FIRST–GENERATION LATINAS ACHIEVING ACADEMIC SUCCESS WITHIN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS THROUGH A SENSE OF BELONGING

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ABSTRACT

FIRST–GENERATION LATINAS ACHIEVING ACADEMIC SUCCESS WITHIN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS THROUGH A SENSE OF BELONGING

MAILE CANLAS

First-generation Latinas (FGLs) in higher education have experienced challenges attending predominantly White institutions. Lack of sense of belonging is a strong predictor for isolation, anxiety, and/or depression. In addition to cultural dissonance and racially driven climates, attending predominantly White institutions increase the odds against Latinas to graduate. In addition to a robust college schedule, first-generation Latinas (FGLs) find it difficult to navigate college campuses. Studies have shown a sense of belonging is strongly associated with academic success and degree attainment. The culmination of educational inequality is an epidemic among historically marginalized populations on scalable levels. According to the article in the *Education Trust Journal* by Anthony et al. (2021), "White women and men are likelier to hold bachelor and graduate degrees than their Hispanic peers. Bachelor's degree attainment for white women and men is over 20% higher than for Latinas and Latinos" (p. 76). The ongoing social injustices among higher education institutions are problematic and continue to silence underrepresented populations. The purpose of the study is to give voice to FGLs and examine the relationship between women of color. In addition, increase awareness to procure academic success and gauge sense of belonging attending predominantly White institutions. The methodology of the study was derived from an autoethnographer voice. As Bochner and Ellis (2021) stated, "The autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass

audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people" (p. 277). Educational equality is possible, transformation is necessary for monumental change on behalf of marginalized populations. The powerful voices in this study are just the beginning of the solutions for breakthrough—the resources to help future generation of Latinas establish a sense of belonging while attending predominantly White institutions, the status quo will continue to be progressive, and not regressive, and as an educational leader, this is my vow.

Keywords: first-generation, Latinas, race, gender, identity, Chicana, cultures, resources strategies, academic success, degree attainment, college dropouts, continuing education, higher education, under-represented populations, historically marginalized populations, marginalization, socioeconomic status, Latinas studies, closing educational equity gap

DEDICATION

To all the beautiful first-generation Latina trailblazers pursuing their degrees in higher education, reach for the stars! To the first-generation Latinas pursuing their doctorate degree, you are a rare breed, I dedicate this study to you.

"The Latina doctoral graduate is a rare breed. She is persistent, smart and makes up only 6% of the doctorate degrees earned in 2017 (NSF, 2017). What makes those 1,764 Latina doctoral recipients in 2017 special? What drove those women, despite the odds found in numerous literature such as feelings of otherness (Aleman, 2018), microaggression and racial discrimination (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009), to earn an advanced degree like a doctorate?" ¡Adelante! I say, ¡Adelante! (Perez-Holt, 2021, p.1).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Husband and sweet Son who endured the arduous journey with me, what can I say but thank-you.

Love mommy,

(*King James Version*, 2018, Philippians 4:13)

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INTRODUCTION

"Autoethnographers write using first-person voice or point of view, positioning the researcher as the narrator of the story. First-person point of view is decidedly subjective because the narrator reports what she or he sees, experiences, knows, and feels, providing readers with I/eye-witness accounts" (Adams et al. 2014 p. 78).

My own life informs this dissertation and the research conducted significantly. The stories in the study begin with my own experiences living in impoverished areas and attending predominantly white institutions as a first-generation Latina. Autoethnography allows the flexibility for readers to experience the actions, understand the transformation, and identify the influences towards my decision for upward mobility. Through non-traditional dissertation writing, my hope is you experience the emotions these stories were charged with when they were shared furtively.

The Barrio

Grandma only attended the fourth grade before she was plucked out of elementary school to harvest raisins. Grandma was a woman of wisdom and revelation. In broken English she would say, "Mija, smile, you look beautiful when you do. When you smile, you attract friends, you know? So, you feel like you belong!" The barrios in the south side of Phoenix were steep in the Latino culture; the inner cities of the metropolitan area were loud with the hustle and bustle of street light traffic from both cars and pedestrians. The neighborhood had smells of backyard barbecues or piled up alleyway trash. Abuelita's kitchen always smelled the best, especially when she was cooking her red chili enchiladas. The barrio population has continued to grow, the densely populated neighborhoods are now considered "the new barrios;" however, the *La Esquina* market on the corner that my friends and I would walk to everyday to give the Chinese cashiers a hard time still stands today.

Walking back home from the Esquina market, my friends and I saw the local neighbors visiting with one another, standing by their chain link fences waving as the cars passed by on their way home. Latinos with lowriders came home late at night with rap music playing loud from their vehicles after cruising up and down South-Central Avenue. My friends and I lived close to one another, where at any time one of the families would have an all-night carne Asada barbeque. Drinking tequila and blaring cumbia music, this was the only way to live in the neighborhood. Early in the morning, as soon as the sun began to rise, the roosters began to crow and it was a race off to get home to bed before grandma woke up. The barrio life has never ceased to amaze me. We loved our people and the community in which we lived, and we were proud of our culture. The ghetto whispered, "*La Raza*" meaning the race, we were a living, breathing community, a synergy of strength-because we all had a sense of belonging.

Latino Population & Borderlands

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2022, the Latino population in Phoenix, Arizona, was 589,877; of that number, 290,895 were Latinas. Impoverished spaces made the land affordable, and the homes offered acres of space to grow crops for fruits and vegetables—skills my people knew how to cultivate. Southwestern Arizona is rich in soil, the land in our backyards was plenty and perfect for raising chickens, both hens and roosters alike. Every week I went with grandma to purchase seed to feed them, all a part of my daily household chores. The segregated community of south Phoenix was plentiful with sociocultural traditions and values, especially with the expectations in the home for the young Latinas (Bryan, 2023); we were Latinas, Mestiza, and new mix breed. In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa (1987) stated:

> To live in the Borderlands means you are neither *hispana India negras espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata,* half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from. (p. 216)

Identity is just one of the many challenges growing up as Mestiza in the barrio.

Living in a three-generational household was difficult but we would not have had it any other way. Grandma, papa, my mom, and two siblings lived in the home. Later, my mother and siblings moved out, and I decided to stay because I loved having all the attention from my grandparents to myself. In addition to our chickens, the neighbors had pigs, cows, and even horses. Papa cultivated the land with fruits and vegetables. We always had the water sprinklers spraying the green grass in the backyard and growing agriculture to include the tall palm trees down the driveway in the front of the house. The partition of the palm trees and the chain linked fences helped separate the territorial lines from the other houses and the rough streets of south Phoenix.

Girl from the Southside

Life was hard in the Southside of Phoenix. I was raised off 19th avenue and Broadway Road in Phoenix, Arizona, south of the river bottom. As a little girl I remember making shoes out of cardboard boxes. I cut them out in the shape of my feet, punched holes throughout, and tied the string up to my ankle and around my toes. After all, I wanted to play outside without stepping on rocks and hurting my feet. I felt good accomplishing an invention of my own until my grandma told my mom while she was at work; when she got home, she yelled at me to take them off. She was embarrassed. I remember, she hit me in the back of the head, "What's wrong with you, we are not that broke; we can't buy shoes!" *But we are so I thought.*

Outside of school, the barrios were home to us. When we got older, my friends and I did our best to dress up, walk, talk, and act as if we were well-to-do. Little did my friends know, I would pilfer my grandma and papa's clothes from their closet! Dreaming about upward mobility was always prevalent in my mind. Mom was a divorced mother of three children, working the night shift to make ends meet. We all lived in my grandparent's house, which made it a three-generational household, a familiar dynamic for Latino families. When I got older, I sensed the expectations for my Latino culture and the preassigned roles my grandparents enforced, they were to go straight to work—attending high school was not encouraged nor planning to go to college was not an option, as a matter of fact, it was unthinkable. Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016), authors of the study Marianismo and caregiving roles among U.S.-born and immigrant Mexican women, strongly demonstrated the laborious expectations among Latinas in the home. As Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016) wrote:

> For most participants in the study, an obligation referred to having a lack of choice or an unwanted responsibility, as well as caregiving under force or stress or because no other alternatives existed. On the other hand, study participants viewed the term commitment more favorably than obligation because commitment involved a willingness to give care whereas obligation did not. (p. 929)

Low Degree Attainment

Statistics for college attainment for Latinos have been clear: "In 1990, about half of the Hispanic population had at least a high school diploma, and 1 in 11 earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Hispanic adults were less likely than non-Hispanic adults to complete high school or college" (Walker & Vatter, 1996, p. 5). The data are derived from the early 1990s;

however, it is of extreme importance college attainment for Latinos is still on the lower levels of statistics today for degree attainment. According to a study by Lopez (2001), "The most common invalidating experiences reported by students during their transition were 'coldness' from faculty and low expectations from other students, which induced self-doubt" (p. 237). Students of color who received validation, affirmation, and awareness were more likely to get involved and succeed academically, especially if they played in sports. Lopez (2001) stated, "Latino first-year students in a predominantly white college campus may experience stress related to their ethnicity" (p. 237); however, through recognition and belongingness, students begin to participate and thrive on PWIs. There is empowerment in numbers, and research has demonstrated the significance of early intervention, one of the many solutions to increase degree achievement among historically marginalized populations (Bochner et al., 2021).

The use of autoethnography for this study was to share one's story and gauge the significance of the participants' experience and their pursuit of sense of belonging while attending PWI. The purpose was much greater and involved social change among first-generation Latinas (FGLs) to increase educational equality. Bochner and Ellis (2021) stated:

> The autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people. (p. 277)

The methodology of autoethnography is scalable and the use of voice is powerful to reach a wider audience. The experiences shared demonstrate connected emotions, feelings, and

opinions supported by qualitative methods and data analysis, the process in which allows stories to significantly stand out compared to other shared experiences in research studies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship among FGLs academic success and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, this study examined the challenges FGLs experienced attending PWIs. I demonstrated the findings through qualitative research using autoethnography and told my own story as the researcher and participant considering my life experience adds to the research of this study. In addition, I shared stories of four other FGLs who graduated from PWIs successfully. Finally, I discuss Latina postgraduate career opportunities, representation, and upward mobility. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997):

> A sense of belonging is suited to understanding a variety of collective affiliations, formed in large environments, that can attribute to an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community. Sense of belonging is fundamental to members' identification with a group and has numerous consequences for behavior. (p. 328)
>
> Thus, being accepted, invited, or welcomed within a community is paramount for academic success. The feeling of acceptance encourages students to get involved in school activities, and the representation of Latinas on PWIs is vital to degree attainment and educational accomplishments.

Further, studies have demonstrated the connection between belonging and academic success among FGLs attending PWIs. Walton and Cohen (2007) addressed campus service workers' experiences and stated, "For members of socially stigmatized groups, the question, 'Do I belong?' appears to go hand in hand with the question 'Does my group belong?'" (p. 94). Thus, as Keels (2019, as cited in Walton & Cohen, 2007) said, "It is therefore essential to

their personal, academic, and social development that they find counter spaces that can counteract this outsider status, thus increasing institutional interconnectedness and overall belongingness" (p. 5). Walton and Cohen then argued campus service workers provided these counter spaces. However, there has been dearth of information and research on FGLs' feelings of alienation within the PWI environment and their feelings of being an outsider; these feelings are an everyday occurrence for these students attending PWIs, and the psychological changes are astounding for FGLs. Keels (2020) stated these students are seen as "cultural deviants— students who fall outside normative assumptions of who college students should be" (p. 5); thus, first-generation college students face additional psychosocial challenges in finding identity-affirming and supportive spaces on campus.

This study aimed to close the educational achievement gap through further research and awareness. According to Anthony et al. (2021):

> Hispanic adults have long had lower attainment than White adults (and, as a result, they have often been trapped in low-wage jobs that don't require a college degree). In our previous work, we found a 24.5-percentage point gap in degree attainment between Hispanic adults and White adults. (para. 3)

The education achievement gap is circulatory, from generation to generation until we as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives say, "no more!" Our children, the next generation of women, will have access to higher education, establish a sense of belonging in PWIs, and achieve degree attainment.

Statement of the Problem

The educational equity gap among FGLs has continued to widen. According to Anthony et al. (2021), "White women and men are likelier to hold bachelor and graduate

degrees than their Hispanic peers. Bachelor's degree attainment for white women and men is over 20% higher than for Latinas and Latinos" (p. 76). The ongoing social injustices are problematic and have continued to silence marginalized populations. Significant change is necessary to advance FGLs in higher education so they can attain degrees. The relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging is the catalyst for increasing students' graduation rates.

In addition to academic achievement for FGLs, according to Schwartz (2001), "Latino families' short-term economic needs supersede parents' desires to support their children's long-term education goals" (p. 1). FGLs are expected to follow family customs, values, or traditions. According to Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016):

> Marianismo, a traditional gender role in the Mexican family (Gutmann, 1997; Hubbell, 1993) . . . is fundamental to the social organization of Latino cultures (Staton, 1972). Women are socialized into the marianismo role beginning in early childhood, which guides normative behaviors of femininity, submission, weakness, reservation, and virginity. (p. 926)

Latina daughters and granddaughters make constant sacrifices to pursue their dreams of higher education, which was not a choice for their mothers and grandmothers growing up. The influence of family expectations for Latina cultures was to take on the role of caregivers or financial providers, pursue a husband, and bear his children. If they dared to dream, Latinas were viewed as Chicana feminists or considered not a "good girl."

Research Questions

The research questions examined in this study were:

1. How do first-generation Latinas, initially as students and later as staff navigate academic

success within a predominantly White institution?

2. Sense of belonging and academic success are critical for first-generation Latinas and academic achievement but how? How do first-generation Latinas, initially as students and later as staff, create a sense of belonging for themselves and others?
3. First-generation Latinas lean significantly on a sense of belonging; how does that relate to their academic success and cultivating other FGLs and sense of belonging? How do first-generation Latinas explain the relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging as students and later as staff to give back to the community?

Significance of the Study

There has been a dearth of information on FGLs; through recognition and belongingness, students are apt to participate and thrive in college. In *Low-Income, First-Generation Students*, Ion (2023) cited other researchers stating:

> Far from being a unitary approach or a panacea to deficits, the focus on strengths represents a shift in the dominant research paradigm (Fogarty et al., 2018) on marginalized, minority populations. Despite the valuable contributions of this research strand, there is a dearth of strengths-based studies regarding first-generation students' career development and the role of families in shaping this experience, with some exceptions such as Gofen (2009), Reyes (2012), Murillo et al. (2017), and O'Shea (2019). (p. 2)

Due to the dearth of research, the paradigm of struggling FGLs attending PWIs must be corrected, and degree attainment and sense of belonging must be evident. As Juarez (2022) stated, "Research findings suggest that persistence, retention, and graduation rates are positively related to the sense of belonging of Latina/o/x students in college" (p. 16). The

significance of the study can help further develop resources and programs to enhance FGLs abilities to graduate and reach degree attainment.

Further efforts and belonging elements have curtailed current graduation rates, shifting the current low retention challenges on colleges and universities for marginalized populations through organizations, sports, or clubs. Juarez (2022) stated:

> Research points to an array of sense of belonging opportunities that allow students to participate in campus activities that promote a positive experience and enhance graduation rates. While these include participating in student organizations, being part of intramural sports, and being active in student life (p. 7).

Many organizations and activities aid in the collaboration and cohesiveness that lead to a students' sense of belonging.

Among marginalized populations, social and academic integrations in higher education play vital roles for students to thrive in college. This research has referred to students of color who received validation and were likely to get involved and succeed academically. Prevention of academic warnings or probation is essential for academic success. FGLs experiencing feelings of isolation due to lack of belonging is institutional abuse and needs to stop, or students will experience self-doubt or be treated as unwelcome guests. This current study is significant and highly relates to the low metrics of degree attainment for FGLs. Educational institutions must be proactive to show the importance of solutions and cultivate a welcoming spirit. Hence, students will avoid the pitfalls of struggling in institutions where the dominant race is White.

Summary of Relevant Literature and Gaps

Relevant literature has supported the educational journey and the challenges FGLs experience attending PWIs from the elementary level throughout college. Anzaldúa et al. (2012) discussed these struggles throughout history, such as losing one's native tongue and learning a new language. Anzaldúa et al. shared the eight varieties of languages spoken by Chicanas/os: (a) standard English, (b) working class and slang English, (c) standard Spanish, (d) standard Mexican Spanish, (e) North Mexican Spanish dialect, (f) Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations), (g) Tex-Mex, and (h) *Pachuco* (called *caló*). The literature has described the feelings of Mestizas attending elementary school in the United States who have been forced to speak English, then return home to their families to speak Spanish (Anzaldúa et al., 2012). The borders exist not only within the physical barriers that surround Chicanas but also in the psychological borders, such as expectations in the home or barriers that prevent further growth of strong Latina women who pursue their dreams and achieve their goals.

A review of the literature has described racial segregation and gender scrutiny as part of the social injustices that continue in society. Chicanos have straddled the borderlands, meaning they have taken ties to Mexican and American borders as part of themselves (Anzaldúa et al., 2012). Educational inequality is evident; Chicanas attending PWIs have many barriers (e.g., borders); yet, they have bravely continued to cross over and demand their own space. Chicanas have acknowledged the existence of discrimination on college campuses, especially during the onset of the Chicano movement (Garcia, 2016).

Garcia (2016) described the historical traces of Chicanas fighting for their space within higher education institutions, stating:

> At NSU (pseudonym), students fought for the creation of counter spaces such as the Office of Outreach and Recruitment, which dates back to the 1960s when Black and Chicano students took over the administration building, demanding that the campus adopt programs that increase their overall access to the university. These spaces are unique at NSU because they have not only become institutionalized counter spaces for students but also for the student affairs staff working within them. (p. 28)

Creation of these spaces and preservation of the historical traces of Chicanas have been helping Chicanas fight for social justice and the right to belong on PWIs. Chicanas must show honor to those who have made sacrifices before them.

Pascarella et al. (2004), authors of *First-Generation College Students: Additional Evidence on College Experiences and Outcomes*, discussed the categories from which FGLs come. They need opportunities to lead and guidance from their parents when entering college. If not, they are left alone to navigate their undergraduate program. The second category described by Pascarella et al. (2004) referred to first-generation students' transition from high school to college. FGLs must be set up and groomed to be college bound and expected to attend college at an early age. The third category focuses on the degree attainment and the persistence necessary to complete their college education. Pascarella et al. (2004) stated, "First-generation students are at somewhat more risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind" (p. 135). The literature review presents the models for solutions to address first-generation challenges through awareness, self-perception, self-worth, the value in numbers, and the positive reinforcement of feelings of reassurance through a sense of belonging and community and establishing acceptance of PWIs.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is non-traditional format due to the methodology of autoethnography and qualitative research. “The process then asks participants to re-tell each other’s stories using first-person voice (“I”) and beginning with the statement, “This is what I heard” (Adams, p. 53). In addition, according to constructivism theory, everyone’s individual experience makes their own learning unique to them. When learning new material is applied to the foundational knowledge, individuals possess external elements that affect the ways individuals learn. However, according to Creswell et al. (2007), “Constructivism stem from a constructivist worldview, which upholds the idea that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 8). Individual’s background and previous knowledge impacts how students learn new information. FGLs may interpret new material differently compared to other cultures and ethnicities. In addition, Creswell et al. (2007) stated:

> Collecting data from these individuals would involve having them tell their stories. These stories, called field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), provide the raw data for researchers. Other field texts might include a record of their stories in a journal or diary, or the researcher might observe the individuals and record field notes. We might also collect letters sent by the individuals, assemble stories about the individuals from family members, gather documents such as memos or official correspondence about the individual, or obtain photographs, memory boxes (collection of items that trigger memories), and other personal-family-social artifacts. Narrative researchers situate individual stories within the participants’

> personal experiences (their job, their homes) and their cultural (racial or ethnic) and historical (time and place) contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). (p. 243)

The development of this study was based on learning about individual experiences of FGLs who attended a PWI. They may or may not have faced opposition regarding attending college at home and on their college campus; however, the stories they told come from personal experiences or cultural and historical contexts. Anonymous (2012) stated:

> Delgado Bernal defined cultural intuition as the deliberate employment of Chicana identity—its substance and its expression—in the theoretical and interpretive repertoires of Chicana researchers. She then, by example, through an oral history of Chicana students, showed how this feminist framework served the broader aims of educational research by amplifying rather than silencing Chicana voices. (p. 511)

Chicana feminist and sense of belonging behaviors are established based on their thoughts and experiences on PWIs. González et al. (2006) asserted, "The ultimate border–the border between knowledge and power–can be crossed only when educational institutions no longer reify culture, when lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge" (p. 42). FGLs' direct relationships with education leads to academic success with the knowledge of opposition and the borders they face, constructing their own beliefs and values to attend PWI and to thrive. Calderón et al. (2012) stated:

> The unique experiences of the literature that a Chicana feminist perspective can provide are those linked to issues such as language and religion. A Chicana feminist perspective can be achieved over time by deconstructing the effects of class, gender, sexuality, and race. (p. 513)

I approached the theoretical framework in this study from a Chicana feminist lens, using the

goal of the political grouping and the assertion to achieve educational equality by deconstructing the effects of class gender, sexuality, and race. Latina enrollment numbers are increasing; however, "graduation rates are at an all-time low for degree attainment" (Espinoza, 2010, p. 319). However, the solution to closing the achievement gap is strength in numbers and the development of new beliefs, placing value on the knowledge students are learning and the importance of expressing their voices with their own understanding and significance of higher education.

The framework was woven with epistemological perspectives in Chicana feminism according to research by Delgado Bernal (1998). The substructure allowed for a deeper foundation of the subculture by layering the foundation that surrounds FGLs and their perspectives attending PWI. Delgado Bernal (1998) stated, "Employing a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research thus becomes a means to resist epistemological racism and to recover untold histories" (p. 556). In addition to untold histories, the paradigm shift and the study of Chicana feminists reverts the shortcomings and dearth research of Chicanas in scholarly research. Delgado Bernal (1998) stated:

> By shifting the analysis onto Chicanas and their race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, scholars are able to address the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship (Castaneda, 1993; Castillo, 1995; Pardo, 1998; Perez, 1993; Ruiz 1998; Trujillo, 1993), thereby giving voice to Chicana experiences and bringing change to their lives. (p. 559)

Autoethnography requires voice to describe FGLs experiences in higher education who are attending PWIs and their challenges navigating college because Latinas are the central subject of the research epistemological lens from Chicana perspective and crucial for further

understanding the framework of the study. Delgado Bernal (1998) stated, “Therefore, ‘endarkened’ feminist epistemologies are crucial, as they speak to the failures of traditional patriarchal and liberal educational scholarship and examine the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (p. 556). Ultimately, it was vital to understand the conversations and reflections of FGLs throughout recordings from this study as individuals drew from memory their experiences of cultural dissonance or a seamless transition attending college; either way, the lens provided understanding of historical stories told and the cultural context from which Latinas were reared.

Methodology: Autoethnography

The autoethnography research design of this study demonstrated the importance of developing FGLs through the Chicanas feminist’ lens; the framework focused on the deconstruction of systemic discrimination and built solid educational enviros on scalable levels to enhance degree attainment for on behalf of FGLs attending PWIs. As Altschul et al. (2008) stated:

> Rather than finding that declining academic performance across generations of residence in the United States is associated with a “thickening” in-group identity, our results suggest that generational decline among low-income FGLs is associated with a lack of identification with an in-group. Among youth who identify with an in-group, lack of appreciation of the identity-relevant connections between in-group and broader society is associated with lower achievement. (p. 319)

As Anthony et al. (2021) stated, “Unless we address these longstanding structural inequities, we will continue to see vastly divergent outcomes along racial, ethnic, and gender lines — and that is something our increasingly diverse country can ill afford” (p. 1). The

research targeted the critical accountability elements for student retention, graduation rates, and academic success at PWIs. As Anthony et al. (2021) stated, “Slightly more than half of Latinas and over 60.0% of Latinos have only a high school diploma or less versus roughly 28% of white women and 35% of white men” (p. 2). History has continued to repeat itself from the recoiling of brown bodies using systemic epidemics of racism. Prevention of Chicanas finding academic success has been ongoing—there is a need to reinforce positive behaviors, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, and prevent attrition by implementing retention programs, outreach, and resources in numbers to overcome systemic barriers within institutional discrimination.

Autoethnography includes journaling, archive retrieval, and the sharing of one’s story to penetrate the readers’ understanding of the social context of the author. It includes structural events about how life experiences are told and influences are shared, the impact of FGLs, and the challenges of attending college. Autoethnography consists of explaining the turning points and transformation that has occurred, psychologically and physically, especially after achieving tremendous accomplishments in higher education (Denzin, 2014). The autoethnography framework draws on memory.

