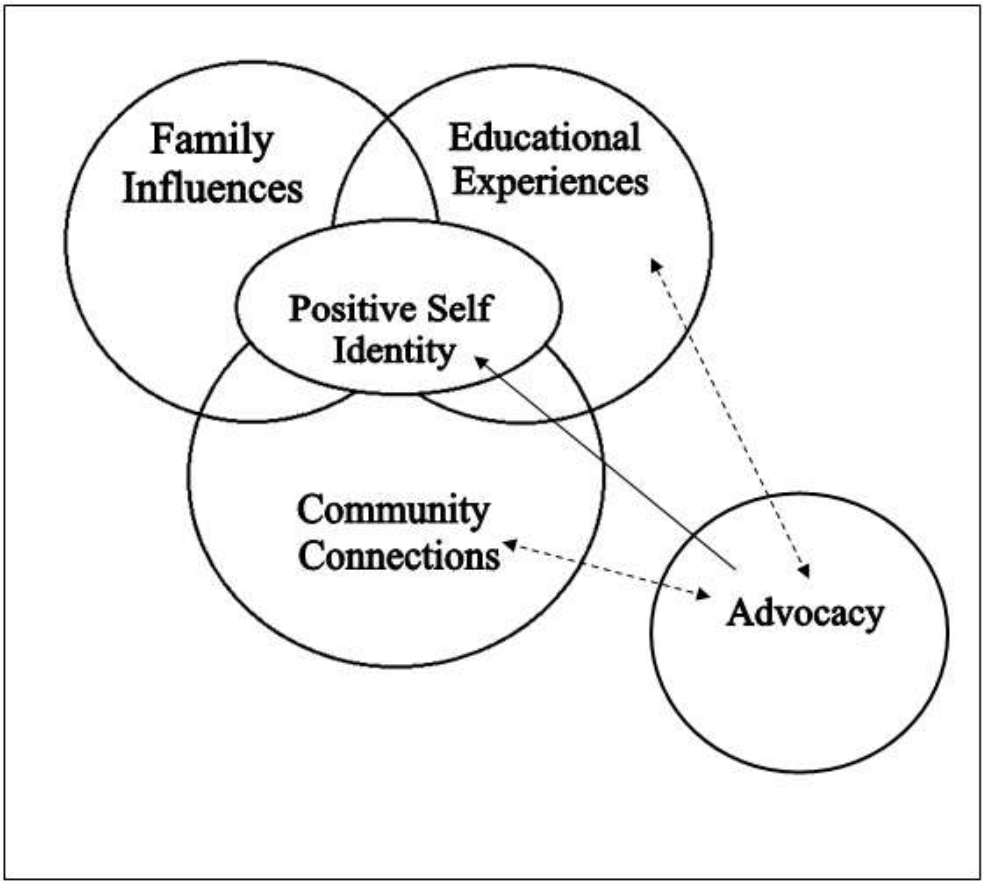

Figure 2. Conceptual map displays how findings interconnect

In Chapter 5, the interpretation of the findings and interconnection of the five themes are discussed. Implications, recommendation for future studies, and limitations of the study are also shared.

Chapter 5 - Findings and Recommendations

Overview

The Latino population is the largest minority group enrolled in schools across the United States. For the purpose of this study, Latinas were the focus because they have the lowest graduation rate among other minority women (Gandara et al., 2013; Gandara & The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH), 2015; Unmuth, 2012; Zambrana, 2011). In addition, Latina females are seen as a critical link to future generations and their educational outcomes. Therefore, this study centered on a successful group of Latinas from a success rather than a deficit perspective.

Research suggested successful Latinas possess positive identities, are very motivated, and have high aspirations (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Gandara et al., 2013; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). Gandara et al. (2013) indicated their research found factors, such as early school aptitude and strength in math were associated with Latinas and school success. Research also indicated they have caring, supportive, and hard working parents. These parents maintained high expectations and a strong belief their daughters will do well (Gandara et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2008; Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Several participants shared their parents believe in the "American dream". Attaining this dream is the goal for the family and the next generation. In order for this to occur, Latinas need opportunities to participate in rigorous courses, such as honors and/or AP classes, have a caring adult to talk with about school or other concerns, have a friend or peer to connect with, and understand the process and requirements of getting into colleges (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Gandara, 2013; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Rolon, 2000). Latinas must also be able to utilize, access, and acquire additional social capital in order to navigate the educational system and network

(Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In order to hear the voices of more successful Latinas in the mid-Atlantic area, I sought to add to the literature by looking at how a selected group of college level Latinas made meaning of their high school experience.

Through this basic qualitative study, I investigated and explored how 14 selected Latinas reflected on their high school experience and sought to find out whether or not the selected participants had supports to help them graduate from high school. I was careful to ensure this information came from the participants' perspectives and not from my own ideas and perspective (Merriam, 2009). All information was obtained through one in-depth semi-structured interview with each participant. Member checks were conducted, and several participants made clarifications or corrections to their transcripts or added additional information to a particular question. These participants shared their thoughts about themselves and their families. The participants discussed their school experiences from elementary through high school, which included positive relationships with at least one caring adult and participation in programs geared towards minority females and college education. The participants described their definitions of success. A few shared aspects of their current educational journey. These young women shared various community activities that were either done on their own and/or with their families. Lastly, the participants shared their overall hopes and desires for their future. The information obtained was rich, informative, and enlightening.

This chapter provides a conclusion section which discusses the findings from two research questions. Second, implications to theory and the conceptual map are addressed.

Third, implications for practice and policy are shared. Fourth, recommendations for future research will be considered.

Discussion

This basic qualitative study attempted to answer two research questions which sought to find out how Latinas constructed meaning of their high school experience and whether this experience involved supports or lack of supports. The two research questions were:

1. How do Latinas, currently enrolled in a four-year postsecondary institution, make meaning of their high school experience?
2. What resources and factors, if any, contributed to their success?

The study utilized a theoretical framework and concept map, with a constructivist approach, as the vehicles for interpreting the information obtained from each participant. Several emergent themes came to light after analysis of the participant interviews, reflective notes, and analytic memos. These themes included Latina self identity, family influences as well as their educational experiences from elementary through high school. In addition, themes such as advocacy and community connections were also found. The findings that pertain to each question are discussed in the next section

Findings – First Research Question

The first research question asked: How do Latinas, currently enrolled in a four-year postsecondary institution, make meaning of their high school experience? In order to answer this overarching question, it was imperative to seek information about how each participant viewed herself and her abilities as a Latina. It was also important to determine

what influences their parents had and whether or not the participants were following their own path or a path that was set for them. I discovered the following findings:

1. Having a positive Latina identity provides a strong sense of self.
2. Family influences instill a belief that getting a college education will enable Latinas to pursue and live the American dream.
3. Educational experiences impact high school graduation and post-secondary opportunities.

Finding #1

Having a positive Latina identity provides a strong sense of self.

When examining the words to describe themselves, the researcher noticed all 14 participants utilized words that were positive, determined, and fervent (see Table 4). Each participant noted when she thought about her identity as a Latina and whether it occurred early in life, was forgotten or not considered, or identified with her identity later in life. Acknowledging their identity at some point became empowering. Research from Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) shared several success factors they found from their study of seven Puerto Rican high school students. One of the success factors included having a strong Puerto Rican identity. In their study, the young women were very proud of their heritage. The study included the participants became more motivated and determined if they knew someone thought negatively about their ethnicity or background. Gandara et al. (2013) also stated Latinas must have a strong sense of self and ability. All of the participants in my study strongly believed in themselves for several reasons. First, the participants shared their parents were hardworking, supportive, and dedicated to them. This dedication materialized through high expectations, encouragement, and belief in their

success. Second, the parents kept their cultural heritage alive by speaking Spanish at home and/or participating in Hispanic events. Each participant viewed their parents as a role model who demonstrated pride on a daily basis. This behavior enabled the Latinas to internalize and exhibit pride in their own identities. Third, by having a positive identity, each Latina was confident and determined in herself and her abilities to graduate and pursue a college education and other dreams and aspirations.