In this study, sharing stories and establishing a sense of belonging was essential to academic success. In comparison, students overcome challenges such as establishing belongingness after several repeated attempts, identifying transformation of the good fight to attend college against family plans, and connecting with academic members such as advisors or professors in higher education. True to the participants’ own words, my story continuously surrounded the research process, not necessarily to compare or contrast stories, but to arrive at definitive conclusions when reviewing all of the combined data.

The culmination of ethnography and cultural tuition via Chicana feminist epistemology was crucial to further explore and understand the data collected and the delivery of the findings at the conclusion of the study. The autoethnography inquiry in this study was based on nonfictional, lived experiences and the challenges of attending college as first-generation students and voice. According to Denzin (2014):

> These conventions which structure how life experiences are performed, told, and written about, involve the following problematic presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions: (1) the existence of others; (2) the influence and importance of race, gender, and class; (3) family beginnings; (4) turning points; (5) known and knowing authors and observers; (6) objective life markers; (7) real persons with real lives; (8) turning point experiences; and (9) truthful statements distinguished from fictions. (p. 18)

In addition to the interviews, participants also wrote letters to their younger selves. These letters were also part of the data. Participants were asked given what they know now, what would they tell their younger selves at the onset of the educational journey. The purpose of the letters was to enlighten readers, enhance reflections, and celebrate wins as participants told their story through their own narrative and autoethnography. Findings for the letters were then coded to compare any similarities and differences; however, more importantly, the letters shared participants' testimonies for other future FGLs attending PWIs.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

At the time of this study, I worked as an analyst at a PWI at the community college level; the educational institution has changed, but the PWI dynamics has not; a minority student's 1st year is critical for their success. Delgado Bernal et al. (2009) wrote, "Unfortunately, compared with their white peers, the first-year experience is often more complex and tumultuous for

racial/ethnic minority students at PWIs (predominately white institutions)" (p. 22). Historically, Latinas have suffered the social injustices of discrimination, oppression, and domination in the United States for many years. According to statistics, as a FGL, high school dropout, single mother of three attending college for the first-time, I was presumed to ultimately quit school altogether. However, destiny had different plans for me. In the pursuit of feeling as if I belonged, I participated in several clubs, served as a club member, and attended conferences for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). Moreover, this participation helped raise my awareness of social and educational inequalities and injustices FGLs endured; the opposition drove me to try harder in every aspect of my life. The experience felt empowering; I felt supported and understood from where my ancestors came. I was highly related to others in the group, my voice was heard, and I did not feel judged because I spoke in a slight Mexican dialect, although I did not know Spanish.

The roles I have taken in the educational sector have been similar working for PWIs, influencing other FGLs in search of knowledge and power, instilling the values of Chicana feminism, and remembering our leaders throughout history—the pioneers who paved the way in search of educational access and equality. I have served for over 10 years as an academic advisor, recruiter, technology trainer, and success coach for PWIs; therefore, I have had the opportunity to influence the next generation.

In addition to managing the everyday academic rigors of college, "these students must also adjust to an environment that is often foreign, socially exclusive, culturally irresponsive, and wrought with contradictions" (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009, as cited in Delgado Bernal et al., 2009, p. 560). Most students do not have relationships with their counselors or faculty members, much less with their peers. Students coming from Latino homes from the barrios are unable to relate to

their surroundings, so when they have an advisor appointment and see me come out of my office, they feel comfortable immediately. When I share my experience, they feel welcomed instantly. My passion for student support and my ability for my students is undeniable and has brought me to my career choice—first as an advisor and then as a cheerleader. Working for an institution is rewarding, and my role as an advisor place me at the forefront as an educational leader.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of this research was the sources of this study as FGLs and Chicanas may be from Mexico; however, their ethnicities may range from other South American countries such as Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, or Guatemala. Anwar (2015) wrote:

> Hispanic generally refers to how Latin Americans are united through their connection to Spain and their links to Spanish culture and tradition. Spaniards would be included in this formulation, but Brazilians would not. On the other hand, Latino is usually used to refer to how Latin Americans are connected via their common history of colonization. Spaniards would not be part of this formulation, while Brazilians might. However, for the most part, these labels and categories are ambiguous, and many organizations and institutions invest in keeping these terms as ambiguous and broad as possible. (para. 17)

Gaps in the literature were the limitations of data for Latina research overall, in addition to Chicana feminism, degree attainment, academic success, and the significance of a sense of belonging. There were also restrictions from memory loss as FGLs who told their stories and shared their experiences attending PWIs may have had barriers to understanding the literature and the in-depth research of the study. As Chang et al. (2013) cited:

> Personal memory data include writings that you will create as you jog your memory about past events, people, places, objects, behaviors, thinking, and utterances. By

> activating your memory of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, you may be able to bring out many vivid details about your past when collecting these types of data. Although you may try to recall your past as accurately and completely as possible, your personal memory data are disappointingly "imperfect." (p. 75)

Other constraints may have been the program FGLs attended on the college campus. For example, gathering research from liberal arts majors compared to engineers attending PWIs may render different results and the study produced results for participants who attended a 4-year university compared to a 2-year community college and transferred to a university.

Definitions of Terms

Academic success measures student achievements by their academic, social, and cultural experiences in higher education. York et al. (2015) stated, "This initial framework of academic success consists of academic achievement; acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies; and persistence and retention" (p. 2). Grade point averages and progression and remaining time to graduation according to the timeline are characteristics of academic success.

Latino community is defined as a group of individuals who may relate to one another on certain levels such as ethnicities, cultural, traditions, or nationality, "By enhancing the scholarship around the concept of Latino Educational Leadership, school leaders will have access to greater resources that will help serve partnerships with Latino communities" (Rodriguez et al., 2016 p. 148).

First-generation students in college may have a greater risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind due to their parents not attending college "First-generation students are at somewhat more risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind" (Pascarella et al., 2004 p. 135).

First-generation Latinas-First to attend college in their generation who may or may not be the only child or have/had siblings that attended college simultaneously. In addition to status of citizenship and sexual orientation identities. FGLs may be "Undocumented students who are at risk for many stress-induced emotions—anxiety, guilt, depression, anger, hopelessness, shame, and uncertainty" (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013) (O'Neal et al. 2016, p. 448). FGLs may also identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, "Being gay and Latino meant one was marginalized in both communities. It required a balancing act, strongly rooted in Latino culture, to find a place to call community" (Chavez, 2019 p. 182).

Higher education administration oversees the admissions, registration, advising, and student life offices. Faculty and staff members involved with postsecondary operations of the institutions are also included (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Historically White institutions (HWI) have been supported by the United States before 1964 (M.C. Brown & Dancy, 2010) and have a rich history of a student population of Caucasian descent.

Latina/o/x are Latin Americans, Brazilians, and Mexican Americans who are connected due to their connection and history of colonization (Anwar, 2014). Latino/a/x refers to the historically marginalized population within the context of first-generation students in college in Phoenix, Arizona.

Latina/s are women who are Latin Americans, Brazilians, or Mexican Americans (Anwar, 2014). Latinas refer to historically marginalized populations within the context of first-generation female students attending PWI (Anwar, 2014).

Marginalized is a segregated population, generally minorities, underrepresented, people of oppressed dispositions or constrained to subordinated state (Stulberg & Lawner Weinberg, 2011).

Oppression is a social prejudice that constrains marginalized populations.

Predominantly White institutions (PWI) are colleges or universities where the student population is primarily White or of White descent that accounts for 50% or higher in student attendance (Smith, 2022). PWIs are sometimes referred to as historically White institutions.

Reflexivity is thought of as knowing one's own values, feelings, reactions, and motives and how they influence those around them or situations they may encounter that involves social or political views (Hayes & Fulton, 2015).

Retention is the continuation of college students who maintain attendance or reenroll from one year to the next; strategies for retention are efforts to prevent students from leaving school so they may graduate with their given degree (Guzmán, 2023).

Sense of belonging cultivates acceptance and growth and promotes collaboration and engagement, allowing students to feel (Juarez, 2022).

Women of color are people of the female gender who identify as nonwhite or not of Caucasian descent or lineage.

Achievement gap the space between white graduates compared to Latino or African American descents among students attending colleges or universities.

Retention ability to maintain or retain student attendance via support, resources, and accountability programs.

Cultural dissonance is the experience of the current dominant culture in an environment conducive to white descent as opposed to Latina's upbringing and cultural values and beliefs.

Gonzalez (2020) stated, “Latinas now face cultural dissonance in the struggle between assimilating to the dominant American educational system or honoring their cultural upbringing” (p. 15).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the purpose and relevant literature for the study and re-state the theoretical framework. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, I examine the challenges first-generation Latinas (FGLs) experience attending PWIs. Finally, discuss Latina postgraduate career opportunities, representation, and upward mobility utilizing autoethnography, "Realist autoethnographers use personal experience as a way into, and/or a means for, describing and understanding cultural experience as fully, complexly, and evocatively as possible, creating what Clifford Geertz termed "thick descriptions" of cultural life" (Adams, p. 85). The non-traditional format of autoethnography in the literature review presents relevant literature then proceeds to personal experience told through narrative voice by the researcher and participant.

First-generation Latinas

First-generation Latinas have various sub-identities. In addition to being first to attend college in their immediate family, according to recent studies there are immigrant status FGLs. Documented or undocumented, "Undocumented students who are at risk for many stress-induced emotions—anxiety, guilt, depression, anger, hopelessness, shame, and uncertainty" (Gonzales et al., 2013, as cited in O'Neal et al., 2016, p. 448). First-generation Latinas also may identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, "Being gay and Latino meant one was marginalized in both communities. It required a balancing act, strongly rooted in Latino culture, to find a place to call community" (Chavez, 2019 p. 182). The FGLs in relation to this study will refer her as first-generational Latina who may or may not be the only child or have/had siblings that attended

college simultaneously or previously before her. In this case, FGLs are referred to in this study as the first aside from the parents to attend college or university regardless of cultural background.

FGLs learn based on the historical context of cultural background, understanding a sense of self helps shape their readiness to adapt to new environments or cultural binds. Espinoza (2010) stated, "As a result, Latinas find themselves caught in a cultural bind between meeting the demands of their individualistic-oriented school culture and their collectivist-oriented family culture" (p. 319). They learn new material and process the information that eventually manifests within their behaviors. According to Gonzalez et al., (2006), "By drawing on household knowledge, student experience is legitimized as valid, and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases students can manipulate to enhance learning" (p. 43). PWIs who lead their faculty with the constructionist theory understand this concept; "thus, without considering students' sense of self, identity, and culture in college life, postsecondary institutions will not retain FGLs whose background, beliefs, and traditions are a crucial component of what makes them who they are" (Balcacer, 2018, p. 33).

According to Hurtado and Carter (1997):

> A sense of belonging is suited to understanding a variety of collective affiliations, formed in large environments, that can attribute to an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community. Sense of belonging is fundamental to members' identification with a group and has numerous consequences for behavior. (p. 328)

Being accepted, invited, or welcomed within a community is paramount. The feeling of acceptance encourages students to get involved in school activities, increase academic success to pursue degree attainment, and offset the deficit of educational inequality among marginalized populations.

Further studies have demonstrated the connection between belonging and academic success among FGLs attending PWIs and the connection of campus service workers. Walton and Cohen (2007) stated:

> "For members of socially stigmatized groups, the question, 'Do I belong?' appears to go hand in hand with the question 'Does my group belong?'" (94). It is therefore essential to their personal, academic, and social development that they find counter spaces that can counteract this outsider status, thus increasing institutional interconnectedness and overall belongingness (Keels, 2019, 11). We argue that campus service workers offer such counter spaces. (p. 5)

There has been a dearth of information and research on FGLs' feelings of alienation within the PWI environment and feelings of being an outsider; however, this is an everyday occurrence for them attending PWI, and the psychological changes are astounding for FGLs. Keels (2020) stated, students are "cultural deviants— students who fall outside normative assumptions of who college students should be" (p. 9). Thus, first-generation college students face additional psychosocial challenges in finding identity-affirming and supportive spaces on campus.

This study aimed to close the educational achievement gap through further research and awareness. According to Anthony et al. (2021):

> Hispanic adults have long had lower attainment than White adults (and, as a result, they have often been trapped in low-wage jobs that don't require a college degree). In our previous work, we found a 24.5-percentage point gap in degree attainment between Hispanic adults and White adults. (para. 3)

The education achievement gap is circulatory, from generation to generation until mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives say, "no more!" Our children, the next generation of women, will

have access to higher education, establish a sense of belonging in PWIs and achieve degree attainment. Drawing on a theoretical framework of Chicana feminism and literature on belonging, I analyzed stories from FGLs at a PWI, including my own story—autoethnography.

In the remainder of this chapter, I present my theoretical framework and relevant literature I used to answer my research questions. In addition, share my story as autoethnographer researcher and participant of the New Mestiza as illuminated with themes from my framework and relevant literature: (a) Elementary Barriers, (b) Sixth-Grade "Baby Dolls," (c) Latina Expectations, (d) Latina Culture, (e) Seamless Transition, (f) Borderlands, (g) Cultural Dissonance, (h) Cultural Collision, (i) Nontraditional Student, (j) PWI Racially Driven Climate, (k) Racial Discrimination, (l) Latino Institutional Support, (m) Microaggressions, and (n) Upward Mobility.

The New Mestiza

My story is told from a new mestiza perspective. I was raised by my grandma, who was proud to be born in Albuquerque, New Mexico; *Abuelita* spoke Spanglish. She wanted me to learn Spanish, our mother tongue, and I wanted nothing to do with the language. I regret not learning Spanish from my grandma or not at all. During the late 1980s, the predominant language in the United States was and still is English. Any other language was frowned upon in the U.S. school systems. Grandma used to say, "Mija, I want you to learn Spanish!" I said, "No, Grandma, I don't want to. All they speak in school around here (the neighborhood) is English, and that is all I want to speak!" As Chicanas, we identified as Mexican Americans and have struggled at the intersections of race, gender, and language. Latinas have experienced hardship navigating the social classes of upward mobility in society and endured long suffering from criticism to scrutiny. To further define the new mestiza, Anzaldúa et al. (2012) stated, "Mestizo –

people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood" (p. 27)—through mestizaje, a racial intermixing of Latin American occupants with European colonizers.

Anzaldúa et al. (2012) discussed the struggles of Chicanas/os throughout history, such as the loss of our native tongue and the learning of a new language. Anzaldúa et al. shared the eight different varieties of languages spoken by Chicanas/os: (a) standard English, (b) working class and slang English, (c) standard Spanish, (d) standard Mexican Spanish, (e) North Mexican Spanish Dialect, (f) Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations), (g) Tex-Mex, and (h) *Pachuco* (called *caló*). Mestizas attending elementary school in the United States have been forced to speak English, then return home to their families and speak Spanish again. Language barriers, racial segregation, and gender scrutiny are all social injustices that continue in society. Chicanos have straddled the borderlands, meaning they have taken Mexican and American borders as part of themselves (Anzaldúa et al., 2012). Attending elementary schools in predominantly White communities is challenging. My educational journey was equally challenging. However, my passion has far exceeded my determination and immediate goals to achieve specified academic accomplishments. Through this literature review, while weaving in autoethnography, shared experiences will lead to a discussion of FGLs attending PWIs and the pursuit of establishing a sense of belonging to procure academic success—perspectives of Chicana feminism, new mestiza expectations, and cultural dissonance. These concepts are just a few of the primary components of the study discussed throughout the literature review with supporting citations.

Chicana Feminism

Chicana feminists have constantly deconstructed theories developed by the dominant race, such as the ideology that Latinas should marry and rear children instead of attending

college and obtaining a degree. The Latino culture has exuded a message from a young age into the subconscious and subculture of Latinas. Latinas are taught to earn their keep and succumb to the preassigned misogynistic professional roles—oppressed by gender inequality and racial hierarchies. Many have fought for political rights in higher education and have made significant progress, Latinas have defined what it means to be Latina, and they have continued to fight with resistance to conform. As Mendez-Morse (2003) stated, "For many, this label 'rejects the idea that we must deny our Mexican heritage in order to be a 'real' American' (Gallardo, 1999, Who are Chicanas, 2)" (p. 162). FGLs attending PWIs embrace their culture, continue to bridge a sense of belonging, and implement Latina representation on college campuses. If and when Latina representation is not present, Chicana will cultivate the atmosphere and repeat history, similar to NSU's admissions and recruitment events.

Latinas heal by telling their stories—they rise and continue to fight and challenge systemic discrimination in higher educational institutions; the fight begins in the home. Martinez (2022) described the separation anxiety her close family members experienced when she desired to attend college and her family disagreed. Elders living in the home of two or three generations did not understand why their daughters or granddaughters must leave for college, even if it was for abuelita's self-serving ambitions, such as watching *novellas* [Spanish soap operas] on television. Research has shown Chicana feminists have made marginal progress in institutionalizing social norms at PWIs. Thus, many FGLs may relate to those attempting to attend college while still residing in the home.

In my own story as a Chicana, I experienced acculturation constantly, and hearing the word "no" was not uncommon. Opposition grew in me as a woman of color, and the onset of my maturation began as an FGL. Accepting defeat was not an option; procuring a degree was

inevitable. The expectations and ideologies of my upbringing of who I was had to change, and acquiring new perspectives was necessary to adapt to the dominant culture. Social relationships, the language spoken, and the food choices we practiced were good examples of the everyday adaptation I faced that was necessary to navigate. As Castillo et al. (2004) stated, "Most frequently assessed are language usage, social affiliation practices, and daily living habits (e.g., type of food one likes to eat; Zane & Mak, 2003)" (p. 152). Whiteness was the dominant population; yet, I did not choose to behave or dress in what the dominant culture wore; even the food court had its challenges, french fries were the safe route, besides who does not find freshly cooked french fries comforting?

While in college, I experienced biculturalism: "the acculturation process is often experienced by Chicanas in the form of biculturalism or even in adoption of the *mestiza* identity" (Calderón et al., 2013, p. 513). Two cultures collided and feelings of isolation continued; it did not matter what I did in any given situation. I felt as if I did not belong. Castillo et al. (2004) stated, "When a Mexican American woman attends a predominantly White college or university, she may undergo an acculturative process" (p. 152). As Chicana feminists, one learns to adapt the campus culture and the attitudes and behaviors while maintaining her own cultural values and identities, not necessarily toward the dominant culture, but toward the social and political group that brings about the common change that occurs when operating in large groups such as the Chicana feminist movement. Castillo et al. (2004) stated, "Acculturation on an individual level is referred to as psychological acculturation and pertains to the changes in attitudes and behaviors in individuals as a result of acculturation" (p. 151). Together we remain strong, sharing commonalities and struggles experienced in the classroom, such as the food choices in the cafeteria on the college campus.

The academic environment on college campuses often reflects U.S. White American cultural values such as competition and individualism (Gonzalez, 2020). The number of Chicana gatherings enabled us to thrive within a different culture, and both our social and psychological well-being began to adapt as Chicana feminists. Our newfound strength formed a bond among us, and the feelings of belongingness in our community did not appease the dominant culture. As Castillo et al. (2003) stated, "Difficulties occur when White American cultural values conflict with Mexican American cultural values, such as collaboration and collectivism (Baron & Constantine, 1997)" (p. 152). The feelings of acceptance, communal relationships, and a sense of belonging were emotions I had been pursuing my whole life; I just did not know exactly what I was looking for or how to achieve it, especially during my elementary school years. Students from the dominant culture maintained good grades even if they were bad kids. In college, I continued to see the unmerited favor from professors when their grades were handed out on silver platters; yet, as hard as I tried, I was considered "lucky" to get a grade letter of C.

The gathering of multicultural centers was vital in the 1990s when the particular PWI I attended nurtured a location with hours of operation. As the front office worker, I handled incoming students who needed to work on their papers, assisted with their logins on the computers, printed out documents for their studies, or helped them do research. The multicultural center had a small library with the option to check out books based on Latino cultures, identity, and values; however, due to lack of funding and the importance of continuing diverse programs, the offices were closed indefinitely. Almost 20 years later, there is a need for such offices on college campuses and the rapid growth of diversity programs is rampant. The same PWI has now opened a multicultural center.

Elementary Barriers

I experienced feelings of discrimination early on during my elementary school stages in life. As a young, frail child, these experiences were detrimental to my academic career success and contributed to the early failure I experienced. I attended a predominantly White school. In the fourth grade, the teacher did not fail to remind me I did not belong daily. I have numerous horrific memories; however, one story stands out. At the tender age of 9, while learning a new topic, I kept raising my hand and asking questions because I had difficulty understanding the subject. Frustrated, the teacher said abruptly, "Maile, you and Einstein have one thing in common, you're both dead!" For years, I could not figure out what I did to the teachers to cause them to hate me. As a young innocent girl, discrimination was the last thing on my mind, and as usual, I felt as if I did not belong. Everything was different in school than at home. The kids—the way they behaved—were different; some were kind, but most were mean, just like the teachers. Although the food in the cafeteria was provided, I was not too fond of it; I felt out of place. I missed home and my grandma's red chile enchiladas with shredded lettuce on top and extra salt for flavor with Spanish rice or her red menudo with lime and cilantro on the side made fresh on Sunday mornings.

In hindsight, I was experiencing perceived distress. According to Castillo et al. (2003), Mexican American children perceive acculturation or White marginalization as distress. Latinas are forced to undergo adaptation to their new environment or a different culture depending on their geological location. Everyday preferences and practices awaken their awareness of the mandated changes from their languages and social behaviors to daily habits or food preferences. According to Castillo et al. (2003), "Most frequently assessed are language usage, social affiliation practices, and daily living habits (e.g., type of food one likes to eat; Zane & Mak,

2003)" (p. 152). Whiteness was the dominant culture at the elementary school, and I did not prefer the social styles or attitudes. How the other classmates behaved or dressed was indifferent, and I struggled to assimilate and get along with the others, let alone the food choices in the cafeteria.

Sixth Grade "Baby Dolls"

As a Latina, I struggled in elementary school, but I did my best to make friends even with the "White girls." I began to learn how to assimilate. One evening, my mom took me to the Asian store. We found shoes we, as Latinas, wore and called "babydolls;" the Whiter the socks we wore with them, the better. My mom bought a pair home for me and a pair for my best friend, Sherry Keppers. However, a few days later, her good friend beat the living daylights out of me against a wired fence, and I urinated my pants from fear. As she struck me in the head, she kept saying, "You're trying to make my friend a wetback!" Students in elementary schools learn to adapt and assimilate to the attitudes and behaviors aligned with the dominant culture to fit in so they can integrate on campus and make friends with others who may not be like them. However, they still tend to maintain their culturalistic values and identity. The pressure to respond accordingly to the dominant culture was relentless and I thought purchasing a pair of babydolls for my friends would have been a nice gift; I could not have been more wrong. Besides, all I was doing was introducing new styles of clothing and fashion to my friends, which intimidated the dominant culture. Many behaviors employed in PWIs appeared to bother the governing culture, the academic environment often reflects the U.S. White American cultural values such as competition and individualism (Gonzalez, 2002). Difficulties can occur when White American cultural values conflict with Mexican American cultural values, such as collaboration and

collectivism (Gonzalez, 2002). Good examples are the social behaviors identified with Latinas and their choices in styles in dress and shoes.

During the same year in fifth grade, my teacher pushed my head against a brick wall as she berated me with questions of why I hung around with people who did not look like me. Later in junior high, I began to get into trouble; this rebellion was due to the culmination of being somewhere I did not want to be or having to be told to do something by the same authoritative figures who would hurt me either with microaggressions or flat-out exclusions of conversations or activities in the classroom.

Mestiza—Anzaldúa et al. (2012) brought to light the thoughts and experiences of Chicana feminists and the complexities of growing up in the United States so close to the Mexican border. In her book, she stated:

> Gringos in the U.S. Southwest considers the inhabitants of the borderland's transgressors, aliens–whether they possess documents or not, whether they are Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter. Trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, or shot. The only "legitimate" inhabitants are those in power, the whites, and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there, and death is no stranger. (Anzaldúa et al., 2012, p. 26)

Within these borders are restrictions for the Latino culture and social behaviors, styles, characters, or mannerisms in how they behave around the dominant culture. The expectation for Latinas of how to behave has curtailed opportunities with limitations from purchasing land or being themselves in the United States. The physical constraints are evident in the suppression, depression, and oppression Latinas endured. They have continually battled to overcome the

borderlands of their people, as Anzaldúa et al. (2012) stated, “Carrying all five races on our backs not knowing which side to turn to, run” (p. 216). In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) wrote:

> To live in the Borderlands means you I neither hispana India negras espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from; To live in the Borderlands knowing that the India in you, betrayed for 500 years, is no longer speaking to you, that mexicanas call you rajetas, that denying the angle inside you is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black; Cuando vives en la frontera people walk through you, the wind stews your voice, your burra, buey, scapegoat, forerunner of a new race, half and half-- both woman and man, neither-- a new gender. To live in the Borderlands means to put Chile in the borscht, eat whole wheat tortillas, speak Tex-Mex with the Brooklyn accent; we stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints; living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to resist the gold elixir beckoning from the battle, the pole of the gun barrel, the rope crushing the hollow of your throat; In the Borderlands you are the battleground where the enemies are kin to each other; You are at home, a stranger, the border disputes have been settled the volley of shots have shattered the truce you are wounded lost in action dead, fighting back; To live in the Borderlands means the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off your olive red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart pound you pinch you roll out smelling like white bread but dead; to survive the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras be a crossroads. (p. 216)

Latina Expectations

Given the Latino cultural expectations, Latinas are pressured to be a “good girl.”

According to Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016), "Mexican American women caregivers found both highly acculturated and lower acculturated caregivers felt that was an integral part of being a good daughter with the most rewarding aspect of caregiving being the ability to fulfill role obligations (Jolicoeur & Madden, 2002)" (p. 927). To be a "good girl" meant to financially support the family, get married early, and maintain the ability to keep one's husband and his children. These are just a few examples of Latina expectations. Anzaldúa et al. (2012) stated:

> The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels, she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman does not renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* until she marries, she is a good woman (p. 33).

The opportunities for education, upward mobility, or independence have been greatly limited for FGLs. As a young, hungry Latina one generation away from working in the fields picking from the crops, I wanted a better way of life. I had to procure my own possibilities; growing up in the south side of Phoenix, the suppression was genuine. An experience I can never forget from early in my life is that I knew I had to get out of the ghetto and that meant getting a college education, even if the process was against family traditions. Anzaldúa et al. (2012) stated:

> For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children. (p. 39)

Anzaldúa et al. (2012) described the choices for Latinas: (a) turn to God and the church and become a nun; (b) turn to the streets and live a life of prostitution; or (c) become a mother, the most valued belief for cultural expectations. However, according to Anzaldúa et al. (2012), "Some Latinas are exposed to a fourth path, the path of education, but this path is still limited" (p. 3). I was limited, yes, and I chose higher education. This process has been a spiritual battle. As mothers, women wage war for their families; break the ties that bind and carve out prosperous futures at every perspective for their children. The strongholds of poverty have no bearing on their home: "Not on my watch! Not my children!" My trust in the Lord is undeniable, and my love has endured, overcoming and winning the spiritual battle within. The victory for my family, children, and my children's children is inevitable and sometimes love is war. As Hillsong (2013) shared in their song, *Love is War:*

> In your justice and your mercy, Heaven walked the broken road, here to fight the sinner's battle, here to make my fall your own. Turn my eyes to see your face, as all my fears surrender, hold my heart within this grace, where burden turns to wonder. I will fight to follow, I will fight for love. Throw my life forever, to the triumph of the Son, let your love be my companion, In the war against my pride, long to break all vain obsession, 'Til you're all that I desire.

Constructivism Theory

In constructivism theory, everyone's individual experience makes their own learning unique to them. When learning new material, it is applied to the foundational knowledge individuals possess. External elements affect the ways individuals learn. According to Creswell (2014), "Constructivism stem from a constructivist worldview, which upholds the idea that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8). Individual's

background and previous knowledge impacts how students learn new information. FGLs may interpret new material differently compared to other cultures and ethnicities (Creswell, 2014).

FGLs' beliefs and behaviors are established within the thoughts and experience students have on PWIs. Gonzalez et al. (2006) asserted, "The ultimate border–the border between knowledge and power–can be crossed only when educational institutions no longer reify culture, when lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge" (p. 42). The borders they face and the values they incorporate within their thought process constructs their own beliefs as a culture. The transformation of a renewed mind breaks the barriers and Chicana feminists successfully pull down the borders within their mind and the strongholds that prevents them from succeeding. Calderón et al. (2012) stated:

> Hence, beginning from the lives of Chicanas demands that issues of power, gender, race, and class be foregrounded. Thus, border/transformative pedagogy aims to build on insights that are concerned with eliminating damaging hierarchies having to do with race, gender, class, and sexuality in classrooms. (p. 520)

Chicana feminist perspectives are unique and the experiences they have shared is the power thereof—the deconstruction.

The unique experiences of the literature that a Chicana feminist perspective can provide are those linked to issues such as expectations and educational limitations. However, the solution to closing the achievement gap among is strength in numbers and the development of new beliefs, thereby placing value on the knowledge people learn and the importance of expressing one's voices with their own understanding and significance of higher education.

FGLs learn based on the historical context of cultural background, understanding a sense of self helps shape their readiness to adapt to new environments or cultural binds. Espinoza

(2010) stated, “As a result, Latinas find themselves caught in a cultural bind between meeting the demands of their individualistic-oriented school culture and their collectivist-oriented family culture” (p. 319). They learn new material and process the information that eventually manifests within their behaviors. According to Gonzalez et al. (2006), “By drawing on household knowledge, student experience is legitimized as valid, and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases students can manipulate to enhance learning” (p. 43). PWIs who lead their faculty with the constructionist theory understand this concept; “thus, without considering students’ sense of self, identity, and culture in college life, postsecondary institutions will not retain FGLs whose background, beliefs, and traditions are a crucial component of what makes them who they are” (Balcacer, 2018, p. 33).

Borderlines

Borders from one’s lost language are barriers adapting to the dominant culture, racial segregation, and gender scrutiny that FGLs must overcome. Social injustices have continued to be prevalent in society. According to Willingham (2009), “We remember much better if something has meaning” (p. 42). By being aware of one’s own historical context and the way they learn and interpret new knowledge, they can overcome the challenges preventing them from succeeding the transformation is referred to as bicultural dispositions. According to Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005):

> Even among acculturating individuals who identify with both mainstream and ethnic cultures, variations in sociocultural (e.g., generational status, cultural makeup of the community), socio-cognitive (e.g., personality, attitudes) and socioemotional factors (stress due to discrimination or in-group pressures) leave room for significant individual differences in the process of bicultural identity formation and the meanings associated

with this experience. (p. 1019)

FGLs do this by giving meaning to the acquired knowledge and power and make it our own, the transformation is necessary to succeed in academia.

This includes the importance and the creation of one's own space even if it is in the physical sense. Chicanos have straddled the borderlands, meaning they have taken Mexican and American borders as part of themselves (Anzaldua et al., 2012). Educational inequality has been evident, Chicanas attending PWIs have faced many barriers (i.e., borders); yet, they have bravely continued to cross over and demand their own space to leave their mark on history. Chicanas have acknowledged the existence of discrimination on college campuses, especially during the onset of the Chicana movement.

Chicana Movement

The battle is spiritual and equally important compared to the psychological and the physical realm that Chicana feminists have experienced. Garcia et al. 2016) wrote:

> At NSU (pseudonym), students fought for the creation of counter spaces such as the Office of Outreach and Recruitment, which dates back to the 1960s when Black and Chicano students took over the administration building, demanding that the campus adopt programs that increase their overall access to the university. These spaces are unique at NSU because they have not only become institutionalized counter spaces for students [but also for the student affairs staff working within them]. (p. 28)

These spaces and the historical traces of Chicanas are fighting for social justice and the right to belong on PWIs. Chicanas must show honor to those who have made sacrifices before them.

The borderlands are prevalent and *salvaje* [wild], according to the Anzaldúa (1987) in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* My mom and my aunts learned to work smarter

and not harder individually. They sought out school, either through traditional attendance at the community college or trade school. They did not graduate with college degrees but completed school with certifications. My mom and my aunts told me stories about their experience picking fruit from the crops. I asked them, "How much did you get paid?" They laughed and said, "Paid? Mija, we were blessed to get clothes on our back or shoes on our feet for school." They said, "At the end of the workday, we would get a soda pop or a candy bar, we worked hard in the hot sun, and we were happy to get that!" Every summer, they worked in the fields; however, they influenced me to earn a better quality of life. In their own right, each has been financially well off, accomplished their financial goals of influencing the community, building business, providing for their children to earn their higher education, and giving back to the local church while reaching millionaire status.

My grandma did not encourage her children or grandchildren to attend high school or college. Recently, my mom and I talked, and she shared her opinion several times, stating, "School was never important to grandma." The expectation was to go to work. Being reared at my grandma's house as an adolescent, she said, "Aye but Mija, the school takes so long when you can go to work and get a paycheck every Friday." Grandma had a wild imagination. She even thought of the perfect job for me, as she said, "I can see you working in an office with nylons and long nails answering phones, working for a rich man!" I laughed to reaffirm her misogynistic suggestions. However, I was afraid. I wondered, what if I could not finish college and get a good job? I thought to myself, what if she was right? What if the only job I can get is backbreaking? At least in the office, I could answer phones and not sweat in a factory or the fields in the sun all day. Grandma wanted me to go to work, even if it meant in dead-end jobs; school was not up for discussion, and she did not have the vernacular to understand the

importance of education or my desire to further my education and reach a better quality of life.

Anzaldúa et al. (2012) described Latinas' choices in her literature: (a) turn to God and the church and become a nun, (b) turn to the streets and live a life of prostitution, or (c) become a mother, the most valued belief for cultural expectations. However, according to Anzaldúa et al. (2012), "Some Latinas are exposed to a fourth path, the path of education, but this path is still limited" (p. 3). Anzaldua et al. (2012) further stated:

> The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the church insist women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels, she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman does not renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* until she marries, she is a good woman. For a woman of my culture, there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children. (p. 39)

The opportunities for education, upward mobility, or independence are minimal.

Growing up, I began to formulate my perception of how I wanted my life to be. I was one generation away from working in the fields picking from the crops and wanted a better way of life. Therefore, I had to procure my possibilities, and growing up in the south side of Phoenix, limitations were prevalent, and suppression was present. Latinas are pressured to be a "good girl" in the family. To be viewed as a good girl, I had to financially produce, dismiss dreams of college education, and live out what grandma had imagined. I had to get a job and get married early to find a husband to help support the family and, in return, take care of his children and the

household. Compared to White family dynamics, where students in the home were expected to attend school—elementary, junior high, and high school—and eventually to attend college. The dominant culture populations were considered "college-bound." Undoubtedly, the term had been spoken by their parents several times, who most likely graduated with a college degree. Grooming at a young age to attend college was the goal with the option for Latinas to attend college. My grandma loved to talk on the phone; one morning, she was speaking to my aunt. My aunt had just shared with her very excited good news how one of her good friend's son had got accepted into the elite college Yale. My grandma responded, *"Oh, pobre chico, he's in jail?"* [Oh, poor boy, he's in jail?]. Regardless of the expectations in the home, I went off to college!

Seamless Transition

A seamless transition is a goal for FGLs, primarily during their 1st year in college. Hurtado and Carter (1997) discussed the effects of racial climates by stating:

> We hypothesized a path model of students' sense of belonging that reflected a causal relationship between students' background characteristics (gender and academic self-concept), measured prior college entry; college selectivity (an exogenous institutional variable); ease in transition to college in the first year; and perceptions of a hostile racial climate in the second year. (p. 335)

The negative feelings on PWI campuses were paramount to how students felt and predetermined their academic success. Hurtado and Carter (1997) further stated:

> Smedley, Myers, and Harrell's (1993) study, which included Chicano and other Latino students, reported that students on predominantly White campuses face specific stresses associated with their minority status and that minority freshmen exhibit consider- able psychological sensitivity to the cam- pus social climate, including interpersonal tensions

with White students and faculty and actual or perceived experiences of racism and discrimination (p. 8)

Although there has been an increase in enrollment among Latinas in colleges and universities across the country, graduation rates have been low due to feelings of isolation or lack of belonging.

Understanding the transition for FGLs, and the process to provide supportive resources for students that may experience a hostile and racial climate are all related to student sense of belonging, social interactions, academic integration, and ability to adapt. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), "Students' interactions in the social and academic systems influence social integration, which, in turn, affects such outcomes as students' satisfaction; commitment to college; and, ultimately, decisions to drop out" (p. 325). Hurtado and Carter's study further examined the achievement and persistence of FGLs to close the educational achievement gap and the importance of points of belonging.

Compared to the dominant race, White student populations are considered "college-bound" undoubtedly; the term had been spoken by their parents several times, who most likely graduated with a college degree. Students of White descent are groomed at a young age to attend college and graduate with a degree, this is generally the goal within the family dynamics. The options for FGLs are not up for discussion. Representation of their fellow students is ever present on school campuses, whereas models for Latinos on PWI spaces are scarce. Sense of belonging is intermittent for FGLs, and they do not have parental support from parents who can guide their children through higher education institutions as they did not attend college. These are all significant factors in academic success for FGLs. Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) stated:

Sociological approaches to examine Latina(o) students' transition to college use

> individuals or parents as their primary unit of analysis. These approaches severely limit who should be involved in youths' college-going process, inaccurately perpetuating the worldview that all students are solely raised and supported by their parents. (p. 7)

In addition, assuming all students have the support of their family members and parents is a consideration of college accessibility and choice.

Pascarella et al. (2004) discussed the three categories from which FGLs come, with the first defined as, "first-generation and other college students in terms of demographic characteristics, secondary school preparation, the college choice process, and college expectations" (p. 18). FGLs need leading opportunities or guidance from their parents when they enter college. If not, they are left alone to navigate throughout their undergraduate program.

The second category Pascarella et al. (2004) referred to was first-generation students' transition from high school to college. FGLs must be set up and groomed to be college bound and expected to attend college at an early age. The third category focused on the degree attainment and the persistence necessary to complete their college education, as they said, "first-generation students are at somewhat more risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind" (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 135). Theoretical research has examined the models presented to address first-generation college students and curtail attrition challenges. Self-perception is critical, and self-worth is invaluable; yet, it positively reinforces feelings of reassurance, loving, belonging, and acceptance of PWIs.

The assumption that FGLs have their parents' support is misleading due to inaccessibility to higher education and the lack of consideration of choice. The predilection of pursuits and choices for FGLs, according to Acevedo-Gil (2019), occurs between Grades 6–10 and the thought of higher education. Further, experiences in Grades 11–12 entail consideration of college

attendance and college choice (Acevedo-Gil, 2019). Acevedo-Gil (2019) further stated:

> In the choice stage, the student applies to college and receives admission offers to select a college. The three-phase college choice model is often critiqued for assuming that all students have equitable information to college (Bergerson, 2009) and failing to account for the Latinx student experience because it does not allow for interruptions in the college choice process. (p. 109).

As Chicana feminists in college, they constantly deconstruct theories developed by the dominant race, such as the ideologies Latinas should marry, rear children, and financially produce instead of attending college and obtaining a degree. These expectations are psychologically driven and taught to Latinas early to earn their keep and succumb to the preassigned misogynistic professional roles oppressed by gender inequality and racial hierarchies implemented by the dominant culture. Many have fought for political rights in higher education and have made significant progress; Latinas have defined what it means to be Latina, and they have continued to fight with resistance to conform. According to Mendez-Morse (2003), "For many, this label rejects the idea that we must deny our Mexican heritage in order to be a 'real' American" (p. 162).

Borderlands

The Salt River separates Phoenix's south and north sides; thus, the racial divide was developed in the early 1970s and has continued today. Throughout history, the borderlands were prevalent and *salvaje* [wild]. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Anzaldúa (1987) brought to light the thoughts and experiences of Chicana context of the U.S.–Mexican border, stating, "The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites, and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus.

Ambivalence and unrest reside there, and death is no stranger" (p. 26). Within the borders are restrictions for the Latino culture, curtailing opportunities with limitations, from land purchases to professional opportunities to higher education accessibility. The physical constraints are evident based on the suppression Latinos endured; now, Latinas have battled to overcome the limitations of our people.

As stated, Latinas heal by telling their stories; they rise and continue to fight. Systemic racism is largely present in colleges and universities across the country. Discrimination in higher educational institutions and the fight begins in the home. Martinez (2020) described the separation anxiety her close family members experienced when she desired to attend college, and her family disagreed. Elders living in the home of two or three generations did not understand why their daughters or granddaughters must leave for college, even if it is for abuelita's self-serving ambitions, such as watching *novellas* [Spanish soap operas] on television. Martinez (2020) stated:

> I only lived 20 minutes away from home in college. However, that 20-minute distance seemed minuscule compared to how many miles apart I felt from my family. The more classes I took, the more I read, and the more involved I became in organizing, the more I felt like I no longer belonged. I tried to talk to my mother about social inequalities, the importance of getting involved in my siblings' educational journey, how working at Wal-Mart was so wrong, and so on. My mother simply wanted me to sit down with her and watch novelas and other shows that I did not find exciting or intellectually stimulating. (p. 26)

Latinas have continued to deconstruct theories and institutionalize the social norm on behalf of FGLs attending PWIs. Balcacer (2018) wrote:

> To transplant one's identity into a new environment does not always translate into a sense of belonging. It takes a substantial amount of valor and resolution to leave one's land and people. In other words, separating from all one knows and holds dear for a chance at a better family life requires great courage; this is the type of courage most Latina/o FGCS muster when navigating the unfamiliar borderlands (Anzaldúa) or terrain of college culture. (p. 21)

Seamless transition is not as far-fetched as many believe as it is part of Latinas' understanding of the limitations they have; the awareness leads to the overcoming breakthrough and their thriving on college campuses as opposed to failing in their new environment.

Cultural Dissonance

My desire to attend college persisted; however, the transition was the least seamless. Expectations haunted my thoughts, and the belief to support my immediate family did not fail to remind me of the obligations at home. Due to my desire to attend college, I lost my first marriage. As a single mother to three children, the false guilt persisted, and the odds stacked against me. The social ideologies and beliefs told me I did not belong in college; the thoughts constrained my decisions. They affected my everyday choices, either for success or failure, and it was generally the latter. According to Gonzalez (2020):

> Latinas enrolling in systems of higher education yet encounter oppressive regimes filled with cultural incongrueness. Instructional systems of higher education preach assimilation and have historically stripped Latina students from their language, history, culture, and identity. Latinas now face cultural dissonance in the struggle between assimilating to the dominant American educational system or honoring their cultural upbringing. (p. 15)

Survival of the fittest to attend college early was evident. I experienced cultural dissonance. I felt the incongruousness on campus and at home while attempting to negotiate my individualism and identity. There were days I would ask myself, "Why am I here? I could be working, making money for my children, or why didn't I just support my husband." Until this day, I know the marriage was lost due to the failed expectations stemmed from the Latino cultural beliefs and machismo.

The anxiety of attending college is genuinely taxing. Gonzalez (2020) described the importance of finding one's voice for academic success and navigating college by stating:

> The oppression and dissonance may lead Latinas to face psychological symptoms such as stress, depression, anxiety, and not completing or continuing their education. The process that Latinas must take and need to navigate and overcome the guilt and oppression in the hope of establishing their own identities and breaking through generational curses is overlooked in our literature and our daily practice within higher education systems. (p. 5)

As the first chain breaker in my family traditions, attending college took courage and determination due to misogynistic values, even at the cost of my immediate family. However, given the opportunity, I would do it again.

Of all nine of my children, three have college degrees, are close to achieving their academic goals, or have certifications for occupational programs. They are far from the poverty I experienced when I was their age growing up. Generational curses have lingered; if we are not purposely proactive to thwart financial barriers, we will remain impoverished. The ability to give back to the community and local church is a blessing. Gonzalez (2020) discussed the educational journey as daunting in establishing our identity as educated Latina women. In academia, scholars

give credit where credit is due. In Latino culture, we fail to acknowledge one another, especially the women in our families, the warriors, and the pioneers who paved the way before us.

Cultural Collision

In my college experience, I experienced a coldness from most of my professors and staff members, and I did not see other students or the familiarity of my home or the community. The challenges to attending college were real. As Storlie et al. (2016) stated:

> In addition to adjusting to the individualistic climate of college, social stressors in the academic environment have been found to greatly affect the ethnic identity development of Latinas" (Telzer & Garcia, 2009), a protective factor in educational success. Latina college women have been found to experience poorer self-perception, poorer self-esteem, and a decreased sense of personal attractiveness when compared with peers bearing lighter skin color (Telzer & Garcia, 2009), which may influence their level of academic commitment in a college environment. (p. 305)

College was an environment where even my people as staff members, *mi gente*, were brown on the outside but White on the inside—coconuts or Oreo cookies as my friends and I would call them. Thus, I continued to experience a cultural collision.

Straddling the two borders was a cultural collision and the change could be intimidating. My home environment was brutal, and I began to feel didactic—either be oppressed by systemic racism or begin to break barriers in the traditional Latino way of life. As Anzaldúa et al. (2012) wrote:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, I am mestiza, undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like everyone, we perceive the version of reality that our culture

> communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision. (p. 100)

Nontraditional Student

As an FGL young single mother of three children attending a PWI, I experienced the unwelcomeness or the harsh cold treatment from the professors or staff members of Caucasian descent. I generally worked for men and women of color when serving in my federally funded student worker positions. I was also on food stamps and welfare; to the public, I had no business attending college at the time! One day, my counselor, whom I met regularly, said, "The welfare system is in place for citizens like you," after I had shared with him the false guilt, I was experiencing by leaving my children and living off the welfare system to pursue a college. Many expected me eventually to drop out. Navigating school could have been more precise; I got lost looking for my classes, needed help figuring out financial aid, or needed clarification on how to add or drop courses and even which classes to take! I attended college afraid, lost, and muddled most of the time. I felt school could be taken away from me at any moment because attending was considered a privilege that was out of the norm for someone like me. I feared being shunned and rejected publicly, and it was not a false fear because it *did* all happen. My 1st year of college experience ended in shame. The following year after I returned, I dropped out again after failing my classes. The naysayers won, and after all the hard work convincing everyone in my family that I could attend school and succeed, I was wrong. I was embarrassed and ashamed.

Once again, I returned to school. I was determined to maintain attendance this time, but it took work. On my second attempt to attend college, I passed two computer classes. To my surprise, I discovered my niche, computers! As an advisor, when my students fret because I am

looking at their transcripts, they first say, “Oh, please do not look at my grades. I was terrible when I first started!” I responded to them with, “It is not how you start. It is how you finish. My grades were terrible when I first started college, and now I am finishing my doctoral degree.” Their faces light up, which is the most rewarding feeling in the world; I found my purpose.

At the time of this study, I held an associate’s degree, two bachelor’s degrees, and two master’s degrees. I will complete my doctoral degree after my dissertation defense, should I pass the program. I have learned to defend myself and remind my family members and friends of my educational goals and the pursuit of upward mobility, especially when they ask *why* I am still in school. My educational journey has been hard to understand for most of my family members and friends. I am the first among my siblings to graduate from college with both an undergraduate and graduate degree, and not the last. The purpose of the statement is to the education achieved, as the researcher and participant I am evident to attest sense of belonging and academic success are strongly related and I write this as part of my own literature review on the content and research studied.

PWI Racially Driven Climate

Achieving a college education was a pipe dream early on in my family. As a young Latina with the wild expectations of the household dynamics, I never thought the dream would come true, but I continued to thrive at PWIs. Facing opposition daily, achieving academic success, and establishing a sense of belonging on a college campus was challenging but not impossible. One day during my undergraduate program, I was in my introduction to art history class where my professor was less than accepting of my attendance. The term microaggression was not in my vocabulary then; however, it made significant meaning that day. The professor’s snide remarks and subtle insults about how I talked or represented myself were a daily

occurrence. One morning, I was getting ready to sit down, and he said aloud, “We will all get started as soon as ‘Maile’ decides where she is going to sit today!” Embarrassed, I thought, “Other students are still looking for a seat.”

Understanding the transition for FGLs, and the process to obtain supportive resources for students who may experience a hostile and racial climate are all related to student sense of belonging, social interactions, academic integration, and ability to adapt. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), “Students’ interactions in the social and academic systems influence social integration, which, in turn, affects such outcomes as students’ satisfaction; commitment to college; and, ultimately, decisions to drop out” (p. 325). The racial tensions and discrimination on PWI persisted even throughout the research projects I was assigned during my undergraduate social and behavioral science program. We formulated a diverse group intending to have representation from each ethnicity in the classroom; however, the history recorded that day changed our friendship and classroom dynamics indefinitely and, unfortunately, as Hurtado and Carter described, led to some dropping out of college.