The young women were also asked to define what success means to them. As the researcher, I thought they would share having a college degree would equal success. I was wrong; most participants described being successful as moving away from their community, attaining independence, doing something one loves, raising a family in addition to being successful, being happy, or living day to day without having to worry about anything. Three participants wanted to be financially stable. Two participants stated graduating from college would mean success to them. One young woman voiced "Spiritual success is very important to me."

Finding #2

Family influences instill a belief that getting a college degree will enable Latinas to pursue and live the American dream.

Family influence is the second finding because the young women shared a variety of comments about their family background, upbringing, beliefs, and expectations. In the Latino culture, family life is very important and may also be traditional (Gandara, 2009; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Henry et al., 2008). Parents teach their children and practice their cultural values about family and respect. Henry et al. (2008) shared familism (familismo), which means loyalty, obligation, and

interdependence, and respect (respeto) are also two values families believe in and practice. Woolley (2009) discussed how education (educacion), another cultural value, includes formal school and the teaching and rearing of the whole child. In addition to ensuring their children understand and practice these values, Latino parents model these traits and beliefs by working long hours on one or more jobs to make sure they are able to provide for their families and to help plan a better future for their children.

Several of the participants described their parents as loving, supportive, loud, and ambitious. They recalled being close to their families, breaking bread together as often as possible, and communicating almost on a daily basis. One participant emphasized how much her parents cared for her. Another participant, Jenny, shared, "Yeah, we have dinner every Sunday, every night of the week as much as we can." Two other participants stated they spoke with their parents every night. Patricia and Danielle described their families as being loud because when they get together everyone is talking, laughing, and listening to music at the same time. Other words used to describe their families can be found on Table 5.

The 14 Latinas in this study stated their parents instilled a powerful sense of responsibility and determination to succeed in the pursuit of their educational goals. Participants shared why their families left their countries and built new lives in the US. The belief in the American dream made sacrifices and working long hours in landscaping or construction meaningful and a means to an end. Katie, Angela, and Valentina specifically stated their parents wanted them to pursue and live the American dream. However, all of the participants were knowledgeable about their parents' expectations.

Each participant acknowledged the sacrifices made on her behalf and did not want to disappoint her parents. The parents informed the participants at an early age and throughout their lives they would attend college. The goals parents set for their daughters were looked upon as not only uplifting the daughters, but also making a better life for other members of the family and the next generation. The participants acknowledged and agreed this educational accomplishment would help them become successful and open more doors of opportunity. The participants took pride in describing how they were eager to learn and maintain good grades. Katie discussed why she always pushed herself to take difficult courses while in high school. She shared, ". . . just watching my parents work long hours that just motivates me to do well in school." With all of the sacrifices made by the parents, the participants thought getting good grades, graduating from high school, and going to college was the least they could do to make their parents proud.

One very interesting role about daughters in the Latino community stood out in a very sharp manner. As stated in Chapter 4, Latinas are expected to be "good daughters". A good daughter does not question her parents. She may have certain responsibilities, such as taking care of younger siblings, translating for parents, working a part time job to assist with finances, and any other responsibilities the family believes is necessary. These types of responsibilities may occur at various ages. A study conducted by Espinoza (2010) noted other researchers believed Latinas still face barriers and find it more difficult to be devoted to the family and family obligations while also attending college. Espinoza (2010) called this the "Good Daughter" dilemma. He emphasized the importance of Latinas living between two cultures. Espinoza (2010) discussed a third hybrid identity called *mestiza,* which comes from the Chicana feminist theory. Latinas

possess this identity as a way to deal with the daily ambiguity in their lives. Gandara et al. (2013) found "border crossers" have the ability to exist in two cultures and are able to move from one to the other with ease. The findings from Espinoza's study of Latina doctoral students were characterized by two overarching themes: *integrators and separators*. Espinoza (2010) shared a number of participants were able to be both a good daughter and a good student at the same time. Conversely, the separators kept the two worlds separate and believed being a good daughter meant protecting the parents from worries or concerns.

The 14 young women in my study understood the importance of being a good daughter, and they seemed unwilling to displease their parents. Mary shared her parents were extremely disappointed when her older brother dropped out of college. Even though Mary always planned to attend college, she emphasized the importance of succeeding as a result of her brother's failure to complete his studies.

There are times when children have to put the family first if assistance is needed (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). Two participants took on a great deal of responsibility while sophomores in high school when both their mothers became ill. Lisa worked a full time job while attending high school in order to pay for her own needs. In addition to working, she also took care of her younger sister. She was proud to take on the responsibility, took it in stride, and relied on her religious beliefs to pull her through the crisis. On the other hand, Roxanne was openly resentful and bitter about being responsible for taking care of her mother and her siblings.

The previous research and the information gathered from these participants made me wonder how much stress these young women may endure since they are constantly

moving in and out of several cultural environments each day. All of the participants wanted to live up to their parents' expectations, balance being a "good daughter" with their personal goals and aspirations, excel in school, begin a career, and give back in some way. However, Roxanne did question the role of being a "good daughter" again when she did not get accepted to any colleges.

After listening to the participants' conversations about family beliefs, values, and expectations, I understood how much family influences can have on a person. This level of influence may have impacted other facets of their lives. I realized these young women carry a heavy load. I admire their dedication to the family, fortitude to accept and carry out their responsibilities, and determination to succeed in education and other endeavors.

Finding #3

Educational experiences impact high school graduation and post-secondary opportunities and experience.

The United States has a long history of segregating minority students (Grant, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Saenz, 2004; Soto, 2007). Before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, there were two cases heard regarding the unlawful use of segregation and that Mexican Americans had a right to fight this unfair practice. Soto (2007) believed the two cases played an important role in providing information for the 1954 Brown decision. After the Brown decision, there were other cases heard involving Latinos and their education. These types of concerns are still being discussed and studied.

Schools and organizations, such as National Council of La Raza (NCLR), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE), and Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), are working together to ensure the Latino community are aware and

understand the importance of the Common Core State Standards and being college and career ready. For the past 25 years, the White House initiated and focused a number of programs to improve the graduation and college rates of Latino students. These ongoing programs and initiatives are working steadily to close the achievement gap and to uphold US with the highest number of college graduates in the world by 2020 (U.S. Department of Education: A Blueprint for Reform, 2010). See Chapter 2 for more details.

Three major studies reviewed for this research discussed the educational status of Latinas. Ginorio and Huston (2001) provided an overview of Latinas and trends in education. The authors also explored how individual experiences were shaped by educational variables. Ginorio and Huston (2001) shared concerns about the 9th and 12th grades being the two years Latinas may decide to drop out and not return. It was also noted a Latina's family may or may not expect their daughter to graduate high school. On the other hand, the second study noted Latinas had high aspirations to graduate from high school, but others believed they may not be able to do so due to family care-taking responsibilities, low expectations, poverty, discrimination, low self-esteem, pregnancy, poor academic preparation, and gender stereotyping (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). The participants in my study did not feel their parents had different expectations for them and their brothers. Several participants were the eldest in the family and were expected to be role models to their younger siblings, which sometimes included younger brothers.

Another interesting facet of the research from NWLC and MALDEF, (2009) indicated if the educational level of Latina parents were low, the parents would not be able to advocate for their children. Conversely, in my research study, the participants shared their parents did not go into the school buildings but were advocates; and if they

could not assist their daughters with questions about a class or the college process, they tried to find the answers. Lopez (2001) indicated that some Latino families consider themselves actively involved with schools by instilling the importance of an education to their children. Only one participant stated her mother was actively involved in the PTSA when she was in elementary school. However, when this participant began attending a prep school, her mother no longer participated in a parent organization.

The third study from Gandara et al. (2013) reviewed existing knowledge about encouraging Latina education success and learned that early school aptitude, being good in math, having a Latina/o teacher, and encompassing a strong sense of self and ability were very important. They also noted having an advocate in their lives, remaining bilingual, and delaying pregnancy would help pave the way to graduate high school and enroll into a post-secondary institution. One participant in my study shared her Spanish teacher was Latina.