Racial Discrimination

During my undergraduate program, my professor and I argued in front of the class; adamant in my response, I said, “I have never been discriminated against!” He responded, “I promise, unbeknownst, YOU have.” My program was social and behavioral science, and the conversation that took place that fall semester changed how I saw others perceive me. I knew I was an outcast, treated indifferently, but I did not realize it was because of my skin color. We were assigned a class project, an off-site observation at the local mall. A group of five women, myself included, gathered together. The end goal was to complete the study and test the time it

took for individuals to receive help from customer service at the sales counter, and later compare responses.

The research group consisted of five female students who were Latina, African American, and Chinese, two were of Caucasian descent, and one had a disability and wore metal braces. The four women and I still needed to learn what we would experience. A few of us carpooled together. We talked and laughed while the other students met us in the parking lot. We walked separately into the store; high-end brands displayed everywhere. Seven long minutes later, even after seeing a few salespersons, I was finally asked, “May I help you?”

The Asian American woman’s experience was slightly different. Her timer clocked in at around 4 minutes. As the Latina woman, I received help just half past 7 minutes. Although the sales representative asked if I needed help, she did not look at me and continued straightening the display case department. After 10 minutes of waiting, the African American woman approached the clerk and asked for help. When the sales representative replied to any of her questions, she provided definitive answers and walked away. The longest recorded time was 14 minutes for a White woman with a visible disability. The mood of the group changed, different from the car ride. We were not as excited or friendly as before, and our overall attitudes shifted for the worse. Instantly, there was segregation among the group, as if we were blaming each other. We were no longer a friendly, diverse team. We were not friendly with one another, and when we had to present our findings to the class, the delivery was short of enthusiasm. There was sorrow. Two group members dropped out of the class and left the institution entirely.

Chicanas have seen themselves not individually but collectively and need to feel validated and accepted, similar to a sense of belonging (Balcacer, 2018). Latinas have acknowledged the prejudices on college campuses and the cold, harsh realities of discrimination;

however, Latinas have continued to thrive and encourage others through our stories and the power of voice (Contreras, 2005). Those numbers are just one of the many elements that encouraged me to stay in college. The research project at the mall was a rude awakening and my eyes were opened to the microaggressions I have experienced in my own life and on the college campus; the harsh realities of discrimination were relentless and affected me until recently especially when I went shopping.

According to Martinez (2020), "Racism is examined, and racist acts are named, thus victims of Racism can find their voice. Marginalized groups are empowered when they hear their own stories, listen to how arguments against and for them are framed, and learning to how to overcome in order to defend themselves" (p. 48). Our first line of defense is empowerment, which is accomplished by the number of voices declaring war cries, continuing to be women on the frontline, and not giving up the good fight of faith to those. I say give honor where honor is due. Through my numerous attempts to attend college and achieve academic success, the honor is due to those who made me feel welcome.

Latino Institutional Support

My history professor was Latino, and he enjoyed his college career. Students all around including myself perceived his passion for higher education, the classroom activities, and the everyday shenanigans of experiences attending college when vulnerable times of insecurity were rampant; however, these were the early stages of a sense of belonging. The manifestation of belonging attracted me to our group, the professor's charisma, energy in teaching us significant historical documents to students, and the passion he demonstrated for helping us succeed one day, and grade at a time. The dynamics attracted me on a scalable level and I wanted that, the ability to inspire others. One day, I daringly shouted, "I want to teach for the college like you!"

He said, “Oh yeah? You need a doctorate, and only 1% of Latinos get their doctorate, not including Latinas!” The odds put a fire in my belly I have yet to forget; little did I know the long road ahead of me. My educational journey took a tool and I paid a heavy price for opportunities higher education offers coming from Latino background; however, I have not been left alone in the fight. As I grew to belong to the institution and my peers, I attended a conference for Mexican Estudiantes Chicanas de Mazatlán (M.E.Ch.A) during my undergraduate years. As part of the club vice president, we found funding for sponsorship to pay for travel and hotel to attend the East Lansing Michigan State University conference, this was just one of the many conferences attended to build a strong foundation for first-generation Latino students and I was part of it and continue to be.

We were early in our educational journey, and our campaign to fight for our rights to represent Latinos on PWIs had just begun. At the conference, we felt a sense of belonging. We found commonalities and were able to relate to one another. There were large populations of Latinos and Latinas, and we were elated to find representations. Similar to Garcia, I felt a sense of comradeship. M.E.Ch.A. became my home away from home. In this organization, I learned of the power of numbers, storytelling, the strength of my voice, and the hope to thwart the social injustices among educational equality.

As the vice-president, I discovered the strength in sense of belonging when we attended the conference. They were giving away bumper stickers that read, “*Adelante*,” meaning “forward,” and “*Si, si puede*! [Yes, you can!].” A typical rally cry today for life-changing events Latina/o/x use to get their message across. M.E.Ch.A was a space where I was able to find support and like-minded individuals that understood what it meant to be the “only one” in the class—the representative of all Latinos, regardless of our differences in nationality, language,

generation, social, and economic status. The conference was revolutionary, and in the words of Sal Castro, a 1968 Walkout teacher and leader, "It was a good day to be a Chicana." *Adelante y Sí, se puede!* (as cited in Castellanos, 2013). According to Lopez (2001), "The most common invalidating experiences reported by students during their transition were 'coldness' from faculty and low expectations from other students, which induced self-doubt" (p. 237). Students of color who received validation, affirmation, and awareness were likelier to get involved and succeed academically. Lopez (2001) further said, "Latino first-year students in a predominantly white college campus may experience stress related to their ethnicity" (p. 237); however, through recognition and belongingness, students begin to participate and thrive in PWIs. There is empowerment in numbers, and research has demonstrated the significance of early intervention.

Social factors have been found to mediate perceptions of a hostile climate. According to Lopez (2001), "Discussion of course content outside of class and involvement in religious and social community organizations are strongly associated with a sense of belonging" (p. 8). Lopez (2001) cited students feel as if they do not belong on the school campus and:

> sense of belonging is lower at highly selective institutions. The rise in racism stresses subsequently leads to students feeling like they are not a part of the mainstream, predominantly White student body. Thus, experiencing racism appears to decrease Latino students' social and academic integration into this school context. (p. 206)

The findings suggested a lack of belonging leads to higher dropout rates when students feel as if they do not belong, especially first generations in their 1st year in college. Chicanas see themselves not individually but collectively and feel validated and accepted, similar to a sense of belonging. Latinas acknowledge the prejudices on college campuses and the cold, harsh realities

of discrimination; however, through their stories and voice, we continue to thrive and encourage others. According to Martinez (2020):

> Racism is examined, and racist acts are named, thus victims of racism can find their voice. Marginalized groups are empowered when they hear their own stories, listen to how arguments against and for them are framed, and learning to how to overcome in order to defend themselves. (p. 48)

There is empowerment in numbers, voices that let out war cries, frontier women who did not give up the good fight of faith, and give honor where honor is due.

The value of identity is significant and attached to a sense of belonging. According to Polanco-Roman and Miranda (2013):

> Found that ethnic identity buffered against the ill effects of acculturative stress, such as hopelessness and related suicidal ideation among a sample of Latina/o emerging adults. Similarly, among a selection of Latina college students, ethnic identity moderated the relation between low levels of acculturative stress and depression, such that higher levels of ethnic identity weakened the relation (Iturbide et al., 2009). With low levels of acculturative stress, strong ethnic identity had significant, positive effects on emotional well-being for Latina/o college students. (p. 10)

In addition, a sense of belonging and establishing identity and relationships in community spaces where Latinos are represented however, collectively and collaboratively such as work study or full-time on PWIs for representation and to influence other FGLs.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are expressed in all shapes in sizes, until this day I have a horrific memory from the fourth grade attending a predominantly White elementary school. At the tender

age of 9, while learning a new topic, I kept raising my hand with questions because I had difficulty understanding a topic. Frustrated, the teacher said abruptly, “Maile, you and Einstein have one thing in common, you’re both dead!” I could not figure out for years what I did to those teachers and why they did not like me, discrimination was the last thing on my mind, and as always, I felt I was somewhere I did not belong. According to Jana et al. (2020), microaggressions are subtle acts of exclusion, the negative sentiment was conveyed. Early on emotions of being excluded were evident in my life, not only in school, but also at home and among extended family members. Baffled, I thought it was because of my mischievous behaviors, which were often due to my frustrations and angers in pursuit of finding my purpose and where I belonged.

Upward Mobility

This study refers to the daughters, granddaughters who are students as FGLs. This inquiry examined the relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging, discussed the challenges FGLs experience attending PWIs and the opposition they face in the home due to expectations stemming from traditional Latino culture. However, this study also discussed the accomplishments in higher education of participants who graduated from a PWI and currently worked at the higher education institution and their dreams, goals and efforts towards upward mobility.

FGLs’ campus communities have helped participants through a collaborative effort once they established a sense of belonging. They all wanted upward mobility, a better way of life, and career opportunities, just as the dominant culture had. Soon, FGLs saw one other meet their academic goals, procure well-paying careers, and give back to the community. Postgraduation, they have continued to build comrades among FGLs attending PWIs. According to Castillo

(2004), “Understanding Mexican American women’s adjustment in higher education is critical for opening doors to career opportunities, economic mobility, and quality of life” (p. 151). The successful adjustments to higher education and our efforts to create seamless transitions for programs, pathways, and transfer students are not in vain.

Working for higher education, FGLs provide public service to students who remind them of the challenges they experienced and have continued to experience as a dream to accomplish. The feelings I have working for a PWI college campus that once shunned me for my color and the ability I have to implement Latino representation are indescribable; however, this is my way to give back to the community and help FGLs achieve their academic goals combat systemic racism in higher education. Kiyama et al. (2015) stated:

> Although Latino/a/x students are members of the largest community of color in the United States, they continue to achieve college degrees at lower rates than other racial and ethnic groups. Thus, researchers and practitioners must better understand how to transform institutional environments to serve this population better (p. 30), especially within PWI spaces.

As brown faces in White spaces, metrics have been low; yet, FGLs are progressing. Latinos are increasingly graduating and embracing their college education and, even better, becoming educational leaders.

To conclude, FGLs’ educational journeys have been challenging while attending PWIs. Negotiating identity and navigating college and home life has been equally brutal, bridled with cold environments and adverse racial climates are just a few examples. However, with determination and healthy acculturation, stress can be overcome. When one pushes through the challenges, dreams become a reality. Marginalized populations collectively thrive on PWIs with

a sense of belonging, achieve academic success, and graduate with degrees. Campus resources and programs are necessary models for supporting women of color. These programs are vital to close the academic achievement gap among FGLs. The critical juncture of the social injustices in our country continues; however, with awareness, we can grow the much-needed graduation rates and end educational inequality.

My educational journey has also been a spiritual battle, and the literature has demonstrated the research journey as arduous. As mothers, we wage war for our children for a better quality of life and immediate opportunities, and I still pray, "*Not on my watch! Not my children!"* My trust in hope and in the Lord is undeniable. My love endures. We are victors, not victims; we are overcomers and will continue to win. I said it before and I will say it again, *Love is war*.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The non-traditional format of autoethnography in the study lends to the personal experience told through narrative voice by the researcher and participant and delivers non-traditional format to dissertations for the methodology section. Given the gap in literature on the relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging for first-generation Latinas (FGLs) in a predominately White institutions (PWI) from their perspective, I wanted to hear from FGLs about their experiences. According to Balcacer (2018), the stories told during interviews describe one's experiences, and demonstrated through audio recordings, this approach was vital to capturing the thought process and understanding of the participants' experiences. This chosen approach was, at best, the expression of their testament, the challenges they experienced when choosing to attend college at a PWI, and during their postgraduation opportunities. As opposed to surveys or questionnaires, the process demonstrated quality of the observant or the details that makes the individual who she is or what she has become during the educational journey and transformation.

Participants who have the choice to lend their voice to research allow for overall freedom through their expression, using their powerful tool voice to enhance and encourage FGLs; this practice teaches people at PWIs that sense of belonging is essential for the institution to retain FGLs (Balcacer, 2018). Balcacer (2018) stated:

> Allowing the participants, the freedom to tell their stories through interviewing, art, and writing was a powerful tool that can lead to a better understanding of what works or needs improvement for the Latino community in the field of postsecondary education. (p. 50)

I employed autoethnography as the methodological perspective in this study, including my story as the researcher–participant and four other FGL members who graduated from a PWI. Thus, I used autoethnography and related qualitative research methods to develop the research design for my study. Autoethnography was first rooted in ethnography (Creswell et al., 2007) and featured some commonalities and some distinctions with ethnography.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method using data about the self and its context to understand the connection between the self and others within the same context (Chang et al., 2013; Denzin, 2014). In other words, autoethnography systematically approaches collecting data to analyze and interpret the self within the larger context of social phenomena (Chang et al., 2013). The differences between ethnography and autoethnography target the narration of the voice of stories the individual tells, including the researcher. Autoethnography was best suited for answering my research questions:

1. How do first-generation Latinas, initially as students and later as staff navigate academic success within a predominantly White institution?
2. Sense of belonging and academic success are critical for first-generation Latinas and academic achievement but how? How do first-generation Latinas, initially as students and later as staff, create a sense of belonging?
3. First-generation Latinas lean significantly on a sense of belonging; how does that relate to their academic success? How do first-generation Latinas explain the relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging as students and staff?

In this study, I was the researcher and participant; through shared experiences and interviews, participants disclosed their backgrounds that resonated compared to the research study. According to Adams et al. (2021):

> Autoethnographers tend not to instruct, "This is how you should generalize from the events portrayed." Instead, we invite readers to ask, "How does the author's experience resonate–or not–with my own?" Autoethnography involves the engagement of the researcher as the participant, "It centralizes (auto) self and involves creative composition (graphy). Systematic engagement with culture (ethnos) distinguishes autoethnography from autobiography." (p. 3)

Autoethnography includes the shared stories told by the narrative voices who may relate to other peoples and cultures. Ethnography is the focus of the studied participants' behaviors, culture, or ideologies. According to Adams et al. (2021):

> Of course, humans ought to be understood as homo narrans, the story-telling and story-consuming creature. It's what we do. The power and the call of story is at the very heart of our being. Narrative is the heartbeat and the hearthstone of our humanity's home. And autoethnography carries on that ancient core human tradition in a new and powerful way. (p. 30)

In autoethnography, the researcher is the participant and vice versa. Denzin (2014) argued:

> Ultimately, the writer may abandon ethnographies of the other and turn to autoethnography. I chose to abandon the writing of ethnography of other women. I choose instead to set out again to know myself as a woman, as a woman writer. (p. 42)

Participants inside views described their shared experiences, positive or negative, demonstrated how they adapted to their extraneous academic environment, built their networks while attending PWI, got to know one another, and established relationships. Sharing one's stories brings about commonalities, similar influences, and the psychological impact of forced change. According to

Denzin (2014), "Autoethnography is a postmodern research genre that connects self-narrative with an ethnographic investigation of a cultural phenomenon" (p. 78). Self-narratives are participants telling their story; ethnography investigation was the cultural phenomena of FLGs attending PWI. Denzin (2014) stated:

> Autoethnography is the journaling, archive retrieval, the sharing of one's story to penetrate the readers' understanding of the social context of the author. We must learn how to connect (auto)biographies and lived experiences, the epiphanies of lives, to the groups and social relationships that surround and shape persons. As we write about lives, we bring the world of others into our texts. We create differences, oppositions, and presences which allow us to maintain the illusion that we have captured the "real" experiences of "real" people. In fact, we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices. (p. 18)

As the autoethnographer, I was both researcher and participant; therefore, the research design started by looking at me as the autoethnographer and sharing my experiences. For example, as an FGL attending PWI with previous experience, whether the encounters were negative or positive, data were coded or analyzed through the same lens of FGL and the researcher's own experience.

Recruitment

Through the recruitment process (see Appendix A), four participants were identified and interviewed a total of three times. To locate the participants, initially I reached out via email to pre-screened potential candidates confirming first-generation status and degree attainment on LinkedIn to no avail. Ms. Bachelors who became acting recruiter on her own will became the catalyst to my mission, she identified and recruited Ms. Masters and eventually Ms. Associates.

One by one coming into my office not knowing what to expect however, harnessed the energy and the courage for change and FGLs. Ms. Doctorates who recently graduated from the same program and the same university volunteered prior to the recruitment process. The interview points included an opening, midpoint, and conclusion. I sent a recruitment email with prescreening questions asking the potential participants about their background, upbringing, expectations, and upward mobility to gain their interest in the study. The participants of the study were screened and chosen with the help of Ms. Bachelors.

Initially, I asked general questions regarding availability for three interviews and scheduling timelines (see Appendix B). In addition to general upbringing, background, first-generation status, and household economics, participants were asked (a) if they experienced pursuing a sense of belonging or experienced exclusion in college, (b) if they pursued academic success by attending PWI, and (c) about current employment for the institution. Participants were those who identified as FGLs, who experienced impoverished geographical spaces, who desired to attend college, and who yearned for upward mobility.

In addition to obtaining their college degree, participants had roles that inspire future generations of FGLs attending PWIs. Muncey (2010) defined autoethnography as:

> The idea of multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, critiquing the self in social contexts, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potential. They contain the personal story of the author as well as the larger cultural meaning for the individual's story. (p. 18)

These individuals demonstrated their ability to thrive in PWIs as FGLs through a sense of belonging.

Data Collection

Discussions emphasized participants' individual experiences. The process of the interviews and data collection lead to overall solutions and recommendations for actions required to change the culture or dynamics attending PWIs, in addition to the renewing of the mind for other FGLs. As Balcacer (2018) stated, "Through highlighting Latina/o first-generation college student voices and experiences instead of just focusing on attrition, this study recommends actions for change based on participant feedback" (p. 2). Final results of the interviews created a tapestry of knowledge that was prepared to code for further analysis. According to Creswell (2007), "The strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives" (p. 13).

According to Denzin (2014), "Autoethnography is "reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect" (p. 22). The research was recorded and later transcribed into an audiotape to provide the personal stories as they were told; in addition, I took notes for comparisons. Personal memories are insightful and thought-provoking and entail emotional involvement; as such, triggers occurred, and when that happened, I provided resources to support the event.

Through in-depth interviews, I gathered the necessary information to analyze the data and surmise conclusions. As Balcacer (2018) stated:

> Participants can reconstruct their story or experiences in education through in-depth interviewing. It is also about showing the participant that their narratives are worth exploring: [An in-depth interview] demands that our actions as interviewers indicate that others' stories are important. (p. 9)

The primary source of data was stories. The participants told their stories of attending

PWI as FGLs, their personal experiences, and, if any, their association with a sense of belonging and academic success. In their stories, participants described the attributes that helped them as students assimilating into college and overcoming feelings of isolation and inadequacy through a sense of belonging. I interviewed four participants three times—an opening, midpoint, and conclusion totaling 12 interviews. Participants also wrote a letter to their younger selves to help prepare them for their future selves, their pursuit of higher education, the opposition they faced, and their postgraduation experiences toward upward mobility.

During the interview process, I asked the interview questions in more detail (see Appendix C), as opposed to direct research questions; as they started to tell their stories, I hoped identify themes and observe multiple perspectives while discovering commonalities among the group. Throughout the qualitative research process, I focused on learning about the meaning the participants held about the problem or issue, not the meaning I brought to the research.

The participants' willingness to share their stories was invaluable; the details in their memory bank may be recalled under tremendous stress with the necessary survival skills to thrive and joyous experience. Either way, the subject of the study and the differences created the woven tapestry of the study especially pertaining to commonalities and themes combined. According to Creswell (2007), "Researchers are also sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process. They respect individual differences rather than the traditional aggregation of categories such as men and women, Hispanics or African American" (p. 34). As a researcher and participant, it was vital for questions, conversations, and general information to not disclose the purpose of the study to avoid biased conversations leaning toward the study as opposed to truthful data, allowing software programs to analyze the data. As the researcher, I was sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process.

Participants were offered a questionnaire and additional information about the study. If the participants agreed to do the study, a consent form following institutional review board (IRB) rules and regulations was sent to them for them to sign and date (see Appendix D). Interview meetings were organized for weeks at a time, and recorded interviews using the Otter recording app on a cell phone were then committed to paper. These transcripts included just the commonalities found among the participants. Research questions were open ended and interviews were semi-structured. Participants told their stories of attending PWI as FGLs, their personal experiences, and, if any, their association with a sense of belonging and academic success. All interviews were audio recorded, and pseudonyms were used instead of original names for anonymity.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed for the purpose of identifying the participants' experiences of both traumatic and joyous occasions. According to Saldaña (2009), "In Vivo Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for . . . studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (p. 106). The process was consistent with autoethnography and consisted of inductive coding, theme analysis, and grouping of themes in the data. Various codes consisted of a sense of belonging, academic achievements, or subcodes such as discussions in opposition of household Latina expectations, the transformation of Chicana feminist view, hostile environments, discrimination, cultural dissonance, or the psychological borders described in the literature review. Furthermore, researchers provide reciprocity by giving or paying back those who participate in research, and they focus on the multiple-perspective stories of individuals and who tells the stories. Through coding,

commonalities and similarities, if any, were drawn among the challenges at the participants' campuses and participants' story summaries.

> The research design was not without limitations. As Chang et al. (2013) stated:
>
> Personal memory data include writings that you will create as you jog your memory about past events, people, places, objects, behaviors, thinking, and utterances. By activating your memory of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, you may be able to bring out many vivid details about your past when collecting these types of data. Although you may try to recall your past as accurately and completely as possible, your memory data is disappointingly "imperfect." (p. 75)

Memory recall was essential to the study; the participants all had varied stories to share, and themes were developed through coding and establishing the commonalities within the responses.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance in qualitative research and when conducting interviews regardless of the interview modality. For the sake of credibility and reputability of the institution, pseudonyms were used when referring to colleges or universities. If the audio recordings inadvertently revealed the participant's identity, the names were removed when transcribing the interview to honor the signed consent and confidentiality of the collected data. Qualitative research with validity is essential; the approximate location of the college by the state was used if the college is private or public, and I used a pseudonym for the college's name.

The transcription was solely dedicated to analytical purposes. According to Creswell (2007), "This form of research is defined as a 'personal narrative written by researchers who describe and interpret their personal experiences within social stories and political or cultural context to understand the life experiences of people as told through their own stories'" (p. 146).

The participants' experiences were discussed to share the behaviors or responses to particular situations by marginalized groups; therefore, it was essential for participants to recall specific events by memory. As Creswell (2007) stated:

> The study must have value both in informing and improving practice (the "So what?" question) Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design and in protecting the confidentiality, privacy, and truth-telling of participants (the ethical question) . . . an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. (p. 256)

Through storytelling and one's life experiences comes the risk of manifesting trauma. When triggers occurred, the participants were provided access to resources immediately and directives for counseling services. The study's objective was the simple safekeeping of identity and mental health throughout the research process, emphasizing solutions.

Testimony Prompt

Finally, all participants were asked to write a letter to their younger selves (see Appendix E). The purpose was to reflect on everything the participants experienced in life after completing their degree, their overall achievements, and what they would tell their younger selves. In addition, the letters-built trustworthiness between me and the participants, an important element in research. People's lives all change through progress and it is paramount to stop and recognize their wins. Further, this process allowed participants to identify the place they were at in life, tell their story, and encourage others.

The letters of testimony developed a triangular relationship along with the findings of academic success and the establishment of a sense of belonging. The research can help observers

identify the strengths necessary for FGLs to procure educational goals and build trust. Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) stated:

> Some scholars define *testimonio* by focusing on the form of the narrative. Specifically, it is an account told in the first person by a narrator who is the real protagonist or witness of events. This definition focuses on *testimonios* as evolving from events experienced by a narrator who seeks empowerment through voicing her or his experience. Thus, the politicized and self-conscious element in this point of view is paramount in this definition. A *testimonio* must include the intention of affirmation and empowerment. (p. 525)

The importance of the testimony establishes empowerment because participants are encouraged by voicing and sharing their experience in writing.

In addition, hearing the participants' stories-built trustworthiness; thus, the findings were triangulated with the relationships and characters each participant embraced to achieve academic success. The letters helped trace the participants' positions, identified their attitudes toward higher education, and collectively acknowledged individual wins when attending PWIs. The written testimonies manifested the necessary trustworthiness for the participants, me as the researcher, and future observers of this study.

Reflexivity

According to Denzin (2014), "Autoethnography is "reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect" (p. 22). The context and roles I played in this study as researcher and participant were as a first-generation Latina, full-time professional working in higher education, and full-time doctoral student. Managing multiple roles was not without challenges. In addition

to the feelings as observer, researcher, and participant, and conducting interviews and data analysis, I came to learn any educational journey is demanding. When learning about stories of other Latinas, the researcher's reflexivity is minimized generally in qualitative work; however, I was part of the research in this case. There was a thin line between autoethnography, reflexivity, and qualitative research; in this case, I vowed to share who I am, my background, and my beliefs in culture and traditions while not mitigating those being studied.