A major finding of my study was the discovery that the entire educational experience of the participants incorporated a college-going mindset. This mindset was established and nurtured early in their lives because parents instilled that college was not an option - - it was the only option. The completion of this option would allow the parents to see their American dream become a reality. The participants recalled their elementary experiences. Four were in gifted and talented (GT) classes, and six remembered being enrolled in English as a second language (ESOL) classes for part of their elementary years. Sacajawea was in both ESOL and GT classes. Danielle shared she believed she was misplaced because her English was very good. Several participants attended more than one elementary school due to moving to different areas. When

participants were attending schools in their diverse neighborhoods, they felt comfortable. However, when two participants shared moving from a diverse neighborhood to a less diverse one, they felt different from other students. Katie was bullied and Mary felt out of place and a little frightened. She stated, ". . . .There was kind of not much diversity. So, I was displaced and a little scared because things were different. That's probably where it started my whole fear of approaching people." Patricia moved every year during her elementary experience and believed the moves made her quiet to this day. It is interesting to note none of the participants seem to believe their education was negatively impacted. Perhaps these circumstances were internalized, made them stronger, and not thought about until asked to recall them. Conversely, if these types of situations had not occurred, I wonder what might have been different or perhaps better about their elementary experiences.

The secondary education experience provided a range of information. Shiu, Kettler and Johnsen (2009) discussed middle school students need to feel comfortable, connected, and part of a peer group in order to build self esteem and form aspirations. In middle school the participants went through emotional and physical changes as well as learning more about themselves and their abilities. Rainne shared her experience was not nurturing, and Angela was teased about her physical appearance. Jenny had difficulty transitioning in 6th grade because she did not know her teachers. By 7th grade, she felt comfortable. Danielle made friends during this time and still remains friends with some of them today. Valentina learned she was an excellent math student, which boosted her self esteem. Patricia shared middle school was very easy for her. On the other hand, Naomi still lived in Peru during her elementary and middle school years. She discussed

how confident she was that her father's influence "would help me to accomplish something in life. So, in elementary school and middle school in Peru, I didn't care much about my education". When the family moved to the US when she was 15, Naomi did not do well because she refused to attend her classes. She felt insulted taking the ESOL classes. However, this attitude changed when she realized she wanted to graduate and attend college.

Sadker, Sadker and Zittleman (2009) asserted middle school Hispanic students have a much lower self esteem than White or Black girls. In addition they found confidence levels dropped from a high level in elementary school to a very low level in high school. The participants I interviewed shared their experiences with honesty and candor, and I did not hear anyone dwell on low self esteem. If anything, these young women began to discover their abilities and started making connections with teachers. At least two participants were already involved in a minority girls' group/program and participated in enrichment field trips, learned about a variety of topics including college information. It is my contention these selected participants experienced normal middle school changes and experiences, but having entrenched family beliefs, close family connections, and ideas about their future already in place, they did not lose much, if any, of their confidence level during their middle school years.

The case study findings from Gandara et al. (2013) found each one of the seven participants experienced difficulties such as ". . . undocumented status, low-income homes, early pregnancy, struggling with low grades, and little support in high school-but they have all surmounted most of those hurdles" (p. 36). Six participants, including one undocumented student, from my study shared they came from poverty level families. The

participants shared their parents told them they would attend college “no matter what”. None of the participants were pregnant or planned to be pregnant in the near future. All of the participants had at least one caring adult while in high school.

During their high school experiences, 12 participants in my study took honors and/or AP courses. All participants made plans for college. Many participants participated in after school activities, clubs, and/or honor societies. Gandara et al. (2013) were surprised to learn the seven participants in their study belonged to an after school sports group or another type of extracurricular activity. The participants in the Gandara et al. (2013) study shared belonging to a group assisted with time management, provided a peer group, and kept them motivated. In addition, these activities assisted them with their studies and provided them with a sense of accomplishment.

Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) reported their seven high school participants were also involved in school and church activities as well as enrolled in AP or honors courses. These seven participants believed these factors helped them to be successful in high school. The selected young women from my study continued to learn about themselves and expanded their educational knowledge. They, too, agreed they felt a sense of accomplishment when they were part of their classes, honor societies, drama club, Latina club or other school organizations. Several were also involved in church activities.

Mothers and fathers were seen as motivators, but mothers were named more often as the person who played an important role in encouraging their daughters to do well in school. This same sentiment was expressed in two other studies (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Rolon, 2000). In addition, several participants shared their mothers were their role

models and the one that assisted and supported them with homework or listened to their concerns or self-doubts.

In a few cases, participants shared a "watershed moment" in their lives which changed their outlook on their future. Naomi came to the US at almost 15 years old and did not enjoy her first couple of years in high school because she was unhappy with her placement in ESOL classes. She tried to explain why she did not belong in the classes, but her request was denied. As a result of the denial, she did not attend classes for two years. After returning from her older sister's graduation in Peru, Naomi realized she also wanted to graduate from high school and pursue a college degree. She settled down, worked hard, and graduated from high school.

Valentina became very interested in her culture and believed taking AP Spanish Language and AP Spanish Literature gave her insights she never considered. She stated, "And that just opened my eyes to a whole 'nother world, especially literature. . . .[I]t just expanded my mindset to see the world outside of [her high school]." Sacajawea thought she knew how her life was planned until her family moved to the Virgin Islands for a period of time. Her watershed moment came after she returned to the US. She realized she no longer wished to attend the state college. She wanted to spread her wings and attend an out of state university.

Several of the participants shared their involvement with special programs specifically designed to expose Latino or minority students to different opportunities and help them reach their potential. Gandara et al. (2013) found two of their participants were previously enrolled in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, and one participant attended a *Stepping Up program*. However, Gandara et al. (2013)

cautioned these programs can be expensive and only available to a limited number of students. Vanessa participated in the AVID program and took a class each year from eighth grade through her high school experience. She explained each year the program covered a specific topic, such as getting prepared for high school, PSAT's, preparation to take SAT's and researching colleges, to actually applying to colleges and pursuing several scholarships.

Alyssa applied to a program called Prep for Prep at the end of her fifth grade year. She was a member of this program from middle school through high school. Accepted students were required to take classes during the summer as well as during the school year. The program provided tutoring and SAT classes, sponsored overnight field trips to colleges, assisted students with writing college essays, paid for college application fees, and students worked with a mentor. Alyssa shared, "I'll say that Prep for Prep changed my life." She also stated once students completed the intense program, they remain members for the rest of their lives.

One student participated in the math, science, and engineering academy offered at her high school. However, after two years of the program, she decided to pursue dual enrollment. Naomi received tutoring on a regular basis from an outside tutoring program. The volunteers came to her school each week to work with students. Still other participants discussed various opportunities and programs that helped prepare them for college.

Throughout their high school experiences the participants shared they had one or more friends or peers. Research found having friends or peers is a very important component for educational success, especially for high achieving Latinos (Gandara &

Contreras, 2009; Gandara et al. 2013; Shiu et al., 2009, Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Collectively, the majority of their friends were Latina; however, a few of the participants chose to have Black friends either because they did not get along with other Latinas, identified with Black culture, or the Black students were the majority minority in the schools. Vanessa identified her high school friends as Latino and non-Latino, but stated, "I did have more Latino friends than non-Latino friends." Alyssa shared she had White friends, but eventually gave up because she was tired of "being outside my comfort zone."

Katie mentioned she was usually the only Latina in her honors and AP classes and did not like the jokes made about the "Latino kids". She shared, "Once I told them yeah what they are doing is wrong but it doesn't mean because they're Latino that's why they are doing it." On another occasion, she heard a comment about why Latino students bother to attend school "when they're going to end up working at McDonalds". Katie stated this type of comment made her angry but also motivated her to work very hard.

For the majority of their education, the 14 young women had positive experiences in high school. According to NWLC and MALDEF (2009), discrimination occurs due to stereotypical attitudes from schools and society. The participants did not dwell on discrimination and seemed to take their high school experiences with friends and peers in stride.

The young women in my research study displayed poise, positive self identities, and confidence in their abilities and goals. The types of high school experiences the participants shared provided them with a great deal of learning opportunities and a variety of options they could pursue. The participants took rigorous courses, participated

in extracurricular activities or programs, and had wonderful support from their families. Several of the young women discussed "watershed" moments when their lives took a change albeit a positive one. The participants shared their experiences with friends and peers. All participants knew they would attend college "no matter what" after high school, and in most cases, took advantage of the many opportunities in order to be prepared for a post-secondary experience.

Findings – Second Research Question

The second question focused on whether or not Latina students received resources and other factors; and if so, did these contribute to their success. The findings related to this question revolved around having at least one caring adult. The second finding revealed the level of participation in the community through activities such as volunteering at school or in the community as an individual or as a family endeavor. Special programs were considered to be part of the first research question because I believed these programs assisted the Latinas in making meaning of their high school experience. However, I also believe special programs played a role in the resources utilized which contributed to their success. The types of special programs in elementary, middle, or high school were geared to Latinas or minority females to broaden horizons. At the middle and high school levels, the special programs included a community prep program, tutoring from an outside group, or involvement in a Hispanic academy foundation. The two findings are listed below.

1. Having a caring advocate is an important resource throughout one's educational experience.

2. Community connections from various sources provide positive interactions that may increase educational success and other opportunities.

Finding #1

Having a caring advocate is an important resource throughout one's educational experience.

The research indicated Latinas having at least one caring adult can make a world of difference in a student's life. The caring advocate or teacher promoted, encouraged, and influenced high academic achievement and embraced their background (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Gandara, 1995, 2009; Rolon, 2000; Stevens et al., 2007). All 14 participants shared they had teachers or other caring adults who cared about them and encouraged them in various ways depending whether it was in classes or during clubs or other programs. Sacajawea shared her sixth and eighth grade teachers were very influential. Patricia voiced, "My teachers pretty much helped support me. I never had a teacher tell me I couldn't succeed in whatever I set my mind to." Roxanne shared her English teacher and Shakespeare club adviser both encouraged and gave her praise on her work and for showing her creative side. Two other participants had an outside counselor or advocate who visited them in school on a regular basis to check on school progress, answer any questions about their home or social life, and answer questions about the college process. Lisa shared her administrators "made a big impact on my life. They knew I kinda grew up independently but needed to be respectful and remember I was still a student. So instilling those traits in me while still being in high school was very helpful to me." Two participants shared they are still in contact with one or two of their former teachers.

Latino and African American students tend not do well in school if they believe their teachers do not care or display a negative attitude toward them. (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999; Zambrana, 2002). This negativity has a lasting impression on Latinas. They will not feel comfortable or accepted in the classroom. Two participants specifically shared a negative encounter with their guidance counselors. Roxanne stated her guidance counselor did not go the extra mile to assist her in obtaining information about an out of state college program that would enable her to graduate early and also earn an Associate's degree. Since she experienced this negative encounter, she refused to seek out this counselor when the time came to seek advice about applying to colleges. As a result, Roxanne only applied to Ivy League colleges and received denial letters from each school. In addition, Roxanne believed a teacher who strongly encouraged her to identify and discuss her Latina heritage on these college applications provided misguided information and advice. Naomi shared her guidance counselor was always abrupt with her. She voiced, "They were not nice. They were always, like, they didn't care. They were not even in their offices. I really didn't want to go to my advisor in high school because she would always give me bad news or tell me to come the next day." Even though Naomi felt disrespected by her counselor, she was able to communicate with another adult who assisted many Hispanic students. Two other participants only used their parents' advice when choosing and applying to colleges.

Finding #2

Community connections from various sources provide positive interactions that may increase educational success and other opportunities.

Schools have evolved over the years from only educating students to providing community service activities, partnering with community organizations, and encouraging

parents or other adults to volunteer inside the schools. According to Gonzalez (2013), schools must change in order to help all students become successful. Schools can change in many ways but part of the focus is needed on school climate and culture (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006; Rodriguez, 2008).

One of the topics I thought would be discovered through the interviews would be that Latinas would talk about their participation in community programs run by organizations such as Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE). However, this was not the case. The participants shared information about their neighborhood environment and community participation via volunteering through school or volunteering with their parents.

Sacajawea lived in an upper middle class White neighborhood with "big lawns and pools". She shared she loved her neighborhood and the amenities. She also stated she and her family did not participate in any community activities. Patricia did not participate in any activities because she moved a great deal and "we weren't really in the best of neighborhoods". Nevertheless, half of the participants participated in community events or activities.

Lisa shared her family volunteers every year by taking food to the local food bank and helping to serve the food. Danielle's family participates in an annual Mexican traditional holiday that Danielle's father initiated in order to bring the community together. Three participants volunteer at their respective churches. Katie's family participates in fundraisers in order to help anyone in need. In addition, Katie shared her family sends "money to [country] so my grandparents can buy toys for the poor kids that

can't get them." Katie also volunteers at an annual summer week-long program sponsored by a Hispanic foundation in order to be a role model to younger Latinas.

All participants completed their required school community service hours in various ways. In addition to school community service, one participant volunteered over 1,000 hours at a hospital. Another participant currently volunteers 12 hours per week as an EMT.

As noted above, the special programs some participants utilized outside of the school setting could be viewed as providing community connections. The Prep for Prep, the other Hispanic outreach advocate program, and the outside tutoring program all assisted those participants with educational needs, emotional needs, and also provided windows of opportunities through college visits and payments of college application fees. In addition, these community connections may have lasting ties with these participants that could last a lifetime.

Implications and Recommendations

This basic qualitative study helped shed light on Latina voices in order to deeply examine how these young women made meaning of their high school experience. This study also sought to determine what resources and factors contributed to their success. The study gained rich, relevant, and important knowledge about these young women and concludes that: (a) positive self identity propels motivation, ambition, and determination to succeed, (b) family influences, which include high expectations, instill a belief that getting a college degree will enable the participants to live the American dream, (c) educational experiences that include taking honors and AP courses, as well as participating in special programs, impact high school graduation and post-secondary

opportunities, (d) having at least one caring adult throughout one's educational experience builds confidence and an "I can do" mantra, and (e) involvement in the community through volunteering at school and/or volunteering as a family provides positive community connections. This study will discuss implications to theory, practice, policy, and recommend future research options in the next section.

Implications to Theory

Social capital theory was the theoretical perspective utilized for this study (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Coleman (1988) believed social capital was a resource that could be accessed and acquired by anyone. He specifically argued social capital made a difference in education as well as one's life, and family was responsible for making sure their children had access. Putnam (2000), agreed but also thought it was important for a person to bond and bridge with others, which involved trust, support, reciprocity, and civic engagement. Stanton-Salazar (2001) took social capital a step further by stating institutional agents, such as schools, can assist students in gaining more access to social capital. He also contended mentoring, peers, and resiliency have a greater impact on acquiring and using social capital. Blended definitions from these three authors were used for my study. The conceptual map (Figure 1) depicts four circles which include self, family, school, and community. The circles overlap each other in order to determine how and whether social capital that existed or acquired affected the selected Latinas in each area depicted. Social capital theory and a constructivist approach were used as the vehicles to interpret and make meaning of the data provided by the participants. The findings from this study are presented in the conceptual map (Figure 3).