For this research, my living story was my testament to attending college by transforming my Latina expectations into Chicana feminism values while still being in the home and on the college campus! My story complemented the individual participants' stories; however, it did not dominate the purpose of the study due to the massive commonalities between my story and the participants' stories. I maintained a journal after each interview to aid in the process of identifying traditions, expectations, and values while attending PWIs and achieving academic success.

> Education inequality has continued to be rampant, and women of color face many obstacles in higher education. I have witnessed these behaviors firsthand and read about the history of the long-sufferings Latinas experienced. Similarly, my participants shared their challenges and overcoming those challenges. In the early 1960s, Latinas fought to establish our rights through higher education. For example, Garcia et al., (2016) wrote:
>
> At NSU (pseudonym), students fought for the creation of counter spaces such as the Office of Outreach and Recruitment, which dates back to the 1960s when Black and Chicano students took over the administration building, demanding that the campus adopt programs that increase their overall access to the university. These spaces are unique at NSU because they have not only become institutionalized counter spaces for students

> (Garcia et al. 2016), but also for the student affairs staff working within them]. They now play an important role in shaping all people's experiences and perceptions of the campus racial climate (p. 9)

People in these spaces and the historical traces of Chicanas are fighting for social justice and the right to belong on PWIs. We must show honor to those who have made sacrifices before us.

To say the least, college was baffling, as I did not know how academic programs and financial aid worked, understand homework assignments, know how to get good grades, or even group study. The transition was daunting and exhausting to navigate in my own reflections of reflexivity. I highly related to the voices of the participants sharing their experience but I especially wanted to honor those who trusted me in sharing their stories.

Even during the 1990s, FGLs were expected to marry, settle down, and provide financing to help her husband, who was considered the head of the home. Some of my participants just graduated from college and were working for higher education. Participants may have experienced the rigors of a college schedule or integrating school in a peaceful manner or conversation at home; to pay homage to my participants will be to tell their full story, whole heartedly.

Positionality

At the time of this study, I was an academic advising analyst at the local community college. The educational institution I worked for carried the title of a Hispanic serving institution; however, the school has not demonstrated the efforts. In my opinion, I have worked in the educational sector on PWIs for 17 years in numerous capacities, from student worker to informational technology and recruiter. At the time of this study, I was an academic advisor. I

have seen many students fail academically, especially women of color. Hawkins and Larabee (2009, as cited in Bernal et al., 2009) stated:

> Unfortunately, compared with their white peers, the first-year experience is often more complex and tumultuous for racial/ethnic minority students at PWIs. In addition to managing the normal academic rigors of college, these students must also adjust to an environment that is often foreign, socially exclusive, culturally irresponsive, and wrought with contradictions. (p. 560)

Commonalities, in my experience, are students need to be more involved or have relationships with their counselors or professors, and peers early on their educational journeys to achieve academic success.

The passion I have for students' academic success is undeniable. The excitement wakes me out of bed early in the morning. I love to dress up for the occasion, ready to represent women of all colors and encourage those around me. My passion for higher education has brought me to my current career goals. Working for an institution is rewarding, and as an educational leader, I enjoy what I do and live out my purpose. I am in the right place and time; this is my season to flourish, and the best is yet to come.

Students from Latino homes may need help relating to their new academic surroundings to attend PWIs efficiently. FGLs did not grow up hearing their parents say, "when I was in college" or "when I graduated." As the academic advisor working with students on academic probation, I see one of the requirements students must overcome is the challenge to make an appointment, discuss the challenges, and create a plan for success. My goal is to remove the student's academic probation or academic warning indicator. This can be more challenging for first–generation students who immediately feel comfortable meeting with their advisors. This is

why representation of Latinos on PWI campuses is essential for academic success—the familiarity, commonalities, and traditional nuances or mannerisms Latinas possess. I may look like one of their relatives or speak like their tia, and when they hear "Mija" or "Mijo," they can relate. Removing the stress students may be experiencing is the goal when they meet with me—I provide them with words of affirmation, reminding them of their dreams and purpose to graduate from college and earn their degree.

Conclusion

The autoethnography of this study focused on the relevance of my unique academic success story. The purpose drew from narrative voices of those participants who told their stories of challenges and tribulations they faced attending college. The transition will break through Latina expectations in the homes within the culture and as underrepresented populations and FGLs attending PWIs. The autoethnography focused on women's voices and their conflict as New Mestiza asserts Chicana feminist rights in procuring degree attainment. In addition, participants interviewed for this study drew on the challenges FGLs experience and allowed for an increase of educational research and awareness of overcoming truculent circumstances attending PWI.

The methodology was a collective approach and resulted in collaborative work among those who identify as FGLs. The participants shared their experiences while challenging the deficit of graduation rates among women of color. The results provided solutions for systemic change at hostile racial-driven campuses, and students' constant grapple to achieve academic success through a sense of belonging while attending PWI. The final stories are included in Chapter 4 and summarized in Chapter 5. They reiterated the empowerment of numbers, spoken

voices, a collective approach, and lived experiences with positive results of a better quality of life post-graduation.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Anzaldúa (1987) provides a good example of the non-traditional format in this dissertation for the findings section utilizing autoethnography and qualitative research switching from first-person to second-person narration. Anzaldúa (1987) poetically described the separation associated with leaving one's homeland by stating, "To this day I'm not sure where I found the strength to leave the source, the mother, disengage from my family, mi tierra, mi gente, and all that picture stood for" (p. 38). As an autographic researcher and participant, I was far from home when I attended college and even further when I began working for the institution. Yet, higher education institutions have continued to recoil the brown bodies attending the universities through systemic racism, prejudices, and discrimination. According to Martinez (2022) in *Dismantling Constructs of Whiteness in Higher Education*, "This is particularly so for insights and harms manifested through the diffusion and dissemination of white supremacy ideology in higher education work settings" (p. 49). The good fight of faith must continue, in numbers FGLs must break the silence, expose the deep hidden assumptions, ideologies and stereotypes under the micro- and macro-aggressions we, our people have taken so long to recognize. We must unite in numbers, our voices and education are our weapons, assert our rights to obtain an education and the rights for equal opportunities within higher education institutions.

The systemic epidemic in higher education is a power technique, "In fact, under this power analysis one can argue that the American campus climate that serves the ideology of whiteness and Eurocentricity in the production of knowledge is an endemic condition" (Martinez, 2022, p. 45). There is empowerment through our voices and shared stories as we

break the silence among the limitations and psychological borders that continue to try to suppress first-generation Latinas (FGLs); the journey is arduous and not an easy feat, but it is possible. The objective educational equality will be through transformation by the deconstruction of higher education institutions; however, for many there will be a heavy price to pay. Awareness is key; as Martinez (2022) stated, "The first thing for emerging scholar activists to remember is the phenomenological experience of living and working in contested or colonized spaces" (p. 88). During my experience working for predominately white institution (PWIs), I did not have the knowledge to recognize the behaviors. Even if I attempted to explain, I was unable to identify the issues or put a name to negative atmosphere in the workplace.

Sharing my own experiences and speaking my mind without reservation or fear of losing my position is a reflective recall that aligns with the suppression experienced working within colonized spaces. Martin (2022) stated, "Journey or a reflective soliloquy about the root causes and processes pertinent to supremacist ideology. In this realm of senses, ahistoricism alone cannot deconstruct whiteness, oppression, injustices, and denial of human dignity and suffering" (p. 47). Separating myself from what I knew to be familiar—the brown faces at home and characteristics and traits of my *familismo*—and choosing to break the psychological borders, barriers, and expectations has been very difficult.

Colonized communities in higher education initiate educational inequality immediately for underrepresented populations. The color of my skin determines preset limitations for me in attending PWI as a student or staff member. The lack of freedom I experienced from enduring an impoverished state of mind for years and the limited career choices were set by standards in a subjugated community. I knew higher education was key to future success and financial gain;

however, it became hard to defend my rights working for the information technology department in male dominated unit at the PWI and as a Hispanic woman.

The deconstruction of higher education and racism is necessary for FGLs attending PWIs as students and working for the institution to achieve success. As Anthony et al. (2021) stated, "Unless we address these longstanding structural inequities, we will continue to see vastly divergent outcomes along racial, ethnic, and gender lines — and that is something our increasingly diverse country cannot ill afford" (p. 1). The findings from the interviews and the stories shared in this study showed how a sense of belonging portrays a crucial characteristic for academic success. In addition, they showed a sense of belonging for FGLs as a woman of color working for said institution.

Student to Staff Member

During the early 2000s, I worked for the same PWI I had attended to complete my bachelor's degree. During the middle of my education, entry funding for my tuition was becoming scarce, so I decided to apply for the university and landed a job working in the information technology unit as technology support analyst. The department employed predominantly White staff members, including the director. Almost immediately, I felt discriminated against. Not only was I Latina, I was a woman in a male dominated industry. Regardless, I was desperate; I wanted to finish my college degree for myself, my spouse, and all eight of my children at the time. The opportunity was more than a job, it was my career and hope for a future.

My job was to make sure the homeless people would not come into the library at the downtown campus. That was not the job for which I interviewed and hired for my title was technology support analyst. However, I rarely performed the duties of the position for which I

was hired. One Friday, I had to move a heavy teaching station into a classroom at another campus across town. I packed up my work bag and I took the storage dolly and set out to do the job. Because it was a Friday, I planned to take the dolly home as opposed to driving it back to the downtown location after I finished because I lived in the opposite direction. I asked for permission and the assistant director agreed. The following Monday morning, I was accused of being a thief. In hindsight, it was never about the dolly. As a student, I could not quite fit in well at the university; however, I pushed, pulled, and did whatever it took to adapt. As an employee, I could never quite fit in working for the same institution as a student.

By the latter part of that week, my director, who was clearly upset, approached me with a very loud tone. The director demanded we step into the information technology server room, a huge storage closet. The room was noisy, I could hear the humming from the computers in operation. Once inside, the director slammed shut the heavy metal door behind her and, at the top of her lungs, yelled, "What the hell are you thinking?" The director, who was taller than me, hovered over me at least by a foot and she spoke harshly. I froze. Many questions were asked; however, I did not get a chance to respond because fear had set in. I could feel her spit on my cheeks as she kept yelling, basically accusing me of stealing the office dolly. Right before the director left, she shoved me on my shoulder, and I fell back against the storage cage where the servers were held. Then, she threatened to take my position from me. She said, "You need to watch out for yourself." Again, I heard the heavy metal door slam shut; I stood there afraid trying to process what just happened, my hands were trembling, and I started to frantically cry.

The director's approach was aggressive. I thought there were other ways to professionally handle the situation. I was mad at myself; I did not know why I became tongue tied, unable to verbally defend myself, but mostly, I was confused. I thought to myself about all the other

possibilities that could have happened to avoid being in this situation; however, it did not matter. I was set up to fail working in a harsh environment on PWI. Regardless of any of the choices I made that weekend, I did not know the suffering I would incur over the next 2 years; it was a living nightmare.

The workplace environment became hostile, I felt shunned by the director's loyal team who worked under her. Employees looked away when I walked into a department, regardless of whether I had business in the unit. The term microaggression was uncommon at the time. At every angle, I experienced a form of direct, indirect, or subtle discrimination. Constantly, my job was under fire, the pressure was relentless, and I started to experience fear and bouts of anxiety. Finally, I decided to file a report with the human resources (HR) office. The result was laughable; the director was ordered to stay 10 feet away from me and to not have any communication with me except through the use of email. However, the director was still able to summon meetings as long as others were in attendance. Needless to say, I sat the furthest from the group; yet, I still experienced verbal accost from the director and the group witnessed the torment. Many recognized the ill treatment, and although one other woman of color in our group recognized the discrimination, she was unable to speak up. After I left, she became the director's next victim.

I will never forget one of the meetings when she walked around the table asking, "I wonder who is next?" I wondered what she was talking about. One of my coworkers leaned over to his work buddy and whispered, "So-and-so got fired." The job was a living nightmare! I was put on an unwarranted second performance improvement plan; after three, a person is automatically terminated. I outperformed my coworkers daily, ensuring I did not give any reason for a poor evaluation. I made sure I was not late although I depended on public transportation.

When it was lunch time, I went out to grab something, came back, and ate at my desk or I did not go out at all; I did not want to be late. I did not leave early or ask for time off, that was out of the question and I had built up hours. Every project in my name was triaged accordingly. My performance was on point; however, this was not enough to appease the court. I did not know the director's mission was for me to vacate my position entirely. Regardless of my performance and my attempts to move forward, there were no second chances with the director.

At the start of the Fall 2009, I thought I lived through another semester. Classes were back in session, and we were very busy. I received a phone call from one of the professors in the school of journalism who was desperate for help. He asked if I could come up and troubleshoot a technical issue; he had been waiting almost an hour, to no avail. Reluctantly, I agreed. Among the many incidents prior to the server room situation with the director, this was the final nail in the coffin.

According to my director's set of directives for me, I had unknowingly violated another cardinal rule. When I got back to my desk, my phone rang and the yelling began. This time, the director opened with a few choice words and then asked, "Why did you take over an hour to help the professor and why didn't you escalate the IT ticket to the school of journalism?" There I was again, explaining myself and trying to state my case with words that would not come out. I tried to explain it was not me who took an hour to respond, then I realized she called over the phone so the conversation would be her word against mine if I reported her to HR again for violating her orders to communicate via email only. Witty.

After the verbal accost, we hung up. I called my husband and he said, "You need to get out of there." Then, I made another call to HR for the third time; this time I was not crying or shaking. I felt strong and determined; there is something underlining this whole situation. The

harassment, the intimidation, the painful process of "poor performance," and the daily chore to prove I was worthy to keep my job all became too much. HR said they would send down a representative to meet with me. Finally, I thought, there was hope. Wrong.

When the day came, I felt afraid; yet, I knew I was defending my rights to be here. I remember feeling fearful and sick to my stomach, then I prayed and asked for courage as I walked into the conference room. Suddenly, my fear was transformed to boldness; I opened the door and looked across the table and saw a stern Caucasian woman that did not look pleased to be there. I knew immediately sharing my side of the story would not go well and before the meeting ended, it did not. I felt hopeless.

Yet, I told my story. In my attempts to describe the hostile work environment from the server incident to performance evaluations, probationary threats, and the potential loss of my job, she took notes, very quietly. I described the isolation, being shunned by other employees, and the director's bouts when she would prance around the office and speak very loudly how no one's job was secure. I began to cry. Quietly the HR representative asked, "Could you show me how the director shoved you?" Surprised, I obliged. I stood up and physically demonstrated the incident. HR representative asked, "Are you sure the director wasn't just holding onto your shoulder to make sure you were listening?" Frustrated, I answered, "The director shoved me." I looked her in the eyes with the same courage and boldness I walked in with and said, "Why then would she take me into a server room, behind closed doors?" The HR representative said, "Well we asked the director why she had taken you in there and she said to avoid embarrassing you in front of the other employees." Tactfully and gracefully, I stood up and dismissed myself. Obviously, I was in the wrong place and the wrong time for my career. Finally, I relented and put

in my 2 weeks' notice. My heart was broken. I wondered how I would pay for my children's education.

Being far from my homeland and experiencing microaggressions and macroaggressions at a PWI was difficult to identify; it was even harder to put words and terms to the ill treatment I experienced. Due to the long-term, ongoing, sheer discrimination, emotional torment, physical assault, and verbal abuse in a hostile work environment, I suffered eventually from anxiety attacks. Even after resigning from my position. The experience was painful to endure.

Deconstruction of institutions from systemic racism is necessary for change to take place. As a woman of color, I was not White like the rest of them, I did not look nor act like them. Everyday took boldness and courage and many prayers and I grew in my faith among the naysayers. However, if it were not for that experience, I would not be the advocate I am today working toward diversity, inclusion, and equity at PWIs. The purpose to endure for a season was to pave the way for other FGLs not only as students but also as staff members that have the same rights to work anywhere, they choose. The unforeseen forces of power that suppress who society deems "less than" have been found out.

(Re)statement of the Problem

> According to Anthony et al. (2021):
>
> Hispanic adults have long had lower attainment than White adults (and, as a result, they have often been trapped in low-wage jobs that don't require a college degree). In our previous work, we found a 24.5-percentage point gap in degree attainment between Hispanic adults and White adults. (para. 3)

The purpose of the study was to decolonize the academy; create awareness; and implement action plans, tools, and resources for the purpose of educational equality. Degree attainment

among FGLs and, ultimately, closing the educational achievement gap is only one of the many action items. The establishment of a sense of belonging and academic success align with deconstructing academia's goals of Whiteness to achieve degree attainment for underrepresented populations who have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Educational inequality is cyclical, from generation to generation; however, as a visionary, mother, teacher, advisor, and most importantly, educational leader, I am drawing a line in the sand and saying, "Not on my watch!" Our children—the next generation men and women of color—will have access to higher education and opportunity from the start, increasing growth in numbers in attendance and retention across all colleges and universities in the country. Attendance among FGLs is growing; however, retention and attrition are. There are many resources, tools and aspects that rely on the educational systems; however, when there is a systemic epidemic of racism, there is a need for deconstruction within the academy, providing ideologies and familiar expectations for FGLs to thrive and be successful while attending PWIs.

Further studies have demonstrated a strong connection between sense of belonging and academic success among FGLs within PWIs even if the other persons either work for the institution or at the college. Walton and Cohen (2007) addressed campus service workers' experiences by stating, "For members of socially stigmatized groups, the question, 'Do I belong?' appears to go hand in hand with the question 'Does my group belong?'" (p. 94). Thus, as Keels (2019, as cited in Walton & Cohen, 2007) stated, "It is therefore essential to their personal, academic, and social development that they find counter spaces that can counteract this outsider status, thus increasing institutional interconnectedness and overall belongingness" (p. 5). Walton and Cohen (2007) then argued campus service workers provided these counter spaces. Although there has been dearth of information and research on FGLs' feelings of alienation

within the PWI environment and their feelings of being an outsider; these feelings are an everyday occurrence for these students attending PWIs, and the psychological changes are astounding for FGLs. Keels (2019) stated these students are seen as "cultural deviants— students who fall outside normative assumptions of who college students should be" (p. 5). The findings from the current study showed all four participants working for PWI established sense of belonging and found academic success in their rigorous programs regardless of level of degrees.

Throughout the interview process and coding of the data, commonalities began to manifest. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997):

> A sense of belonging is suited to understanding a variety of collective affiliations, formed in large environments, that can attribute to an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community. Sense of belonging is fundamental to members' identification with a group and has numerous consequences for behavior. (p. 328)

Similar to the *La Raza* community growing up in south Phoenix, being accepted, invited, or welcomed is paramount. The feeling of acceptance encourages students to get involved in school activities, increase academic success to pursue degree attainment, and offset the deficit of educational inequality among marginalized populations. All four participants stated their sense of belonging truly began when they started working for the institution—me, as the researcher and participant, excluded—however, the sense of belonging in their relationships with other staff members as opposed to their peers began their 3rd or 4th year. Further studies have demonstrated the connection between belonging and academic success among FGLs attending PWIs and the connection of campus service workers either with or as employees working for the institution. Walton and Cohen (2007) stated:

> "For members of socially stigmatized groups, the question, 'Do I belong?' appears to go hand in hand with the question 'Does my group belong?'" (94). It is therefore essential to their personal, academic, and social development that they find counter spaces that can counteract this outsider status, thus increasing institutional interconnectedness and overall belongingness (Keels, 2019, 11). We argue that campus service workers offer such counter spaces. (p. 5)

There has been a dearth of information and research on FGLs' feelings of alienation within the PWI environment and feelings of being an outsider. Although this has been an everyday occurrence for many, including myself, times have slightly changed; however, the psychological effects are astounding regardless of the degree level achieved. Keels (2019) stated students are "cultural deviants— students who fall outside normative assumptions of who college students should be" (p. 5). Thus, first-generation college students face additional psychosocial challenges in finding identity-affirming and supportive spaces on campus such as culture dissonance; however, in the current study, once participants began working for the institution, they found their sense of inclusion and community.

Review of Methodology: Autoethnography

The study was an autoethnographic study; this methodology has harmful unintentional effects (e.g., memory recall). In specific areas, I was careful when asking questions to, first, not offend the participant and, second, not reach so far back in their memory that the participant became upset or uncomfortable. According to Denzin (2014), "Autoethnography is written by the author about social-cultural occurrences related to family, place, other, trauma (loss, illness, abuse, sexuality, race, death, divorce, embodied" (p. 12). The examples of autoethnography may include journaling, archive retrieval (whether institutional or personal), or interviewing others or

oneself to generate social and self-culture of understanding. The interviews were semi structured interviews, and due to the possibility of potential trauma, institutional review board approval was required.

According to Denzin (2014):

> The conventions which structure how life experiences are performed, told, and written about, involve the following problematic presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions: (1) the existence of others; (2) the influence and importance of race, gender, and class; (3) family beginnings; (4) turning points; (5) known and knowing authors and observers; (6) objective life markers; (7) real persons with real lives; (8) turning point experiences; and (9) truthful statements distinguished from fictions. (p. 18)

All documentation, questionnaires for the interviews, and exported data for analysis was completed and approved by the IRB committee. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and the interview were stopped if participants felt unsafe moving forward with the interview.

According to Denzin (2014), autoethnography is "reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect" (p. 22). The data were recorded and later transcribed. Personal memories are insightful and thought-provoking and entail emotional involvement; triggers did not occur and each participant shared with little or no discomfort and appeared to be proud of their progress and understanding of the data collected with the hope of helping other future FGLs.

The research process consisted of a three-tier approach. Interviews with three of the four participants took place in-person; the fourth participant's—Ms. Doctorate—interviews took place virtually, recording with the same device to later export and analyze the data. Prescreening

began with a phone call in which additional information was provided. Should the candidate qualify, they were invited to learn more regarding the research topics, methodology and further identified themselves for the qualifying criteria as candidate. When the candidate agreed to the study, a consent form was signed with the disclaimers and acknowledgements. Each interview was audio recorded via software for 60 minutes, for a combined 12 hours of data. The timeline between the interview phases was approximately 10 days to allow me to prepare data for analysis, allow participants time to review future questions, and allow participants time for reflection and memory recall.

Interview Phase 1 consisted of participants' background, upbringing, and social economic levels within the home and/or of their parents; they all began telling their story at the root of the questions. They started with their general idea of their social and background experience, first-generation feelings of how they felt when they attended a PWI, and overall completion of their degree. The second phase of interviews began with the follow-up questions based on what I found when reviewing the initial data collected from the first interview. The third layer of questions began with how they navigated college; their 1st-year feelings; 2nd-year changes, if any; and their lived experiences on campus, in the classroom, when making friends, feelings of belonging, and most importantly, academic success. Finally, follow-up questions about family members in the home regarding their supportive or nonsuppurative nature were asked, closing with how they inspire other FGLs and when asked if college was worth it and their final opinions.

The participants' willingness to share their stories was invaluable. They recalled the details within their memory bank with ease; however, some were apprehensive in sharing specific details. A few stated feelings of being alone or isolated and the tremendous stress they

experienced, especially in their 1st year. They soon learned the necessities to find friends, navigate for survival, and thrive on the college campus. They learned where their resources were and, if any of the resources left, where to find the next provider. The autoethnographic approach created the tapestry of beautiful lives woven together with similar experiences that culminated precious memories.

According to Creswell (2007), "Researchers are also sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process. They respect individual differences rather than the traditional aggregation of categories such as men and women, Hispanics or African American" (p. 34). As a researcher and participant, it was vital I remained unbiased, asked questions openly, and conducted conversations sincerely. To provide the general information, I did not disclose the purpose of the study and avoided biased conversations leaning toward the study as opposed to obtaining truthful data and allowing for collected data to speak for itself. I remained cognizant of the sensitivity required and the power imbalances that may play out and interrupt the study during all facets of the research process.

Research Questions

Based on the qualitative criteria and the research study, the questions examined were as follows:

1. How do first-generation Latinas, initially as students and later as staff navigate academic success within a predominantly White institution?
2. Sense of belonging and academic success are critical for first-generation Latinas and academic achievement but how? How do first-generation Latinas, initially as students and later as staff, cultivate sense of belonging for themselves and others?

3. First–generation Latinas lean significantly on a sense of belonging; how does that relate to their academic success and cultivating other FGLs and sense of belonging? How do first-generation Latinas explain the relationship between academic success and a sense of belonging as students and staff giving back to the community?