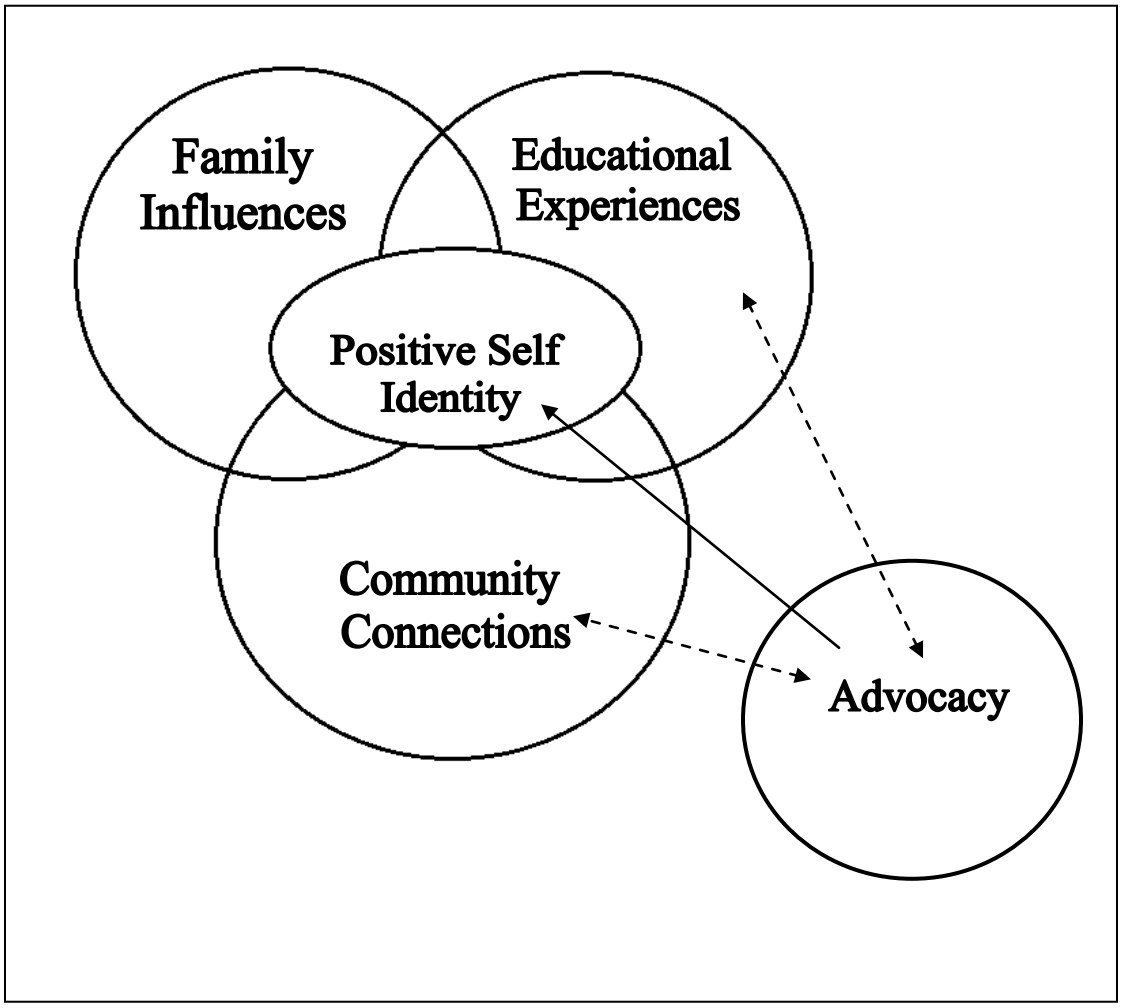

Figure 3. Conceptual map displays how findings interconnect

The findings in this study revealed how selected Latinas described themselves and felt about their identities, how family influences may have shaped their lives in many ways, and how their educational experiences impacted them. In addition the findings demonstrated the importance of having at least one caring adult and what these young women thought about their neighborhood and community connections. Several participants not only had an advocate in the educational setting, but also had an advocate who was outside of the school environment. It is interesting to note how social capital impacted each of the areas on the conceptual map. There is a distinct difference between the first conceptual map and the second conceptual map. First, it is also important to note

the size of each circle does not matter, but the fact that the circles interconnect is very important. Second, the advocacy circle is separate but still has a valuable and positive impact on self identity because some of the participants had advocates from both the educational setting and the community. In order to demonstrate that experience, the advocacy circle is outside of the interconnected circles but still demonstrates how it impacts self identity through school advocates or both school advocates and outside advocates.

Self

The Latinas seemed to be very confident in themselves and their abilities and attended school with social capital received from their parents. Whether they came from low or high SES, this was evident based upon the information obtained from the interviews. These Latinas expressed how much they were loved and supported. They trusted their parents, honored their cultural heritage, and accepted their parents' expectations and rules. Coleman (1988) discussed and emphasized that social structures must have intergenerational closure. Some Latino families keep their children close at home in order to prevent them from going outside the community/family circle. However, as these young women moved through the educational system, they learned to acquire additional social capital. This in turn enabled them to continue their navigation and their educational journey. In addition, several participants had an advocate who came from a community organization that was committed to assisting and/or advising these young women in order to ensure their educational success. This additional advocate also seemed to help boost or enhance their self identities.

Family

The parents came to the US with the intention of accessing a better education and life for their children. The parents worked hard, and if extended family members were present, they were able to utilize a grandparent or another relative to take care of smaller children in order save money and to maintain the closeness of the family. Coleman (1988) stated a child will not do as well if social capital is missing between the parent and child, regardless of the level of financial or human capital the parent possesses (p. 32). In this study, the parents had social capital, but the longer they worked and felt comfortable and participated in family functions at home or in the community, the more social capital they probably acquired, which in turn was shared with these young women. Most of the participants discussed their relationships with their families as loving and supportive. However, the belief systems, being a good daughter, and expectations to go to college stood out as the main influences in the young women's lives versus their relationships with their families.

School

Twelve of the 14 participants took honors and/or AP courses. However, all 14 learned to navigate the educational system. There were a few participants who stumbled, but all graduated. One of the important things to note is Putnam (2000) discussed the importance of being able to bridge and bond. Bridging draws people from diverse areas and backgrounds together. However, bonding with family, close friends, and peers also assist in obtaining and utilizing social capital. The participants who took honors and AP classes were surrounded with students who may have extensive knowledge and experience in navigating and obtaining what they needed because of the level of social capital they already possessed. Gonzalez et al. (2013) stated Latinas who were in

specialized programs or enrolled in high level courses were able to attend elite colleges right after high school, but Latinas not enrolled in high level courses only had access to a two-year college program. However, this does not prevent someone from continuing their education at a four-year institution.

Bonding occurred with their family and extended families. Stanton-Salazar (2001) believed schools, as institutional agents, would provide a variety of ways to access and assist students in order to acquire additional social capital. The Latinas in this study did have supports, such as caring teachers and other adults who acted as role models and in some cases peers or friends who could provide emotional support and trust. Most of the Latinas participated in after school clubs and other activities, which provided another avenue to utilize and acquire social capital. In addition, outside advocates assisted several of these young women in obtaining additional social capital as it related to receiving additional academic help in the form of tutoring, another caring adult to lean on, to provide valuable information about the college process, and to provide monies for college field trips and payment of application fees.

Community

Schools played an important role in this area because every participant in this study had to complete some type of community service before graduation. This enabled participants to get to know their surrounding communities. In addition to required community service, half of the participants actively volunteered in their community either on their own or with their families. As a result, most of the participants felt a connection with their communities. Having and maintaining a connection with a community is another way to utilize existing social capital while gaining additional social capital. In this way the participants were able to bond with their community. They also had the

ability to bridge and network as they participated in activities that were outside of their immediate community. Those participants who had both an advocate in school and outside of school were able to benefit from both resources which may have led to acquiring a larger amount of social capital.

The conceptual map (Figure 2) demonstrated how self, family, school, and community are interconnected with each other. The fifth circle, advocacy, demonstrates how participants benefited from having at least one advocate from the educational sector as well as those who had an advocate from the outside sector. The participants first received social capital from their family through family beliefs and expectations, nurturing, and support. This social capital within themselves is important in order for them to feel good about themselves and increase their self confidence. Throughout their education, most participants had at least one caring adult. Once these young women understood the written and unwritten rules of school, the participants were able to navigate the system. This navigation included taking advanced courses, maintaining good grades, having a trusted advocate, and participation in school activities or outside programs in order to be prepared for college. The community connection enabled the Latinas to bridge and network, which in turn, increased their social capital as they were acquiring additional capital. This extra layer of resources and supports could create more ways to increase self confidence. This circle of interconnectedness will persist as these young women continue their education, acquire new advocates, and begin their careers. They will expand their knowledge and abilities even further and will also be able to network, bridge and bond with different advocates, communities, and other institutional agents.

Limitations

Various research studies pointed out Latinas have the lowest graduation rate among other female groups. The results of this study cannot be compared to other female groups because the focus of this study was only on a selected number of Latinas. Findings shared in this study cannot be generalized to represent all Latinas. This is due to the fact more data from a larger pool would be needed to make overall general conclusions and to provide specific recommendations for the Latina population.

Implications for Practice

The conclusions presented above, along with the implication to theory, inform the implications for practice in the following areas: (a) school systems and (b) policy.

Implications for School Districts

For the past 25 years, several White House Initiatives charged to research this issue and make recommendations to increase the progress of Hispanic education have made inroads. From 1990 to 2013, Hispanic graduation rates increased from 58.2% to 75.8%. During this same timeframe, the percentage of bachelor's degrees rose from 8.1% to 15.7% (www.ed.gov/edblogs/hispanic-initiative/). A variety of community and national organizations, such as ENLACE, National Council of La Raza (NCLR), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and others have joined together to work with the government and local school districts to put programs in place to improve Hispanic education. School districts may have different priorities based upon the needs of their communities, but could reach out to these organizations and/or Hispanic-Serving Institutions to partner and collaborate on how to increase the graduation rates in their districts.

The research findings from this study suggest what Latinas need to be successful. Implementation of these findings in school systems may increase high school graduation for Latinas in order for them to be college and career ready. First Latinas must possess positive identities, which provide a strong sense of self. They must feel comfortable in their school environment. School systems should consider a number of possible solutions. First, school systems should recruit and hire more Latina teachers in order for Hispanic female students to have role models who look like themselves (Gandara et al., 2013; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Second, school systems should hire more Spanish speaking teachers who are able to teach in other content areas. Third, school systems can provide principals with monies to hire Hispanic liaisons at schools with significant Latino populations. Fourth, school systems could conduct community talks in Hispanic neighborhoods in order to establish rapport and build trust, and to listen to parent ideas and concerns. Then follow up after each community talk. Look into already existing Hispanic advocacy groups to determine how they can build a partnership with the districts to work on keeping Hispanic students on the path to high school graduation and college. Fifth, school systems should provide multicultural materials, which represent all ethnic backgrounds in the school district, and recognize Latinas through county or district awards and celebration programs. Sixth, school systems can partner with local Latino organizations to establish mission and visions, set goals, and discuss ways to improve Latina educational outcomes. These types of partnerships could also provide mini educational classes for parents, if needed, to assist them. School districts should include principals as part of this partnership. In addition, these and other strategies should be

included in district strategic plans in order for these strategies to be implemented, analyzed, monitored, and adjusted as needed.

Principals/instructional leaders play a very important role in establishing and maintaining positive school culture and climate. Relationships are very important and must be promoted by the instructional leaders (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006; Rodriquez, 2008). Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) further contend institutional culture must be the focal point in ensuring Latina/os are successful. Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) stated, " leading an institution in building a culture that values, believes, invests, practices, and assesses for the effectiveness of faculty/teacher-student relationships is transformative yet very challenging work", (p. 143). Typically, principals or instructional leaders work with leadership teams and entire staff to promote all beliefs and initiatives (Dufour, Eaker & Dufour, 2005; Fullan, 2001). An inviting school that cares about all students can go a long way in helping Latinas feel valued and wanted regardless of the lack of Hispanic teacher representation. Schools must have caring staff that believe in all students and will go the extra mile to encourage and assist Latinas. Honors, AP and other rigorous courses should be offered and opened to Latinas so they may be exposed to college level learning. Schools need to participate in articulation at every level to ensure Latinas are placed in rigorous courses at every level. Schools need to ensure counselors are trained to work with Latinas by understanding their unique needs and not assume they are unable to take rigorous courses. In addition, counselors may need to take the initial step by introducing themselves and setting aside time to get to know the Latina students on their caseloads. Principals may encourage counselors to make home visits. Schools should also provide special outreach programs targeted to Hispanic females. It may be necessary to ensure

every school has a Hispanic/parent liaison to reach out to Hispanic parents. This liaison could provide a program that would teach parents/students how to navigate the system. This program could discuss a specific target of interest each month. According to Guerra and Valverde, (2007) principals may need to incorporate the culture of the people and the community in order to dispel any myths about their schools. Principals can ensure special programs that work with Latinas could be offered during the school day and/or afterschool. In addition, Latinas should be encouraged to participate in clubs and honor societies or sports to feel connected to the schools. These types of experiences may improve self confidence and encourage the young women to seek leadership roles within the schools. Principals and school leadership teams can incorporate these strategies into their action plans or continuous school improvement plans.

Teachers play a very crucial role in ensuring student success. Minority students need teachers who establish rapport and display a caring attitude on a daily basis. Teacher attitudes leave a lasting impression on Latinas (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Garcia-Reid, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999; Zambrana, 2002). If Latina students suspect their teachers do not like them, they will not work or communicate. Sometimes this could be a miscommunication and mistrust between both teachers and Latinas and needs to be corrected. Latinas need at least one caring adult, and a teacher could be the person best suited for this type of relationship. Teachers should understand and be empathetic if a Latina informs her teachers she has to work part time or take care of siblings, and perhaps arrangements could be made to provide extra time or another way to assist the student. In addition, teachers can also reach out to Latino parents in order to establish rapport and trust with them.

Since classrooms may have a variety of students with different backgrounds and/or cultures, it is imperative teachers teach in a culturally responsive manner, utilize differentiated instruction, facilitate small group learning, provide timely feedback, and offer several ways to demonstrate mastery (Waxman et al., 2003). In trying to understand how to reach students in diverse classrooms, teachers need to expand their repertoire of teaching strategies or tools to include ways to honor complex and, at times, unorganized ways of learning and encouraging a variety of ways to learn. Gutierrez, Lopez and Tejeda (1999) suggested hybridity and diversity create or enable a "third space" to exist for learning. Gutierrez et al. (1999) shared this mixture always existed but some teachers may fear lack of structure would get in the way of learning and disrupt the topic being taught. Gutierrez et al. (1999) believed just the opposite occurs. When teachers facilitate learning, a variety of students from different backgrounds and cultures are able to share and grow their knowledge which in turn could lead to conflict. However, this conflict can be embraced by the teacher who can adjust and encourage more opportunity for learning and interpreting (Gutierrez et al., 1999).

The community is an important asset and should not be ignored by schools. Community organizations can provide tutoring programs, places for students to complete their community service, and at times, provide monies to fund other initiatives, such as community nights or awards ceremonies. Community organizations may access schools to provide programs on school property. It is important for Latinas to feel connected to their schools as well as their communities.

Implications for Policy

As stated earlier, Latinas lag behind other female groups in graduation rates. Therefore, policies must address this concern in order for this statistic to be reversed.

Policy at the local, state, or national level must go through a series of steps before implementation can occur (Fowler, 2009). Even though setting policy may take time, Latinas need to be the focus of concern. Having Latina and Latino students graduate from high school and be college and career ready is vital not only to school districts but important to the United States. By working with this population, school districts are living up to the philosophy that all children can learn and are valued. Therefore, Latinas should be given every opportunity to succeed.

The recommendation to hire more Latino teachers is important. However, this recommendation may be difficult to implement because Lopez and Fry (2013) stated, "Latinos continue to lag other groups when it comes to earning a bachelor's degree" (p. 4). In addition, the percentage of Hispanic teachers increased from 2% in 1986 to 6 % in 2011 (Feistritzer, 2011). As of 2012, Hispanic teachers represented 7.8% of the teaching populace (http://sites.ed.gov/hispanic-initiative/files/2015/04/FINAL_Hispanic-Teacher-Recruitment-Factsheet_04272015.pdf). Since the increase in the number of Hispanic teachers is moving at a very slow pace and cannot keep up with the number of Hispanic children in school systems, it is imperative to note school systems and principals must utilize the teachers who already exist or those who plan to teach in order to reach and teach minority students.