Limited research regarding FGLs attending PWIs, sense of belonging, and academic success has been evident in the literature. Additionally, research has been minimal about postgraduation careers working at PWI schools. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between FGL academic success and their sense of belonging attending PWI, and gauge how a sense of belonging and academic success stemmed from autoethnographer's perspective as the participants tell their story. Bochner et al. (2021) stated:

> Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional researcher usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people. (p. 277)

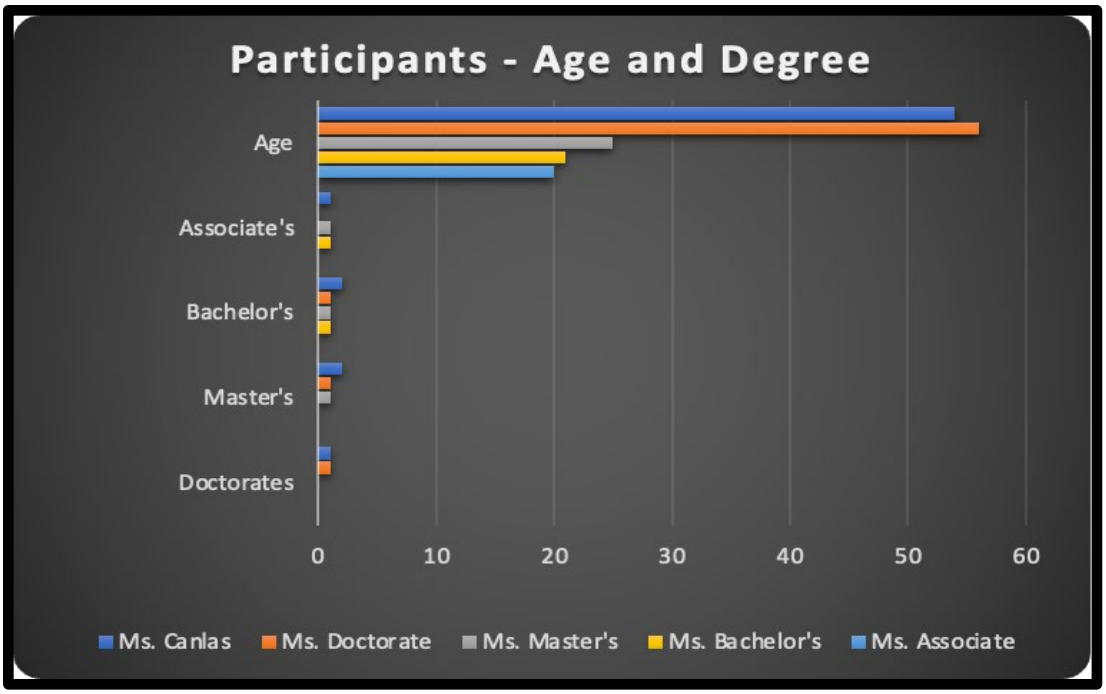
Participant Vignettes

The various generation by age are as follows, Ms. Canlas, the researcher and participant of the study, (age 54) achieved an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree, and was all but dissertation status for her doctorate at the time of this study. Ms. Doctorate (age 56) earned a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and a doctorate. Ms. Masters (age 25) earned an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree tentatively 2024. Ms. Bachelors (age 21) attained an associate's degree and bachelor's degree tentatively 2024. Finally, Ms.

Associates (age 20) will complete an associate's degree in nursing tentatively 2024. Figure 1 demonstrates participants by age and degree earned two generation z and three generation x.

Figure 1

Participant Ages and Degrees by Generation



Introduction to Me, Ms. Canlas

Ms. Canlas was from Generation X and had worked in higher education for almost 20 years. In her early years, she worked for the information technology department, and then moved onto instructional teaching and into recruitment roles. Later, she learned about her love for students and pedagogy and began to advise and teach for the university. At the time of this study, Ms. Canlas currently worked as analyst and faculty for local city college. Originally born in Stuttgart, Germany, she grew up in the inner cities of a desert town in Arizona. In addition to

being first-generation Latina, she was the first ever to have achieved all four levels of degrees in her family line directly blood related to her biological parents according to ancestry.com.

Introduction to Ms. Bachelor's

Ms. Bachelor's was from Generation Z. She had worked in higher education for over 5 years aiding in new student recruitment and assisting incoming students and their families navigate through the enrollment process. Throughout her time in higher education, she contributed to the institution's Hispanic serving institute initiative by presenting during Noche Familiar, an all-Spanish speaking presentation for Hispanic/Latine families providing education on higher education, student resources, and financial opportunities. She was a first-generation Latina who received her associate in arts from Monument Valley Community College and was set to receive her bachelors in interdisciplinary studies in applied human behavior from Flagstone University. She will be pursuing her Master of Education in school counseling to pursue a school counseling career assisting students and their families navigating life in and after high school while creating an empowering environment. She was also the oldest of two; was born and raised in Desert Town, Arizona; and enjoys spending time with her family, going on spontaneous trips, and finding local hidden gems.

Introduction to Ms. Master's

Ms. Master's was from Generation Z. In 2010, Ms. Master's emigrated from Michoacan, Mexico, to a new culture and language to which she had to adapt. As a first-generation college student, Ms. Master's has experienced firsthand the challenges students face without guidance. She started working at Monument Valley Community College as a student worker and discovered her passion for helping students achieve their goals. At the time of this study, she was employed with Maricopa Community College for 5 years, starting first as a student worker at

PVCC, where she was also an alumna. In May 2019, she obtained her associate in arts. She then received a bachelor's degree in strategic leadership from Flagstone University in April 2021. Ms. Master's was pursuing her master's degree in organizational leadership through Flagstone University her expected completion date was December 2024. During her free time, Ms. Master's enjoys spending quality time with her loved ones, exercising, watching Disney+ and Netflix, and prioritizing her physical and mental well-being.

Introduction to Ms. Associate

Ms. Associate was from Generation Z. She was a first-generation Mexican American pursuing a nursing major at Flagstone University as a junior. In December 2021, she received her associate in arts from Monument Valley Community College where she worked part time as an office coordinator in an Early College Office. She was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona, and was the eldest of three sisters. Her extended family hailed from a small town in Sonora, Mexico, and she visited them twice a year. Ms. Associate was fortunate to have a strong support system consisting of her family, friends, and coworkers who have been instrumental in her personal and educational journey. She liked to help and support others in her community and enjoyed spending quality time with family and friends. In her free time, she likes to hike, watch movies, and savor good food!

Introduction to Ms. Doctorate

Ms. Doctorate was from Generation X. She began her attendance at the university at a young age where she later married and began working for the institution. Thirty years later, she completed her bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees. Her career path began working in the community, school districts, and then the government, giving back to the community she truly loved. At the time of this study, Ms. Doctorate was a regional director for the university—quite

the journey for a little girl who started at the community college. She has continued to be ever so grateful because she reached goals never thought possible and will continue to work on behalf of the community, in particular the community college and marginalized populations.

Prescreening Questionnaire

I conducted 12 interviews total during this study. To gain participants' interest in the study, they participants were prescreened (see Appendix A), and later chosen after initial questions. Questions for the screening related to availability, potential scheduling conflicts, and their timelines (see Appendix B). In addition to general upbringing, background, first-generation status, and household economics, participants were asked (a) if they experienced pursuing a sense of belonging or experienced exclusion in college, (b) if they pursued academic success by attending PWI, and (c) their current employment for the institution. Participants identified as FGLs whose parents immigrated from another country. English was their first language and they experienced impoverished geographical spaces; however, they had a desire to attend college and yearned for upward mobility or had parents who encouraged them to attend college for a better life.

In addition to obtaining their college degrees, the participants' autoethnography included their current roles to inspire and influence other future generations attending PWIs or those newly employed by the institution and with whom they worked in close proximity. Muncey (2010) defined autoethnography as the idea of multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, critiquing the self in social contexts, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potential. These autoethnographic accounts contain the personal story of the author, the larger cultural meaning for the individual's story (Muncey, 2010), and

how the participants continue to thrive throughout their careers as they continue the pursuit of higher education and degree attainment.

Three Tiered Interviews

Four participants were interviewed three times, each for 1 hour. During the interview, there was an opening portion that discussed upbringing background, economic disposition, parental guidance, support, and college choices. The second interview—the midpoint—consisted of follow-up questions from the data gathered from the first interview and second tier questions asking additional details about what the participants experienced when attending PWI such as how they felt when they first attended; were they student, staff, or student workers; and finally, when did they feel they established a sense of belonging, if they stated they had feelings of isolation. The third and final interview shared context of the topics and memory recall, specifically background stories that may have related to their academic success or rigors while attending PWI to backfilled overall questions for the participant. Finally, the crux of the research recalled the same subject matter that may or may not have aligned with the research and academic success through a sense of belonging, finalizing the interviews with questions about postgraduation opportunities; their current roles working for the institution; and whether they experienced upward mobility, justification for higher education, and better quality of life.

Data Collected

I used a software program called Otter.ai, an audio recording program and paid subscription that records audible conversations and has the ability to export documents via Microsoft Word or PDF using one's phone. Data were collected for the purpose of the study and shared via a Google Doc for export; once the data were collected, the program generally rendered a Microsoft Word .docx file for coding. During the interview, numerous repeated

patterns occurred and were identified. These patterns included: (a) throughout their lives and experiences as FLGs attending PWIs and their struggle to navigate the rigors of college; (b) schedules, location of the cafeteria, or bringing their own food; (c) adapting to the culture, learning a new language, and the overall feelings of isolation; and (d) inadequacy or lack of sense of belonging. For two of the participants, their negative college experience eventually led to academic failures and lack of involvement with their studies (i.e., one Generation X participant and one Generation Z participant).

Many of these variables were apparent in the interview process and matched up with the timeline when the participants began to thrive in college. Association among FGLs attending PWIs began to manifest feelings of validation when students became involved in campus events or social clubs and organizations affiliated with their identity. The autoethnography inquiry was based on the participants' nonfictional, lived experiences and challenges of attending college as first-generation students; therefore, data were analyzed as actual recordings of their life experiences regardless of the influence of the truth or assumptions. According to Denzin (2014):

> These conventions which structure how life experiences are performed, told, and written about, involve the following problematic presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions: (1) the existence of others; (2) the influence and importance of race, gender, and class; (3) family beginnings; (4) turning points; (5) known and knowing authors and observers; (6) objective life markers; (7) real persons with real lives; (8) turning point experiences; and (9) truthful statements distinguished from fictions. (p. 18)

Data Analysis

The data were framed by FGL students. The interviews allowed me to make sense of the connections or dichotomy between the shared experiences. Autoethnography focuses on the

voices or narratives of the participants and provides the analytical lens of making sense of one's educational journeys (e.g., mestiza consciousness). The data identified repeated patterns or words the participants' experienced that were both traumatic and joyous occasions. According to Saldaña (2013), "In Vivo Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for . . . studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (p. 106). The process is consistent with autoethnography and consists of inductive coding, theme analysis, or grouping of themes in the data. Various codes consisted of a sense of belonging, academic achievements, or subcodes such as the discussion of opposition to household Latina expectations, the transformation of Chicana feminist view, hostile environments, discrimination, cultural dissonance, or the psychological borders, as described in the literature review. Furthermore, researchers provide reciprocity by giving or paying back those who participate in research, and they focus on the multiple-perspective stories of individuals and who tell the stories. Through coding, commonalities, similarities, if any, among the group school campuses challenges, and participant's story summaries will be drawn.

The findings validated that FGLs attending PWIs found it challenging to initially establish a sense of belonging. These participants faced tremendous challenges navigating their college schedule, adapting to their new environments, experiencing culture dissonance, and finding little to no support from the institution. In addition, the results showed the students felt as if they did not belong on the college campus regardless of their efforts. Another interesting fact, regardless of the participants' age range and the varied degree attainment, their feelings of isolation existed while they experienced a sense of belonging when they began working for the institution. Postgraduation level of degrees were also not variables to the lack of sense of belonging attending PWI; however, one did not maintain academic success while the others

focused and achieved good grades due to having scholarships or being worried of not being able to get financial aid if they did not get good grades.

The coding analysis process further examined the results through a two-step approach. The process coding used aids in the qualitative research performed and built the framework of the study, indexing and identifying words or themes within the interviews or stories told of shared experiences from the participants. According to Saldaña (2013), "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). A coding approach was selected in this study due to the discovery approach, considering I was the researcher and a participant and personal biases need to be avoided. The process coding method was selected for the purpose of this study and the best ability to read the results without biases.

Coding

Saldaña (2009) also referred to coding from an analytical point of view and not as a biased storyteller. Cooper (2009) stated:

> This is not to suggest that Saldaña is wishy-washy in his discussion of coding. Rather, he is acutely aware of the multiple approaches and perspectives that enter into the coding process in qualitative research. As he notes, "the act of coding requires that you wear your researcher's analytic lens. But how you perceive and interpret what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 6). (p. 246)

The significance of the process of coding and the themes rendered create one's analysis, aids to the framework, and leads to the overall theory of the study. As Cooper (2009) stated, "Your coding process and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent

patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data—all possibly leading toward theory" (p. 32). Due to the dearth of research, the paradigm of struggling FGLs attending PWIs must be corrected, and degree attainment and sense of belonging must be evident. As Juarez (2022) stated, "Research findings suggest that persistence, retention, and graduation rates are positively related to the sense of belonging of Latina/o/x students in college" (p. 16). The significance of the study is that it can help further develop resources and programs built to enhance FGLs' education so they graduate and reach degree attainment—the overall goal of the study is increase student retention and degree completion within the educational inequality sector and the establishment of policy. "Policy research can also acknowledge the highly segregated and underserved realities of Latino communities and will contribute to this working definition of Latina/o Educational Leadership" (Rodriguez et al. 2016, p. 148). Strategies of written policy on scalable levels for the growing Latino population on college campuses across the country.

Discovery

Autoethnography is the study of both the researcher and participant. In addition to the researcher, the four FGLs who graduated from a PWI were interviewed. Each degree level was represented as "the qualitative approach attempts to 'understand the lived experience' of study participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). The data involved self and the context of the topics are demonstrated as statements from the participants when shared their story. The purpose of the context and readings of each story was to provide further understanding of the connection between self and the context studied and their shared experiences using autoethnography (Chang, 2007; Denzin, 2014). The autoethnography methodology includes systematically collecting the data to be analyzed and interpreted within the larger context of social phenomena (Chang, 2008).

The results are demonstrated in words, sentences, or scalable paragraphs as the participants tell their story

All participants were FGLs, currently attending and later working for the PWIs they attended as students. Significant findings varied, beginning with the generation era of the participants from the sample population. In addition to the participants' generation levels, they received assorted degrees within majors and levels when attending PWIs. However, overall attitudes of expectations in their homes, opinions of family matters or appreciation, lack of sense of belonging, and finding inclusivity once they began working for the institution were paramount to the interview results. All participants were optimistic and showed great appreciation for their parents; interview content was limited during the first interview; however, by the third interview, participants began to disclose more personal information. Commonalities, familiarities, and themes began to manifest—stories of feelings of isolation attending college during their 1st and 2nd year. They felt as if they were alone throughout their educational journey early on, as one participant said, "I was always autonomous." Although they all shared the same sentiment within their statement, participants described the same event or feelings in different ways. Memory recall was pertinent throughout the interviews; however, memory recall is subjective and self-described in one's own perspective or definition.

The generations of the sample population were as follows. Two participants were from Generation X, who represented attending college throughout the 1990s. The remaining three participants attended college early and mid-2020s and onward, representing Generation Z. This information was important to the findings due to the positive progress that has been made throughout the years for underrepresented populations and FGLs attending higher education. However, history repeats itself considering there were many similarities in the findings for

Latino expectations in the home and specific challenges attending college that still exist today such as assimilation, cultural dissonance and feelings of isolation due to lack of belonging early on. Finally, establishing sense of belonging post institutions employment.

The levels of education participants achieved were purely coincidental. The four various levels of degrees attained by the participants were associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees. Dependent on the participants' ages, individually they demonstrated similar and non-similar experiences between supportive parents, in-laws, immediate, and extended family members to include willingness to provide financially although immediate families were unable to provide the support on scalable levels.

Findings showed similarities in expectations. Then, participants shared stories of expectations in the home from a common identity of *marianismo* or "good girl" syndrome. Participants shared feelings of isolation early on throughout their 1st and 2nd year of college were very common and eventually they established a sense of belonging in their 3rd and 4th year after working for the institution. All participants experienced the pressures of expectations in the home while attending college, sometimes falling under false guilt or pressure to return provisions to the home stemmed from feelings of *marianismo*. The culmination made the dream of upward mobility just that—a dream.

All five participants began at the community college, later attended college at the university level, and eventually landed careers within the institution. The participants shared common experiences such as marianismo and machismo experiences, expectations in the home, and pressure to marry or cook and clean for a chosen husband. They heard comments especially from male dominant figures in the home, generally from their uncles or other male members of the family.

The words represented in the literature review are “machismo” or “marianismo”. Findings uncovered thematic views about being a good girl, going to work while attending school as a form of not being forced, yet being expected, to provide or having feelings of disconnect while attending PWIs. They also showed the inability to establish a sense of belonging right away up until 3rd and 4th year of college attendance and most significantly their inability to navigate college or their parents’ inability to help navigate school. In addition, all five participants attended a PWI and began working for the institution as student workers and eventually as permanent employees. Finally, all the participants were surprised they achieved their dreams to graduate from college as they practiced faith or belief in a higher power. Monumental themes revealed across all the participants showed they were readily available to give back to their communities, showed tremendous appreciation for the supportive family members, and procured upward mobility financially and domestically as each individually dreamed.

The overview of the findings presented in the following sections begin with the participants sharing their stories, in addition to the short vignettes and my analysis. The findings included significant results, which, to reiterate, aligned among the participants: (a) expectations in the home as told through their own voices, (b) marianismo and the pressure to be a good girl, (c) family support from immediate and extended members, (d) cultural dissonance via assimilation and challenges such as depression, (e) struggling academically while attending PWIs and searching for sense of belonging, and (f) sense of belonging and how individually the participants reached inclusivity.

Expectations, Machismo and Diversity

Throughout the study, expectations among FGLs were strongly identified in the literature review and in the findings post data collection in addition to the other significant challenges attending PWI. The examples in this section are from Ms. Associates who for the most part did not have reservations in sharing her opinions when asked. For example, Ms. Associates referred to her extended family members often when asked about expectations in the home growing up in a Latino culture.

> I have Tios [Uncles] who are like I I want you to learn how to cook, cause you don't know how to cook. I don't know to cook because I depend a lot on my mom. But it's like I'm always in school or I'm working. So I'm really never home. And whenever I do cook something, whether it's just a simple spaghetti or whatever, my Tio's say, "Okay, you can get married now!" "You know how to cook now!"

Ms. Associates also said:

> Then my Tios are like, "How old are you again? How old? When are you getting married?" Again, I say, "Just because you got married at my age doesn't mean I am going to follow your footsteps." and it's funny but my Mom tells me, "I don't want you to get married yet. Enjoy your life. Finish school because my mom got married 20 years of age and my dad was 18." Wow! But it's like, I understand it's how they grew up in Mexico back home. That was the mentality. But now my parents are more open minded. Yeah. They say things were different then. But I do have a lot of Tio's that are still like that.

Ms. Associates added:

> I tell them, "so what what makes you think that when I become a nurse, and I work my three 12 hour shifts I'm going to want to come home and cook and feed someone?" Like

no, let me cook for my husband. No, no, there's gonna be days where maybe I want to do it like you say, out of love but there's going to be days I'm tired. But I don't want to do all kinds of stuff like I have to. I don't want to feel obligated to do it. Because just because he's [my husband] and is going to work I'm gonna go to work too, yeah, and I'm gonna be tired just like they are. So, it's like c'mon!

Ms. Associates also shared:

Just sitting down talking while my parents are in the kitchen cooking, or I see them even they can't allow them to serve their own drink. I don't like really understand, how hard is it to get up, get a cup with ice for yourself? And I'm not against it, like taking care of your husband. That's totally fine. But I feel like God Mexican men are very dependent on the woman to do everything because it's what you're supposed to do. And it's like, and that's why I feel that a lot of that females don't really get to higher education levels because what they think they should do is what our I will as and everybody else has done for.

Ms. Associates also said:

I think we go back a little 2018 I feel like it wasn't I was diverse. Yeah, at that time. I remember just looking around and I saw more white people than I saw people. Yeah. But now it's more of I mean, there's so much more white people. Yeah. And that's I'm not going to be for a long time. But I do see more color people and people from different places around changing a little.

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Ms. Associates also said:

Thinking of nursing school, my professors wise. I could only think of two like if I really put my head to it. They're all white except two people. Yeah. Two people. Yeah. Everybody else is white. Which is me mean, there's nothing bad about right. But it's like when we are from parents or we're not really white people. Yeah. It's kind of hard. Whereas when you have people who are the same as you, yeah, it makes everything so much it makes you feel better, and it makes you see that you're also capable of doing it. So, I love being here.

Ms. Associates also said:

Um, like I said, I've always been really private with everything. So I would just do things I do differently. I would always tell It'd be my mom and my dad. Oh, wow. No matter what my sisters were younger, because they're much younger than me. So I really wouldn't tell him much, but I would always tell him like, the end of the day, I want them to see other sisters doing stuff. I want to go through the hard stuff. And because I don't know what FAFSA was, yeah. I didn't know how to apply to college. I didn't know what scholarships were. I didn't know anything. And when I got here, there used to be a receptionist in the front office as she saw my biggest support system she helped me with she's the one that told me when she finished early college program on to work for me. And I'm sorry till this day, I'm still there. But she she already retired. And she really supported me throughout the whole Wow process. She helped me with FAFSA, she

would put me in contact with people to help me with scholarships. But back home, it was always like my parents like yeah, I really need whether it's a financial need are those like they've always helped me pay for school and I need it all day. Till this day. If my FAFSA or my scholarships for whatever reason, just don't cover enough. I know I can fall back on my parents.

Ms. Associates also said:

I say this. I don't want to be mean it's it's our it's our culture. We see it Yeah. But I don't want to be a stay-at-home mom. Yeah. I don't want to be serving my husband. Not in that, like, you know what I mean? I mean, if I do eventually get married, and I have kids, I still want to be a nurse maybe even further than that right? Right? But to me, it's more like you get with someone. I'm not just gonna be there just to serve. Yeah, we have to help each other out. Yeah. And that's what a lot of people on our culture don't understand that they think as a woman, we have to do everything. I know it's supposed to be we're supposed to help each other out. Yeah. And I don't I don't agree with a lot of the stereotypes. And I argue with a lot of that. I don't care how good like my cousin goes like can you serve me a taco? I'm like what are you talking as mister! Like I just like I see it all the time and I'm like yeah that's not what I want for myself…

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Ms. Associates also shared:

> I feel like with us Latinos, I have a lot to do with our culture too. Because if you think about it, as women are meant to, in our culture, right, are meant to stay at home have the babies take care of our husbands feed him. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, folders closed, eyes closed, wash, you throw everything you clean the kitchen, it's all us. So I feel like a lot of because I go back home to Mexico and the other girls my age they're either married or they already have babies. And I'm the same age but it's like I live in another in another country or I see things differently. But also my mom plays a big influence in my life. She's the one that pushes me because I'm like well I want to be like you one day now. Better than me. You have to you are you're going to be better than me. You're gonna get an education. You're going to do this. I don't care what you do in school. Just go get your education. And my dad's very supportive to my very good parents.

Ms. Associates also shared:

> That's for the same reason because it's not something you really see. No, I don't think I know a lot of people who have their doctorate that are people of color you're working on yours. So as Kevin, now I know two people Wow. Who are eventually going to become

doctors very soon. So it's like, it makes me feel good. Why? Because it's like, I can get my doctor one day eventually.

Ms. Master's said:

> You know what, sometimes? I think that's just about like, how men are. And its sometimes machismo, like they don't want the woman to actually be more than like them, you know, to cuz you know, when a woman wants to look out for herself be more like, be kinda like independent, like not having to depend on the man. Sometimes men don't like that and I see, that learning like, I mean, I don't want to mention this or something but Hispanic men and like, no, I see that it's disappointing. But hopefully someday, something like that will change.

Ms. Master's also said:

> Things are not the same. Women wants to be more independent and they want to continue their education. They don't want to be like a homestay mom, you know, like taking care of the kids. Doing food work. Woman wants to be independent.

Ms. Master's continued:

> Well, I know like for you know when you're married and you have to deal with like, you know, being at home, I've been at home you know doing all those it's a lot of work. I don't know how like, when you're married you know you had to take care of the kids. Maybe cook you know; things and you have to work plus you have to do like if you want to continue how like I admired that person. I'm single and I don't have those responsibilities and I'm used to doing a full-time job and you know, my education. Yeah. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of commitment that you have to have.