Colleges or universities that offer teaching degrees must ensure their teacher preparation programs contain several key courses or components. First, the students they are preparing to become teachers must know and understand their content. Second, the students must be prepared to approach, develop relationships, and teach the content to the majority minority students. In order to be able to teach minority students, teacher

preparation programs at places of higher learning must role model and openly discuss race, diversity, culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and achievement gaps. Next, teacher preparation programs must somehow teach prospective teachers how to honestly examine the lens they use to see and think about minority students (Andrews, 2015). During a keynote presentation, Andrews (2015) suggested members of the audience ask themselves, "How does my identity form or shape me? How might I be a more critically conscious person?" (Unpublished lecture, 2015). Colleges and universities must train preservice teachers how to incorporate hybridity and diversity in their teacher toolkit. According to Bennett (2012), all preservice teachers should participate in field experiences. Bennett (2012) stated, "Participation and full immersion in field experiences with diverse populations has provided deeper connections between course material regarding culturally responsive pedagogy from the college and practical application in the classroom", (p. 384). Bennett (2012) also believed this immersion helped preservice teachers to learn about themselves as well as learn about others who were different. Griner and Stewart (2012) asserted all teachers need the right tools to utilize culturally responsive teaching effectively.

School districts, colleges, and universities that have teacher preparation programs must implement policies listed above and find funding and creative ways to require and ensure cultural awareness and culturally responsive teaching are understood and practiced by all stakeholders and established and implemented at all levels (Bennett, 2012; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999). Griner and Stewart (2012) emphasized collaboration must occur in order to ensure "policy, practice and people merge this gap" (p. 589). By understanding unique needs of minorities, responsibilities and expectations families

require from their Latino daughters, policies will enable schools to become better equipped to work with Latinas as well as other minority students.

Future Research Considerations

Two unexpected findings surfaced while analyzing and coding the transcripts. A few of the young women discussed how important religion was to them. They included how they and their parents believe their religious way of life sustain them during good and troubling times. Additional research could possibly be conducted to find out what role religion plays in Latina educational success. A mix methods study that incorporates qualitative and quantitative research could be conducted. Selected participants could be interviewed about various aspects of their lives in order to construct meaning. A survey tool could be utilized to gather information about religious affiliation, length of affiliation and practice. Participants may share what faith means to them, how often they attend services, and whether they believe their religious beliefs or lack of beliefs have any bearing on their lives. The participants could rate their level of beliefs on a specific scale. These types of quantitative data could shed interesting numerical information regarding perceptions about religion.

The second unexpected finding was about self identity as it relates to hair and skin color and complexion. One participant discussed her concerns or desires for lighter skin because she felt some people she came in contact with may think she is African American instead of Latino. This made her feel uncomfortable. Another participant discussed why she connected and identified with African Americans, but wished to have long, flowing hair like other Latinas she knew. Future qualitative studies could be

conducted to determine how ethnic identity as it relates to hair and skin complexion may or may not have an impact on self identity, school grades, and future endeavors.

A qualitative study interviewing male Latinos about how they make meaning of their high school experience could be conducted. The study could also include whether resources and other factors assisted in their ability to graduate from high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution. It may be very beneficial to seek how they feel about their identities and how they envision their goals and aspirations. This research could shed light on whether the male experience is similar or vastly different from Latinas.

A mix methods study which interviewed a larger sample size of Latinas across a broader spectrum could be conducted in order to determine how Latinas made meaning of their high school experience and whether similar results are found. With a larger pool of participants, focus groups could be part of the research, and member checks could be done in person. This would allow the researcher to gather additional data using more than one method. The quantitative portion of the study would include certain demographic data, such as country of origin in order to determine the number of Latinas from a specific location and whether this knowledge would contain any pertinent data to add to the research.

Final Thoughts

This journey has been educational, enlightening, exciting, frustrating, and humbling. Conducting interviews with these young women enabled me to see, hear, and understand why their voices needed to be heard and their willingness to share their personal stories with me. Each story was unique and similar at the same time. These women defied the stereotypes and dispelled myths.

I wanted to conduct a research study on Latina high school experiences and what they thought about those experiences because of my concerns regarding their future. These concerns were based upon observations and working with Latinas at a previous place of employment. This research study highlighted the reasons all educators must be open minded about what Latina women can accomplish. They are making strides every day; and with our support and care and partnership with their families, Latinas will continue to excel in education and beyond. These young women in my study proved they are more than capable of achieving their goals and aspirations, while at the same time building bridges for younger Latinas to cross.

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Appendix A – Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol: How Do Latinas Make Meaning of Their High School Experience

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee:_____

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I am a doctoral candidate at the George Washington University, and I am conducting research on Latina Success. The purpose of this study is to discover and describe the experiences and meanings of Latinas who have recently graduated from high school and moved on to a post-secondary institution. In addition, this study will seek information as to whether Latinas were able to navigate the system with or without supports.

You were selected to participate in this study because you are a Latina, at least 18 years of age, graduated from high school or earned a GED, and are currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Everything you say will be kept confidential. Your name and school will not be listed in the study.

I will be recording our interview today on a digital recorder. Your recording will not be used in any publication or presentation. The files containing the recording will be de-identified as soon as possible, but the only identifier on them will be a participant code that cannot be connected to your name by anyone but me.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Notes Section:

After asking a question and believe the participant may have more to share, researcher may ask probing questions to elicit another response.

Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with me today. I assure you that all of your responses will remain confidential. I will provide each participant with a $5.00 Target gift card.

Appendix B – Site Permission Request

To: Diversity Officer/Multicultural Officer, (School Name)
Date: January ___, 2015
From: Gwendolyn Dorsey, Doctoral Candidate, The George Washington University
Subject: Site Permission Request

This memorandum is written to obtain permission to recruit students from your institution. I am conducting a research study examining the lived educational experiences of successful Latina students who are currently enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution.

Latinas are the largest racial/ethnic female group in the United States (Zambrana, 2011). However, they have the lowest graduation rate among other female racial and ethnic groups (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Zambrana, 20ll). There may be various reasons, such as family obligations, discrimination, stereotypes, no school support, and/or lack of self-confidence. However, fewer studies specifically focus on the ability of Latina students who were successful in graduating from high school or earning a GED and moving to post-secondary education. This study will address this gap by listening to Latina voices, encouraging them to share their high school experiences, how they were able to navigate through their education, and attend a post-secondary institution.

Your institution will be one of four participating in this interview-based research study. The following criteria will be used to identify and recruit students:

1. The Diversity Officer or Multicultural Officer, or designated administrator will email the researcher's recruitment email to prospective student participants who self identify as (a) Latina; (b) are at least 18 years of age; (c) currently enrolled in your institution.
2. Interested students will be asked to contact the researcher via email.
3. Students who contact the researcher will be screened to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria.
4. The consent form will be read and signed by the participant prior to the interview.
5. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes.
6. At the conclusion of the interview participants will receive a $5 gift card.

If you have any questions about this study, I can be reached at gdorsey@gwmail.gwu.edu.

By signing below, you are indicating your permission for me to recruit students at your institution.

_____ _____
Signature Date

Appendix C – Recruitment Email to Participants

Dear Student,

This email is an invitation for your participation in a current study I am conducting as a Doctoral Candidate at The George Washington University. This study is interested in speaking with Latinas in order to listen to your thoughts, reflections, and descriptions of your experiences as you went through the educational system and graduated from high school. In addition, this study will seek information as to whether you were able to navigate the educational system with or without supports.

I am requesting a 90-minute interview with you to discuss your reflections and insights on this topic. I am willing to accommodate your schedule and meet at a time that is convenient for you. I assure you that our conversations will be strictly confidential. The interviews will be recorded for purposes of transcription. However, the transcripts will have a unique code for identification; and recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Your recordings will not be used in any presentation or publication. All interview data will be kept in secure locations and will ultimately be destroyed to preserve your confidentiality. You will be asked to sign an informed consent form if you choose to participate. You will also receive a copy of your transcript via email in order for you to review and approve.

Please feel free to ask any questions at any time. I can be contacted at gdorsey@gwmail.gwu.edu. I value your participation and input in this study and thank you for your time, support, and participation in this study. To show my appreciation for your input, I will provide you with a $5 gift card.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn C. Dorsey
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D - Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

An Examination of the Lived Experiences of Successful Latinas Currently Enrolled in a Four-Year Institution

IRB# _____

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Clayton, Ph.D.,757-269-2203

Principal Contact: Gwendolyn Dorsey, 301-742-7656

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study under the direction of Dr. Jennifer K. Clayton along with Gwendolyn C. Dorsey, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Department of The George Washington University. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntarily.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to interview a number of Latina students who have recently graduated from high school or earned a GED in order to discover how they make meaning of their experience. In addition, the researcher would like to find out what resources and/or factors existed that enabled them to graduate from high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Latina, graduated from high school or passed the GED, are at least 18 years old, and are currently enrolled in a four-year university. Please read this form and ask any questions that will help you decide if you want to participate in the research study. Taking part is completely voluntary and, even if you decide you want to, you may end your participation at any time.

This qualitative study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Latinas, attending a four-year post-secondary institution, make meaning of their school experience?
2. What resources and factors, if any, contributed to their success?

Procedure

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in one face-to-face interview with Ms. Gwendolyn C. Dorsey, the primary research contact. The interview will be scheduled at a date, time, and location that are convenient to you. The total time for each interview will be between approximately 90 minutes. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may stop your participation at any time. The interviews will be recorded and file names for this study will be by date and pseudonym only.

Risks & Confidentiality

This study has the following risks:
You may feel some emotional stress or discomfort answering the interview questions. You are free to skip any questions or stop the interview at any point.
There is a chance that someone could find out that you participated in this study and identify you as such. The following steps are being taken to reduce this risk:

1. The records of this study will be kept private and will be stored on a single digital device used only for this research.
2. No names will be used in the final report or in any future publication of this research. Any data referencing participants will be identified only by a pseudonym. Any codes used to identify participants will be kept in a locked location separate from the actual files.
3. The transcription service will be asked to destroy records after they have been confirmed for accuracy.
4. The computer used for this research study is password protected.

Benefits

You may not benefit directly from your participation in this research study, but the results of this research may prove beneficial to the field of educational leadership and school districts.

Questions

You are invited to contact the research team if you have any questions, concerns, complaints, or think you have been harmed in any way through this research study. The Office of Human Research of The George Washington University, at (202) 994-2715, can answer any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research. Further information regarding this study may be obtained by contacting Dr. Jennifer K. Clayton, Principal Investigator, at 757-269-2203.

Please let the research team know if you would like a copy of this consent form and one will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Investigator's Statement

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study.

Investigator's Printed Name_____

Investigator's Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix E – First Cycle Open Coding

Parents' country of origin	Latino label
SES	Family environment
"Watershed moment"	College prep programs
College aspirations	Advocate
Racial makeup	Community activities
Different outlook on life	Success
Self description	Sacrifices made by family members
Care about educational experience	Spanish classes
Unaware of identity	Latina friends
Description of self	Discrimination
Identity with country or origin culture	Bullying
See two worlds	College is not an option
Caring teachers	Love of learning
College process	Parents' educational experience/level
High school experience	Proud of heritage
Friends and peers	Responsibility at a young age
Smartest one	Depression/anger management
No matter what	Rebellious
Thinking about college	Role model
Community service	Diversity
Religious beliefs	Non-diverse
Educational experience	Special programs
Feelings about ESOL	Mentor
Strong bond and connection	American Dream
Moved a lot	Parents' occupations
Changing schools frequently	Immigration status
Gifted and talented	Giving back
AP and honors classes	Honor societies
"Kinda like a mom"	Childhood memories
Neighborhood	School activities
Negative Latina identity	Latina stereotypes
Token	Being independent
Unique educational opportunities	White male advantage
Favorite subject	Health issues/setback
Choice or change of friends	Defining moment
Thinking about going to college	Disturbance in neighborhood
"Good daughter"	Two separate worlds
Spiritual success	Close knit
Make parents proud	School to home mindset
Community culture shock	Good stress
ESOL experience	Determination to succeed
Educational struggles	Uncaring adults
Loss of Hispanic friends	Culture shock

“Never hold onto the negatives”	Lack of Latina identity
Missteps in applying to colleges	Identify with another race (cultural transference?)
High expectations	“Always in charge”
Nurturing environment	Lack of diversity in school
Strict/sheltered upbringing	Communication with former teachers
Career aspirations	“Equated Blackness as another subsection of being Latino”
Skin complexion and identity	Disconnect with school counselors

Appendix F – Second Cycle Pattern Coding

Self	Family	School	Community
SES	Country(ies) of origin	Racial make up	Community service and/or activities
Watershed moment	SES	Caring adults, mentor, kinda like a mom	Moved a lot
Token	Strong bond and connection	High school experience	Changed schools frequently
Self description	Sacrifices made	GT, Honors/AP	Neighborhood connection
Not aware of identity	American dream	ESOL – length, feelings about it	Advocate
See two worlds	Close knit	Favorite subject	Diversity, lack of
Friends and peers	School to home mindset	Choice or change of friends	Giving back
Latina identity/lack of/stereotypes	High expectations	Diversity, lack of	Community culture shock
College/career aspirations	College – no matter what	College process	Nurturing environment
Make parents proud	Strict/sheltered upbringing	Thinking about college	
Proud of heritage	Work ethic	College prep programs	
Responsibility at young age	Family environment	Disconnect with school counselors	
Success		Discrimination, bullying	
Loss of Hispanic friends		Parent's educational experience/level	
Role model		School activities	
Childhood memories		Communication w/former teachers	
Good daughter			
ESOL			
College–only option			
Always in charge			
Skin complexion and identity			
Strong bond or connection			
Determined to succeed			
(23)	(12)	(16)	(9)

Appendix G – Final Coding List with Definitions

Code	Definition
ESOL	English as a second language
SES	Socio-economic status of family
Latina identity	Hispanic heritage – how one identifies
Elementary school experience	Early educational experience
Middle school experience	Middle educational experience
High school experience	Courses taken; extracurricular activities
College aspirations	Plan, determine to go in the future
College process	SAT, advice, search, application
Religion	Beliefs, role, participation in church
Caring adults	Teachers, counselors, others who assisted
Self description	Three words to describe self
Family upbringing/background	Country of origin, work ethic, memories
Family description	Three words to describe family
Family beliefs – "American dream"	Expectations; earn college degree, land a good job, work hard
Success	Individual participant explanation of success
Role model-leader	Parents' role in life; others who influenced
Negative Latina identity	Stereotypical views about Latinas
Friends and peers	Acquaintances at school and/or home
"Good daughter"	Respectful, dutiful; follow parents' expectations
Neighborhood environment/involvement	Connection or no connection
Giving back	Helping another person in family; participating in school/community activities
Recognition/awards	Recognized for good grades; taking honors and/or AP courses
Special programs	AVID, Prep-for-Prep, tutoring, other outside of school programs
Watershed moment	Positive or negative life-altering event
Thinking about college	Age when participant began to seriously take going to college as a fact.

Appendix H – Five Emergent Themes

Self Identity: Latina identity; self description; SES; success; negative Latina identity
Family Influences: Family upbringing/background; family description; good daughter; giving back; family beliefs – American dream
Educational Experiences: ESOL; elementary school; middle school; high school; thinking about college; college aspirations; college process; friends and peers; special programs; recognition/awards; watershed moment
Advocacy: Caring adults; role model/leader
Community Connections: Neighborhood environment/involvement