Ms. Bachelor's said:

> There's that one side where there are families that encourage their kiddos to go to school to find that financial stability to not live the life that their parents are currently living, or like working in a job that they have to be because it's a necessity, they those that side of like those families want their kids to find a job because they like it not because of necessity. Yeah. And there's the other side where we still have like, that mentality of no like, why are you going to go to school? Like you don't need that you can go straight to work where you can help me here and like our business or in their business. Yeah. And so and it's I think it's especially like I see it with a lot of not only like, are Latinos but all sorts of females, where there's still some families that have that mentality of like old school, like no, like, you can stay at home like, Yeah, kinda like take care of the house and things like that and just kind of learn that way. I do see there's like a shift between, like, the Latino or American culture, we mean those two types of mentalities.

Marianismo

Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016), authors of the study about marianismo and caregiving roles among U.S.-born and immigrant Mexican women, strongly demonstrated the laborious expectations among Latinas. For most participants in the current study, they chose to go to work or support the family and buy a home. Words of obligation were not used as all participants went to great lengths to demonstrate appreciation for their parents and the hard work; however, they referred to not really having a choice when it came to personal responsibility for some of the expenses when they became a certain age. All participants had worked throughout the latter years of high school and throughout college. The participants also had caregiving responsibilities for the younger siblings because there were no other alternatives; however, all of them stated it was out of love, care, and concern and not out of obligation at all.

The participants viewed the term "commitment" to the family more favorably than obligation because commitment involved a willingness to give the care needed whereas obligation did not. According to Anzaldúa et al. (2012), "Some Latinas are exposed to a fourth path, the path of education, but this path is still limited" (p. 3). All four participants expressed and agreed largely with the expectations in the Latino home where they felt daughters should stay at home, marry, submit to their husbands, and take care of the family from members of their external family circle, particularly cousins or uncles.

All four participants in the study fully acknowledged the overall attitude of marianismo with the exception of these four participants who remained quiet, good girls and with the persuasion of their mother's attended college, excluding me. In addition, all felt their experience in college felt isolated early on during their attendance at a PWI, and all of them collectively did not experience a sense of belonging until they started working for the institution and reached their 3rd and 4th year. They all held jobs while attending college. This is considered the norm among FGLs as their families do not specifically ask them to go to work; however, the message is subliminally conveyed to go to work—"Yes, attend college we will support you; however, we need you to work." The overall expectations of participants were highly related to one another. All five participants discussed having a sense of obligation to marry, bear children, and provide for their husbands and to take care of the home regardless of the level of education they achieved; however, they had great support to go to college from their parents, which has changed throughout the years.

Before I begin to unpack the participants' feelings of expectations in the home with the quotes from the participants, please allow me to introduce to you the true definition of Machismo according to Films Media Group (1995):

> Our role was to be the protector, the true meaning of machismo is that it's a role that the man has to be a provider, to be a protector, to be, in a way, a team player with the Latina, everybody has a role in the family, and the idea is the survival of the family, and therefore, the survival of the Latino community. (02:21)

The purpose of the introduction is to demonstrate machismo and/or expectations in the home were not a negative connotation, the overall purpose for the male role model within Latino communities are protectors, agents who guided and sustained the family values and traditions. According to Films Media Group (1995):

> The regimented roles of Hispanic-American men and women are being redefined. Women are taking a more effective part in things that have been traditionally controlled by men, and as she progresses, the Hispanic man is forced to deal with these changes. Today's Hispanic woman is strong, independent, a partner capable of making her way in America and on her own. (01:25)

When comparing myself to marianismo or good girl syndrome among the participants, regardless if their fathers or other male dominant nature men in the family were machismo individually, they each chose to continue to support their parents in return of the love, and nurture they received growing up. I was an angry child for numerous reasons. In my rebellion, I felt the pressure to be a "good girl;" however, I could not abide by the rules I had nothing to do with making. My mother did not rear me, my grandmother took on most of the upbringing. Until my mid-teens I began to understand she truly cared by the investment she made into my life. One day, I was at my biological mother's house, and we were cooking our annual tamales for Christmas, without thinking, I insulted my mother who immediately insulted me back. I said,

“Mom, your house is so cluttered there’s no room to cook here, don’t you ever throw anything away?” She replied, “Yeah, I do. My kids!”

I was heartbroken, that incident happened almost 20 years ago and I have yet to forget. I went outside and cried. Needless to say, I gathered myself together went back in and pretended everything was okay. This is not to oust my mother who I honor and respect however, one of many examples of the caliber type biological mother who bore me. Yes, I chose purposely to not be a “good girl” I experienced marianismo within the familial subliminal messages; however, I pushed past it and did things my way. I’m a late bloomer. Fast forward out of us four children, I give my mother the honor and respect regardless of our past differences, she still bore me. In hindsight, due to my rebellious nature, that specific emotion is responsible for continuing my pursuit in higher education. Achieving a better quality of life was and still is my end goal, and now I realize, I was not really rebellious, I was pre-seasoned before my time to become Hispanic independent woman. A Latino educational leader to represent our community

Throughout the findings, you will read shared experiences provided by the participants in response to the “good girl” syndrome either through monetary value, home ownership or their parents ability to live in the home with the students. In addition, you will find all of them have the utmost respect and support for the parents. A deep appreciation for their hard work, in return for the supported, nurtured relationship they received as children growing up. They all showed high regard for their parents’ laborious efforts in the land of opportunities, and not only respect but admiration for their parents.

As for my own experience when I got older, I sensed the expectations for my Latino culture and the preassigned roles from my grandparents and I went straight to work—attending

high school was not encouraged nor planning to go to college was not an option. As Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016) wrote:

> For most participants in the study, an obligation referred to having a lack of choice or an unwanted responsibility, as well as caregiving under force or stress or because no other alternatives existed. On the other hand, study participants viewed the term commitment more favorably than obligation because commitment involved a willingness to give care whereas obligation did not. (p. 929)

Anzaldua et al. (2012) further stated:

> The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the church insist women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels, she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman does not renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* until she marries, she is a good woman. For a woman of my culture, there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children. (p. 39)

In addition to expectations in the home, "Latino families' short-term economic needs superseded their parents' desires to support their children's long-term education goals" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 3). FGLs are expected to follow family customs, values, or traditions. According to Mendez-Luck and Anthony (2016):

> Marianismo, a traditional gender role in the Mexican family (Gutmann, 1997; Hubbell, 1993) . . . is fundamental to the social organization of Latino cultures (Staton, 1972).

> Women are socialized into the Marianismo role beginning in early childhood, which guides normative behaviors of femininity, submission, weakness, reservation, and virginity. (p. 926)

The participants made constant sacrifices to pursue their dreams of higher education. Although encouraged by their mothers, these were not immediate choices among their fathers or other men in the family. The overall influence of family expectations for Latinas among the group appears to take on the role of a caregiver or helping financially to be a provider. Yes, one can pursue a husband and bear his children, so the husband can help too. However, the four participants described the feelings differently compared to Latinas during the 1990s and early 2000s; if they dared to dream, they were viewed as Chicana feminists and considered not to be a "good girl."

To be viewed as a good girl, I had to financially produce, dismiss dreams of college education, and live out what grandma had imagined. I had to get a job and get married early, find a husband to help support the family and, in return, take care of his children and the household. The expectation was to go to work. Being reared at my grandma's house as an adolescent, she said, "Aye but Mija, the school takes so long when you can go to work and get a paycheck every Friday." Grandma had a wild imagination. She even thought of the perfect job for me, as she said, "I can see you working in an office with nylons and long nails answering phones, working for a rich man!"

Ms. Master's said:

> Well, I didn't mention this I usually don't tell people a lot about my personal things but I needed money to get a house. Like it's always been my goal to get a house. And I think I mentioned in my previous interview that my parents and I purchased a house, but it was actually me who had actually purchased the home and they live with me. My dad is a

> handyman so he knows how to fix everything, you know, and it's actually closer to where I work. These houses needed a few things done. Like we had to do the floor like, like paint the house a few things. And my dad is still working on that. So, I mean, I was glad I mean, I'm glad that I have my dad because he's able to do those things and I mean, I still have my parents and they are living with me so it's good. Everything worked out. I mean, my parents eventually want to go back to Mexico but they wanted me to be stable here. You know, like having a good education. Job like a good career, and also having a house as well. Because I feel like that's also like the American Dream that people say always about, you know, having your education and getting a house. So yeah.

Ms. Bachelor's said:

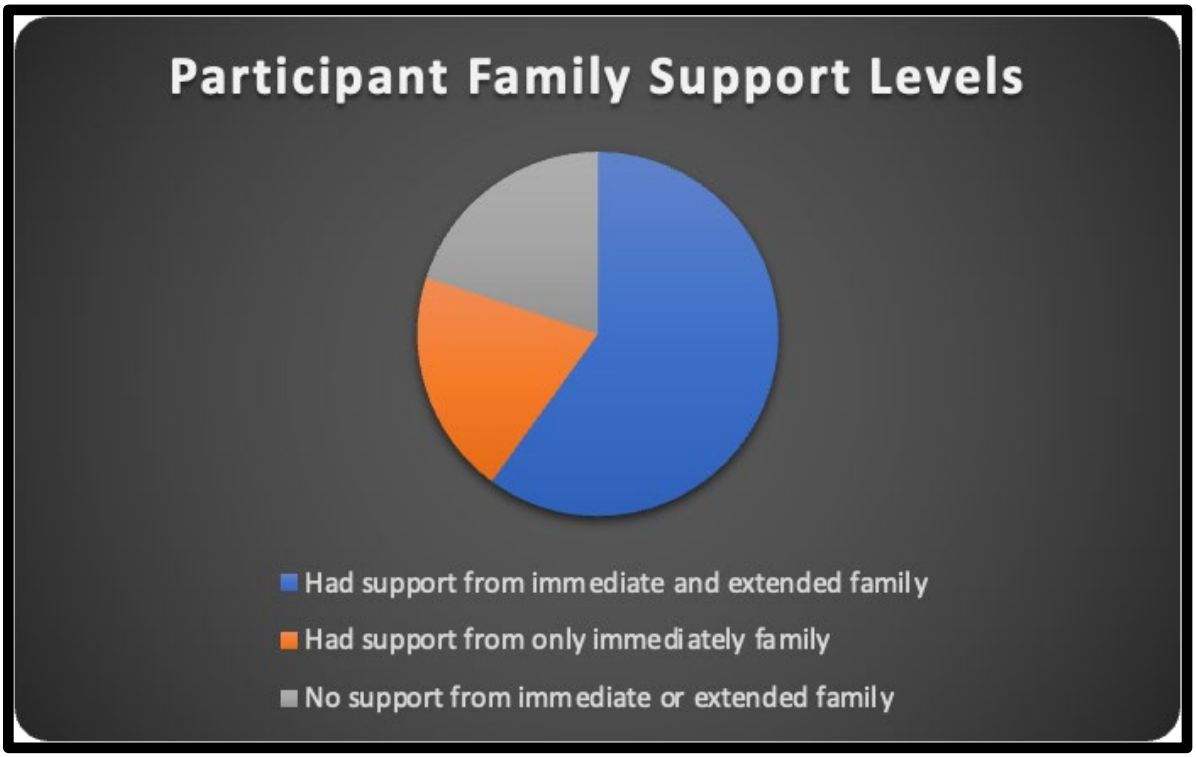
> I like deep down like, I know, like my parents didn't like, tell me that like straight up yeah, you know you need to go to work. I think it was just more of like me internally saying like, okay, like, I have a duty to now help. So, I'm not sure that comes down to being like the oldest, Hispanic daughter and coming from a Hispanic family. But I felt like that sense of like, okay, now it's my turn to begin to provide. Like finding my way after that, so that was one of the things where I'm like, Okay, I feel like my parents have helped me so much up until this point. I know, they'd be more than happy to help me even after, but I think I took it upon myself like, Okay, now it's my responsibility to start helping out with that.

Marianismo is the practice of the "good girl," doing what is right in the eyes of the family. The participants shared an overwhelming sense of family support for the most part. The findings differed compared to my experience as I was expected to go straight to work and provide financially to help with responsibilities. Figure 2 demonstrates most participants had

overall support from immediate and extended family combined. However, the two participants from Generation X had a different experience—one experienced only immediate family support and the other participant did not experience family support early on in their educational journeys.

Figure 2

Participant Family Support Levels



Ms. Bachelor's said:

> My parents, for example, my dad didn't finish, or he ended up dropping out in middle school and meeting people and started working actually. And then my mom, she didn't finish sixth grade. Because again, she had a job and so they did want me to pursue an education but of course, being the oldest in the families, they had to drop that and help financially. And so, I think it comes down to like from what they missed in their life, but

then also the sacrifices that they had to do come in here and everything they're doing now, like working this harsh labor, jobs. Like my dad says, we don't want you to have that same experience as we did, we want you to have something better.

Ms. Doctorate said:

But I remember my mom being very proud, inviting all of her ladies her prayer ladies and then getting the job with the University at the time. It was in the advising center of that being a pretty big deal. Like my daughter works for the university. Oh, yeah. My mom and I'm like, you know, it was at the time as you know, it's an entry level job it got me into and that that path to where I wanted to get. Yeah, but my mom was just a static and supportive.

Extended Support and Nonsupportive Family Members

Ms. Master's said:

Well, I always knew I wanted to continue my education, but I just didn't know how I was gonna do it. Because of that, you know, the income is always an issue, especially because my parents weren't able to afford them. Yeah, but I remember I heard the news about financial aid at Desert Town college I was going to have many questions about things like financial aid and how to apply for FAFSA but my family didn't know how to answer. I actually have one of my cousins in California, where she was working in her education. So, she told me about financial aid. And that's how I found out that oh, it is possible to continue so yeah advise from California is how I learned.

Ms. Doctorate said:

My husband and I are both educated, we are the two in our family who have degrees. I feel that sometimes I think he and I are in a very good place. We're not rich. I think we

have a good home and a good place but I feel that sometimes they hold it against us for getting our degrees and I'm gonna say it's for being successful. I just feel to some degree that they hold it against us. They were not happy when I enrolled in the doctoral program. I remember not wanting to tell them I am going back to school, I remember just like one day I said, "I'm going back to school," and they didn't say anything to me. My girls would share more with their grandparents. They were like, "No, like you didn't tell us you were going back to school;" what's the big deal they're not paying for it right?

Cultural Dissonance

As a Chicana, I identified as Mexican American; however, I have struggled at the intersection of race, class, gender, and language. To further define the new mestiza terms as chapter two first discussed by Anzaldúa et al. (2012) she stated, "Mestizo – people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood" (p. 27)—through mestizaje, a racial intermixing of Latin American occupants with European colonizers. Anzaldúa et al. (2012) discussed the struggles throughout history, such as the loss of our native tongue and the learning of a new language. Anzaldúa et al. shared the eight different varieties of languages spoken by Chicanas/os: (a) standard English, (b) working class and slang English, (c) standard Spanish, (d) standard Mexican Spanish, (e) North Mexican Spanish Dialect, (f) Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations), (g) Tex-Mex, and (h) *Pachuco* (called *caló*). Mestizas attending elementary school in the United States have been forced to speak English, then return home to their families and speak Spanish again. Language barriers, racial segregation, and gender scrutiny are all social injustices that continue in society. Chicanos have straddled the borderlands, meaning they have taken Mexican and American borders as part of themselves (Anzaldúa et al., 2012).

Relevant literature has supported the educational journey and the challenges FGLs experience attending PWIs from the elementary level throughout college. Anzaldúa et al. (2012) discussed these struggles throughout history, such as losing one's native tongue and learning a new language. The study demonstrated the feelings described as the new Mestizas in the literature review. All four participants' parents emigrated from Mexico. English was not the spoken language in the home as demonstrated in the findings, and their parents did not know how to navigate college on behalf of their children. The participants shared how they had been forced to speak English when attending an elementary school in the United States and then returned home to their families after school to speak Spanish. They shared how hard it was to learn the new language.

Although all the participants experienced culture assimilation in similar areas and transitioning to the country was a challenge, Ms. Master's experienced intense cultural dissonance assimilating and even immeasurable levels when learning a new language; the culmination brought about depression in which Ms. Master's was hospitalized for a few months. Mestiza best describes the intersection of Latinas, cross cultures navigating social classes and facing opposition of criticism to scrutiny. The findings in this section show the stories Ms. Master's told. She discussed long bouts of mental challenges and eventually overcoming and acquiring mental wellness and graduate degrees. She manifested dreams in the United States such as purchasing her home while accommodating her parents who currently lived with her and practicing *marianismo* as discussed in the literature. Ms. Master's said:

> So, I was actually born in Michoacan, Mexico. I moved here when I was 12 years old. So, it was a big adjustment trying to adjust. It was a different culture. I had to adjust to the culture and not only that, but I also had to learn English. Oh, challenging trying to adapt

to that new culture with a new language. It was challenging, but I remember, when my dad brought us here to the United States, he told us there's a lot of opportunities here. He's had to work hard for those opportunities. So, I always took that to heart like I always learned that there's a lot of opportunities. He always says that all the time. So, I never forgot. And I think that's what kept me motivated to continue with my education. So, after learning English, I was like, Okay, now I have to, you know, adopt this new culture, started learning the language. And then, after actually, when I graduated from high school, I didn't do so well in high school, to be honest. There's a lot of things I had to go through because I also had depression when I was in high school. And I had to drop out from high school for like, two three months, then went back home, but I was actually able to graduate but then when I started college, everything changed.

She continued:

So, I had this teacher on my first day when I was going to class, she mentioned that you know, like I was new to the class and everything like, she's like, "You're supposed to learn English within a few." She kind of gave me a timeframe to learn English because, you know, like, she mentioned like, "We're in America, you had to learn English you had" and I was like, she made me feel terrible. I was like, how like, it was hard. It was very hard. But, I mean, I was like, that I'm not gonna let that stop me from continuing with my things and the things that I knew I could do I did.

Ms. Master's also said:

To be honest, it took me time. Like I I kind of knew like I was just starting to learn but it took me time to actually feel comfortable speaking English. Because throughout high school, I didn't speak English like I knew. I knew English and I just could understand,

but I didn't talk as much only when I had to. But then, after I graduated from high school, I had to find a job. And I also started college. So that's when I actually started speaking English. So, I was like, I have to try. If I want to continue my education. I have to actually now start, you know, practicing my English and because I knew English, but I just didn't want to like it, I didn't feel comfortable. Yeah, especially. Because, you know, some people sometimes like, I know like I still have an accent and I just didn't feel comfortable.

She continued:

So, I mean, I didn't want to speak English, but sometimes I had to do presentations. And you know, especially in my senior year, I remember I had to do the senior presentation in my English class. But I did it and anyways, even though I didn't feel comfortable speaking the language, I was like, I'm just doing it because I care about my grades and I want to pass the class. So, I didn't end up doing it.

Ms. Master's then shared:

To be honest, I'm a very positive person now. I don't win because I know like, there's always gonna be ups and downs in everything that we go through in life. So that actually helped me grow because I remember when I was a little girl, I used to be so quiet when everything, like if there was a situation or something that happened to me, I will always stay quiet. I was so quiet. And you know, I think it got to a point that I was like, you know, I kind of explore everything like I have to let everything go now. Yeah. And that's when I got depression. And also, because I moved here and all those things and I had to adapt to that new culture, learned a new language. So, there were a lot of things going on. So, but it helped me grow.

Ms. Associates said:

> Um, I don't have nothing to say in in wise of like, I felt discriminated in any way or anything. Like that. No. But I do feel like it's harder for me to like, the communication is fine. But I feel like it's harder for me personally like going up to one of my professors. Because we're not, they don't have to say without sounding like they don't have like any kind of most of them are just white, right? And it's like I'm half his I'm Hispanic so American and Mexican. So it's like I have both backgrounds. But at the end of the day, I feel more of like the the moral the Hispanic side because I'm more open to a lot of things. And I feel like it's kind of it might be harder for a lot and it's not their fault. It might be harder for a lot of them. To like, if I can feel intimidated.

Ms. Associates also said:

> I don't get comfortable because a lot of times like medications can be really hard to pronounce. And I get the paper or the medication and I'm like I've tried to sell him when no 100% knows English. How do you pronounce this? Because I know because when you know another language it's more of like you read it in both. I don't know if it happens to you, but you read it in both languages. So it's kind of hard sometimes for you to pronounce a word and plus you have like the accent sometimes. So like sometimes I'm embarrassed to say anything, because I know I'm gonna say it wrong. Yeah. Or I say and they're like that's not how you say it this way. And I understand that I appreciate that they correct me but it makes you feel bad at the same time because you think you're saying it right? Yeah, do you really not? It was a lot of times I try to avoid you up to professors. make a fool of myself.

Ms. Associates also shared:

> I mean, it's not a bad thing. Right. But it's like I feel like they never gone through stuff like what we've gone through. Yeah. So it's like it's really easy for them just to like, speak out like no no one's around.

Struggling Students

Accessing my own educational journal was not by luck, nor accident. I have achieved the objective thus far; but it is not for me, it is for the next generation. The importance of establishing an innovative college is lifesaving, one student at a time. The facilitation of learning centers to increase graduation rates has been detrimental to the success of FGLs. In *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, Bailey et al. (2015) discussed solutions to obtain result-oriented performance for academic success through a sense of belonging. The authors referred to a few models that could enormously assist FGLs in educational guidance and support and guide them in strategies such as an innovative college or the fundamental concepts of learning centers and successful graduation rates. The suggested framework for the model and achieving academic success was placed in "learning facilitation" centers for practicing "collaborative inquiries," a process with a collective approach (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 85). The purpose of the model and the strategies discussed in the findings in this section entailed evidence participants described about their experience of not having a sense of belonging and why they used the learning center.

The findings revealed learning centers still exist and the resources have evolved; however, the participants still experienced lack of sense of belonging. During my generation in the 1990s, however, learning centers existed; but, they were not as robust as they are today. At the time, we heavily relied upon each other, the peers around us for best practices in writing

papers. That choice posed a challenge considering I did not make friends right away. Tutors were generally found with hand written notes on push pin boards by the registration office and were for hire. There were limited options for tutoring in the library however, very few slots were available and most tutors were of male gender and Caucasian descent, similar to the interview responses below and how they felt a lack of belonging.

Ms. Bachelor's said:

> I know it's maybe silly as it might sound like I did learn in the Learning Success Center but it was one certain place that was hard, at that point like, I was struggling and a subject that was definitely hard for me, which at the time was chemistry and math. Those were like not my not so good, like skill sets or subjects. But then also like being in this space where even like the tutors. I would feel uncomfortable with them in sharing my frustrations I didn't understand the material but for the most part the tutoring center was okay. If I can go back, it was the demographics of it typically was like, you know, older Caucasian men. Yeah. So I think even then, like, maybe even having someone that you know, and like, looks like me would have been helpful.

Ms. Bachelor's also said:

> I did have some struggles, I did have struggles because again, even though I had already adjusted like the college culture, I felt like I still struggled in a way. So, whether it was just knowing how to balance both, like my high school life with my college life, but then also like, my personal and work life, because of course, like from my experiences, as you know, being part of a Hispanic family like there's definitely a difference, like responsibilities or different roles. Yeah, like the financial, or the household so just kind of like trying to like navigate all of that was overwhelming sometimes.

Ms. Master's said:

> You know, like for me, especially, you know, I had to adapt to the new culture, learn a new language. I feel like I had to work twice as hard to earn, you know, it's hard and it's challenging. So, I feel like and I mean, maybe not all, like Hispanics suffer from this, but I feel like, I mean, I personally had like sometimes, like, what is it called? Impostor syndrome? Did I really belong, Can I really do this you know? You feel like you don't belong here or there but I like determined.

Ms. Master's also shared, "When you don't have your parents or your sisters that have done this before, right? Who do you ask? It's so challenging sometimes definitely not easy."

The segue introduces navigation at the college 1st and 2nd year and affordability. Although families for the FGLs were supportive, none of them could financially afford the college or university tuition. The literature research discusses the FGLs demographic characteristics, the expectations of the marginalized population, how trends or transformation has evolved over time; however, similarities and differences remained the same when navigating college and affordability issues arose.

Navigating College and Affordability

All the participants' parents were very supportive of their daughters' dreams to attend college and even encouraged them; however, the supportive parents were unable to answer any questions regarding navigating college schedules, financial aid, or homework assignments. Pascarella et al. (2004) discussed the three categories FGLs come from in terms of demographic backgrounds: "first-generation and other college students in terms of demographic characteristics, secondary school preparation, the college choice process, and college expectations" (p. 18). FGLs need leading opportunities and guidance. Beginning with school

preparation, their parents were not knowledgeable of the preparation needed to attend college. Many of the participants described they received help to navigate throughout their undergraduate program from those around them who worked on campus with them. These were the first proactive steps to fight against feelings of lack of sense of belonging, as asking for help from another coworker established the necessary relationship of trust and FGLs felt comfortable to approach familiar faces on campus.

The second category Pascarella et al. (2004) referred to was first-generation students' transition from high school to college. FGLs must be set up and groomed to be college bound and expected to attend college at an early age; this does not happen within Latino culture due to the harsh expectations. The third category focused on degree attainment and persistence necessary to complete their college education, as they said, "first-generation students are at somewhat more risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind" (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 135). Theoretical research has examined the models presented to address first-generation college students and curtail attrition challenges. Self-perception is critical, and self-worth is invaluable for retention purposes. The characteristics positively reinforce the feelings of reassurance, loving, belonging, and acceptance, especially on PWIs; however, these characteristics are generally not present with early FGL college students once they leave the home in hope for better opportunities due to opposition.

This puts the first-generation student in college at greater risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind due to their parents not attending college and perhaps becoming a statistic for academic warning, probation, or worse, disqualification (Pascarella et al., 2004). Participants experienced are significantly different challenges compared to the students whose parents completed their college degrees and could answer questions.

Findings for Financial Support

Discovery of financial support and the willingness to try to help the FGLs and their families has changed since the 1990s up to the 2000s. For example, of the five participants, four had family members who were ready to help with financial support, if they could. One of the participants' parents provided funding for 1 semester; however, the participant returned the funds as soon as she received her portion from grants and scholarships. All the participants worked throughout their programs to help with family and financial support and to help finance their college tuition.

For years, my stepfather did not respect my choices to attend college, and did not celebrate the accolades achieved until I received my doctorate degree; his reasoning was I was using the government in a very wrong way. Needless to say, many expected me to drop out, including myself. Navigating school could have been more precise; I finally graduated with a 2-year degree after 7 years and approximately 100+ credits later when the degree only required 64. I got lost looking for my classes, needed help figuring out financial aid, and needed clarification on how to add or drop courses and even which classes to take! I attended college afraid, lost, and muddled most of the time. I felt school could be taken away from me at any moment because attending was considered a privilege of a woman of my stature—it was out of the norm, especially for someone like me during the 1990s and early 2000s.

I constantly lived in fear of being shunned and rejected publicly, and it was not a false fear because it all eventually happened. My 1st year of college experience ended in shame. The following year after I returned, I dropped out again after failing my classes. The naysayers won, and after all the hard work convincing everyone in my family that I could attend school and succeed, I was wrong. I was embarrassed and ashamed. Once again, I returned to school; this

time, I was determined to maintain attendance and it took work. On my third attempt to attend college, I passed two computer classes and discovered a unique drive that has yet to stop. I learned I loved computers! Throughout my educational journey I did not have financial support from family or offerings; however, the four remaining participants in this study had family who were willing and tried and could not provide, or they did provide for as long as they could and waited for the FGL daughter to return the funds. Either way, their hearts were to support their family member as a student attending college. Figure 3 shows the differences from participants' financial levels of support.

Figure 3

Participant Financial Family Support Levels

Ms. Master's said:

> So my parents had to help me financially. Ah, yeah, my parents had to help me and then it was the first semester though. And after that, I got my refund back. I paid them back and every time when I was in college, I always got to make the Fulbright scholarship for some reason and that would help support us.

She continued:

> So, at that time, well, the first semester it was my parents because I didn't work at that time. And I didn't have to provide a letter of non-filing from the IRS for myself but it was mostly for my parents.

Although some results, feelings, and scenarios were largely similar to the literature review, the findings also demonstrated incongruencies. For example, Ginorio and Huston (2001) stated, "Latino families' short-term economic needs supersede parents' desires to support their children's long-term education goals" (p. 3). However, Ms. Master's adamantly stated her parents were very supportive in her pursuit of higher education, and if needed, they were available to help finance her educational journey even if they loaned it to her first and she would pay them back to continue to help make ends meet. Ms. Master's resources included financial aid and scholarships she received every semester; however, due to being tied up with documentation and verification for funds to be released, Ms. Masters had to borrow money from her parents because the funds were not allocated on time. In her case, she borrowed from her parents who were supportive parents and trusted her in the process, including providing the verification documents. When she finally received the financial aid, she repaid her parents. Ms. Master's said:

> I actually began to work here part time as a work study. So that actually helped me a lot because I started to know more people and build relationships with others. So that was

really helpful. Because as I was, I was a first gen student so I didn't know a lot of the things that you know, as a first gen, you don't know much of the things that you had to do in the process, and everything. So, after working here that helped me because I have built these relationships with other people. And, you know, when I had a question, I could just go to, you know, certain individuals and just ask them those questions either about financial aid or admissions figuring it out was hard at first.

She continued:

Well, I always knew I wanted to continue my education, but I just didn't know how I was gonna do it. Because of that, you know, the income is always an issue, especially because my parents weren't able to afford the tuition. They would have if they could but yeah, I remember I heard the news about financial aid at Desert Town college things like financial aid and how to apply for FAFSA. And I actually have one of my cousins in California who was working in education advise me. She told me about financial aid! And that's how I found that out, it is possible to continue, so yeah, my cousin.

Ms. Master's also said:

It's really interesting, to be honest, because, you know, as I started working here, I found out about like, all these scholarships and all these things aren't available first. So, I did the 90/30 program, which, you know, you do 90 credits at college. Yeah, you do 30 credits here. And then I only had to do 10 classes. So, it was pretty quick. my Bachelor's was during the pandemic. It actually was supposed to be at Table Community College. But since it was during the pandemic, it was virtually online.

Ms. Master's then shared:

There weren't that many Hispanics now that I'm thinking or like even when they had a band, like it wasn't about like, you know, like, celebration we didn't have anything like that. But now I feel like they do fast forward. They're more diverse. So, they said we're doing with our department that we have now with our intercultural center. We finally got one. Yeah, I think it's, it's better now than it was before definitely.

Ms. Doctorate said:

None of them were. None of them were able to help pay but they supported me. So, my best friend. She was Oriental. And, you know, I kind of thought we were kind of klutzy, but we were just kind of figuring out like we knew we weren't going to go to the University because it was too expensive. We kind of felt our path was going to be at the community college based on you know, there's no way we could afford to go to university, then you think, do we have the grades probably? But there we were we just didn't feel that that was a path we could take. You know, we just didn't feel that that was going to be the start. We started at the community college. And she was so funny because my friend would say, hey, they're given a scholarship for books at Cougar Community College and I'd say yeah, let's go see if we can get one and we did and we were so happy for $50 bucks!

Ms. Doctorate also said:

For me it was day to day getting by. I did not understand the system my parents would tell me go to school Mija but they couldn't afford it. I probably did not come in with good study habits. And I felt that everything I had to do as an undergrad I had to work twice as hard. Sometimes I found myself reading textbooks twice so that I could figure out how I am going to read, how people retain this because I am not understanding this. I

didn't understand you know, the tutorial system, you know, tutors that they had there. I felt my first year I barely got by. I passed the classes. I saved all the money and I paid for school myself because I didn't even understand the financial aid system. So, I felt like that 1st year I got by and then my 2nd year, I began to understand things better, and figured out some study habits on my own by the 3rd year when your almost done that's when I really figured it out after working here. I would see people walking around, would just watch everybody, you know, walking around with books or backpacks and I would be like how are they doing good?

Acculturation and Distress

In hindsight, I experienced perceived distress adjusting to the new culture, especially while in the campus cafeteria. Personally, I rarely could afford the food, but I loved me some french fries, and still do! I had numerous male friends who treated me whenever I did let my friend treat me every once in a while. My friend bought me french fries only if I let him put black pepper on them, which used to make me so mad, but I did. The times were stressful. According to Castillo et al. (2003), Mexican American children perceive acculturation or White marginalization as distress. Latinas are forced to undergo adaptation to their new environment or a different culture attending PWIs.

Everyday food preferences and practices awaken one's awareness and psychological mandated change, from learning a new language to social behaviors or daily habits and practices such as food choices or preferences in the cafeteria. According to Castillo et al. (2003), "Most frequently assessed are language usage, social affiliation practices, and daily living habits (e.g., type of food one likes to eat; Zane & Mak, 2003)" (p. 152). This current study demonstrated two participants could not afford the food in the cafeteria on campus—one participant brought in her

own lunch from home and the other participant borrowed money to eat. Another participant was able to afford it but did not prefer the food in the cafeteria. The other two still purchased food from the cafeteria; however, they did not prefer the types of food offered.

One day I was hungry, and they had Indian fried bread for sale in the cafeteria. I could not afford the food at all that day, I depended on the food I ate at home and I did not have a dime in my pocket, which was usually the case unfortunately. I could smell the food, imagine the refried beans with cheese with hot sauce topped with fresh tomatoes and I could not resist. I walked over to one of the workers at the college who volunteered as a part-time advisor for M.E.Ch.A. I asked him if I could borrow $5 so I could buy a plate of Indian fried bread in the cafeteria. My income came from federal work study pay every 2 weeks and a monthly welfare check of approximately $663. My bills required 30% of my income for rent because I was living in Section 8 housing, and I had to pay 20% of daycare expenses, monthly housing expenses, and many other miscellaneous bills that came faithfully; $5 was a big deal back then. This budget did not include sundries and emergency expenses with the kids, which happened constantly. He pulled out the $5 and handed it to me, I sat down and ate the freshly cooked best Indian fried bread ever! Then, I had to pay him back and I paid a price for it.

For 2 months, I avoided the advisor because I could not pay him the $5. Every time I saw him, I got so mad at myself because I did not have the $5; so, I walked the other way in shame. When I finally made it a point to pay him, I went into his office and paid him; then, to my surprise, he had forgotten about the money! Oh man! I remember wondering how could someone forget they loaned money for $5. It seemed a whole world away for me to imagine because $5 was so much for me at the time.

Ms. Doctorate said:

> And then just kind of as my 3rd and 4th year came around, things started to come together. You know, I listen to my children right now how awful the pricing is for the food in the cafeteria. And I'm like, hey, I carried around lunch, a piece of paper so I could know every class for that day and I would just mark it off. As I go. You know, I didn't ask questions. I knew exactly what I needed for my degree and I just kept marking the classes off. I just was very autonomous. I was not involved. I would always you know, for me, it was always watching people on campus especially at lunch, I could never afford to eat on campus. So, I would always take my own lunch. I would just get my little burritos and like my little sandwiches and hope that you know that I hope, I'm not that hungry by the end of the day because I would wait for a ride home and if I was hungry, it was a long wait. So, for me it was figuring out the system on my own. I wasn't quite sure who to ask questions to at the time but it was really watching other students I learned. Really literally watching people in the cafeteria as I ate my little burritos.

Supportive Parents of FGLs

The simple task of answering questions regarding higher education was a challenge in the home for parents of FGLs. Parents of FGLs could not provide definitive answers. In their interviews, participants described although their parents were supportive financially if they had the means, and supported the family member in college by encouraging them, they were unable to help with navigating college knowledge. Challenges such as answering questions about financial aid or scholarships, the differences between 2- and 4-year institutions, or which classes to take were common knowledge to parents who graduated but not for FGL parents. Lingering questions among the participants when they began their educational journey were tough to answer. The layers deepened to seamlessly attend college, their educational journey continued to

be difficult, and their dreams to degree attainment would blur. Their parents were still supportive in their endeavor, even to the point of taking their daughters to the college; however, they were unable to navigate to help figure out financial aid. But, Ms. Masters, in her determination, figured it out! Ms. Master's said:

> So, um, my family and I went to visit my family, my cousin L, so that's how we started talking about education. And I was telling her I want to continue my education, but I don't know how I'm gonna be able to. So, she was telling me her story and stuff and like how she did it. And then she's like, you might want to check maybe they have financial aid over there she's like, I'm sure they do. So, I always remember that about financial aid and then I saw on the news that Desert College had an event about financial aid and about applying. So, my dad took me over to Desert College because my dad was always so supportive of me and wanted me to continue my education. So, he took me over, I applied, and then they gave me this at the end they gave me like a letter saying, like how much I qualify for, and it was actually a grant and they told me like, you know, this is no money that you do not have to pay back it's a grant. So, I was like oh wow Dad, this is good. So um, after that dad and I went home but that's when I started college here, then I got selected for verification.

I asked Ms. Master's, "What does that mean? When you get selected for verification." She replied:

> It means that you have to provide additional documentation, like your taxes like from your well from my parents, because I didn't work at that time. So I had to do all those. All the documentation. I had to turn in everything. And I didn't have my financial aid at that time when I started college. Because of because I got selected for verification.

We then engaged in the following dialogue:

> Maile Canlas: Once you get selected for verification, you cannot get financial aid?
>
> Ms. Master's: Not until it's cleared. . . . So, my parents have to help me. Ah, yeah, my parents had to help me and then it was the first semester though. And after that, I got my refund back. I paid them back and but every time when I was in college, I always got to make the Fulbright scholarship for some reason.
>
> Maile Canlas: So, when you get verified and forgive me for not knowing is it your background that you need to bring for verification? Is it your taxes or your income of your parents?
>
> Ms. Master's: So, at that time, well, the first semester it was my parents because I didn't work at that time. And I did have to provide a letter of non-filing from the IRS for myself. But it was mostly my parents.
>
> Maile Canlas: It was your parents' background. Did they worry?
>
> Ms. Master's: They kind of knew that how things were gonna work, but I just kind of told them to trust me, I know that it will never work out. I'll pay you back. So, they did and they were able to help me
>
> Maile Canlas: What was the number one worry affordability or citizenship? . . . . Was it like, oh my gosh, Mary, we can't afford this, or was it? No, I'm not turning in any documentation. What if they make us leave?
>
> Ms. Master's: Um, no, it was just about them money because they didn't know how things were gonna work out. But yeah, it wasn't about like, they weren't worried about like me having to turn in any documentation or anything like that.

Reflection from the findings were significant, the commonality regardless of degree level and age of the students. For example, Ms. Bachelor's demonstrated the same tremendous appreciation for her parents. Ms. Bachelor's said:

> I have noticed working in early college that there's like two sides within Hispanic families where we have one side where they kind of discourage their kids to go to school. But then there's another side where there are parents, where they're like, nope, like you're gonna go to school. They want you to have a better lifestyle than what they're offering you now. And so, my parents instilled education from the get go. So, all throughout, like elementary school, they would remind me like, hey, do good in school. Just think of college in general. They didn't know the ins and outs, of course, the Mexican system is different than the education system here it's so different. Yeah. So, they just had it in their mind like, nope, you're going to college. That's why sometimes it was kind of disheartening at times because I would have a lot of questions and I wanted to ask them for advice but I couldn't. They were always my support system, but sometimes they couldn't really answer my questions like they were there, they were like emotional supportive but they would even like to tell me honestly Mija, I don't know how to answer your questions. So, you know your first generation. A lot of the families in the neighborhood would not know, that lived there, the other kids were first generation, we all lived there with our parents because they would work at Turf Paradise you know the racetrack. That's where my family would work to support us.

Ms. Bachelor's continued by saying:

> For me, I feel like there was support and mentorship available for me, and I can say the same for my friends when we were in the ACE Early College program. My coordinator at

> the time made it clear with her words and actions that she was there for us and she would remind us of the various student support services that we had during our time. As a first-generation student this was really important because that is what I needed. We all did. I needed a support system that knew Higher Education and a continuous reminder that we are not alone during our challenges in our academic success. She is small but mighty support system that created a safe space for me to ask questions and for help. She was always helpful and guided us towards routes for success, that is why we would always go to her office and fill the Early College Department.

Latina Trailblazers (Title credited to Ms. Bachelors)

Throughout these FGLs' educational journeys, the participants bore a burning desire to give back to the community, in addition to being surprised they accomplished their dreams of degree attainment. Themes from all the participants showed they all had roles working in higher education with the sole purpose of giving back to the community, inspiring other FGLs to reach their full potential attending PWI, ensuring a sense of belonging and community, and establishing academic success to degree attainment. Each participant demonstrated this through the interviews when asked the final research question.

FGL participants experienced impoverished backgrounds, yearned for better quality of life, and knew the key was higher education, similar to my experiences. Each participant described in their own words how their purpose was to reach back to the Latino community. In addition to obtaining their college degree, the participants had roles on campus that inspired future generations of FGLs attending PWIs. Through their own experience and testimony, they have helped many overcome the challenges and continue to do so. According to Muncey (2010) autoethnography is defined as:

> The idea of multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, critiquing the self in social contexts, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potential. They contain the personal story of the author as well as the larger cultural meaning for the individual's story. (p. 18)

Those with experience teach the inexperienced, the individuals demonstrated their own ability to thrive on a PWIs despite the suppressive powers. Trailblazers share their story, those who have established a sense of belonging on a scalable level and encourage other FGLs; this is done by the sharing of their poignant moments. The participants achieved the unthinkable, they understood the culture around them and now they have the ability to navigate college and show others how to in the same way.

This is why representation of Latinos on PWI is essential for academic success—the familiarity, commonalities, and the traditional nuances or mannerisms Latinas possess. I may look like one of their relatives or speak like one of their Tia's in the family. When they hear "Mija" or "Mijo," they can relate. Removing the stress students may be experiencing is always a goal when they come into my office and meet with me—words of affirmation, reminding them of their dreams and purpose when they graduate with a college degree. I tell them, "If I can do it, you can do it too!" Their faces light up, and their smiles goodness, is so rewarding."

Ms. Master's said:

> I motivated my older sister to continue her education. Yes. She's 31. Okay, yeah, she has daughters and she was able to get her associate's degree. I told her about financial aid and how they pay for her classes. So, she was like, I'm just gonna do it too. If it's, you know, they pay for your classes. And if you have any money left, you can use it for your personal things or purchase books, things like that. So, she got her associate's degree.

Uncovering Inclusivity

The deconstruction of ideologies and theories within PWIs are required to allow Latino's attend college transitionally. The process is done through the transformation of oneself or the students' adaptability to the new college. Balcacer (2018) wrote:

> It takes a substantial amount of valor and resolution to leave one's land and people. In other words, separating from all one knows and holds dear for a chance at a better family life requires great courage; this is the type of courage most Latina/o FGCS muster when navigating the unfamiliar borderlands (Anzaldúa) or terrain of college culture. (p. 21)

Seamless transition to attend college is the goal, and is not as far-fetched as many believe. Understanding the expectations and overcoming the limitations. FGLs have the awareness and drive to breakthrough, thrive on college campuses, and achieve academic success. All of the participants felt included after working for the institution either as student workers or staff members; thus, the acquisition of employment on PWIs led to their own sense of belonging.

Testimonio Quotes of Belonging

Ms. Associates said:

> It would be or my work. Be Kevin Mary Dimitra. Lovely. Well, Helen, Diana, Helen and Cindy. Oh come from different backgrounds. So we come together and we I think she sure they all feel the same way. Because we talk about a lot of the things. We talk about each other. We learn about each other and it's very belonging and I like it. I'm comfortable. Yeah. I don't ever want to leave. I know eventually, one day I have to Yeah, I hope the day I do leave. Wherever I go to is I can feel the same way.

Ms. Bachelor's said:

> Yeah. So it's one of those things were like at the time I was like, I wow, like I feel that connection. Um, but yes, throughout like not only you know, speaking Spanish with my team, I was also fortunate enough to begin speaking Spanish to the students. I like I began working in like the families and things like that. So of course, like, kind of like learning the ins and outs of like, my job was of course like a struggle, right? Because again, it was my first like, office jobs at that point, but I think over time, like starting to kind of get like higher education, and just even using my experience as a not only know someone part of the Hispanic or like Latino community, but also like a Latina, like in higher education. I was able to use my experiences to also educate my community. Yeah. So I think it's one of those things where like, we heavily needed Yeah. And so I'm like, Oh, this is this is nice. This is nice. I'm able to connect with my community or people that look like me and be like, hey, like, you can do it. Like, yeah, your son or your daughter can do it. Yeah, you guys as a family can do it. Because what I've noticed is that we're kind of like treat it like trailblazers. Yeah. How it kind of mentioning like, we're paving the pathway for Yeah, the rest of the community. Yeah. Because like, with our experiences, like we know that, you know, we went through all of this, but we're here. Yeah. And I think sharing those experiences and being fortunate enough to be you know, speak Spanish. You can also see they're like, isolated because like oh my gosh, like I have these questions. thing. Oh, man. Yeah. And like, it's gotten to the point where, you know, you know, like families like would invite me to their house, because they also agree that they had that, like some patience and just meeting someone that would be what to, like, have this conversation from like square one of like, okay, what's the difference

between coming to college and high school? What's FAFSA? What's the no credits like wow degrees what's what's this?

Ms. Bachelor's said:

Considering the statistics of Latinos in higher education, having the ability to experience a genuine connection whether it's cultural, language-based, or all of the above, it creates a sense of belonging. A sense that we are seen for who we are and not just solely a minority in a sea of a majority.

Ms. Master's said:

The first year, it was a little bit challenging. I didn't have friends and the classes were also a little bit hard. But as I started working on campus, I was like, I want to finish my education. I want to do this. So, I guess I got motivated. That 2nd year was a little bit better. I think it was more about me like trying to adapt to the new you, to know the college experience, because college is so different from high school. You know, I feel like college is something that you actually want to do. High school is like you have to do, you have to finish high school, right? But college is more like if you want to do it, if you want to continue you apply yourself.

Ms. Master's said:

What I have what I noticed though, because when I was doing my associates degree and I started working in higher education, I noticed that the difference in my grades as well because I wasn't doing so well when I was working in that job and suddenly, I had A's and B's. I found my passion for education, helping other students as well became my passion.

Ms. Masters also said:

> Well, I like I knew about like, I was always looking for opportunities, you know? Yeah, it sounds like and especially with this program. Like it's something that kind of motivated me, you know, to help students, you know, early college students, high school students, when I you know, I went through depression, I went through all these things. So I can relate to these students and I know what they go through and I want to, you know, be the role model for them. Is to let them know that, you know, you can do this, this is us code. Once you get to college, it's gonna be totally different than where I go. So I really enjoy what I do now. In helping students so.

Ms. Doctorate said:

> I don't recall many friends. Most of those occurred because I happened to see them a lot in class. I thought my competence evolved through the years but it was a long process. When I graduated with my undergraduate degree, I got my job on campus. That's when and where it started. My friendships would evolve and you would be networking. I remember the first job I had in the advisement center. I don't know why I was going to the provost office all the time. Just dropping off stuff was part of my job. And I got to know the provost a little bit and my confidence started to build through conversations and then the provost one day asked me a question. The provost of all people at the school. The provost said, so what are your next steps? And I'm like what do you mean next steps? You know? And that was kind of how the conversations went. I never thought I'd get a master's degree. So, then I just started to think more and more about a master's degree in my case, I tried one class, then two classes then three classes and I'm like, I'm doing this. I just finished three classes. I might be getting my master's degree after all!

The research data demonstrated participants established a sense of belonging when they started working on campus, generally during their 3rd year. According to Hurtado et al. (2015):

> The more students witness acts of discrimination or hear disparaging remarks from faculty, staff, or fellow students, the less validated they are likely to feel, and consequently, the lower their sense of belonging on campus. Conversely, the efforts made by concerned institutional agents to help students feel more empowered—a sense of validation—can fortify students against discriminatory experiences and help them feel included as part of their campus communities (p. 72).

The participants who worked on campus as new students saw a familiar brown face, heard a familiar voice with an accent, and immediately felt comfortable as opposed to the harsh climates PWIs generally have. All participants agreed when they found a sense of belonging, they found encouragement, especially from their coworkers, not only to finish their bachelor's degree but also to continue on to their master's degree during their 3rd year when they began to work for the institution. For example, Ms. Doctorate (Generation X) described verbatim how the conversations aspired her to continue her education at the institution from her bachelor's degree to the master's level and then on to her doctorate degree. She told her story, through which she shared her involvement and progress as a student and staff thriving on PWIs.

Bachelor's Level

Ms. Doctorate said:

> I would look at my piece of paper, my schedule. These are the classes for my bachelors, yeah, and I enrolled in them. It took me a little bit longer to finish but I finished. I got my bachelor's in 1991. I would take one class here and two classes there and so on and that

was sort of the encouragement from people who worked around me. They would say hey, you want to stick with working with the university you need to get your master's degree after you get your bachelor's degree. So, I wouldn't have done it on my own when it was the people, I was working with who were planting the seed and encouraging me, it was my bosses, or the provost for my masters, the people who worked in the office.

Doctorate Level

Ms. Doctorate said:

> Actually, I have worked for this institution for over 30 years. I got my bachelor's degree then my master's degree and ended up working for the university. Through the course of time in working for the university, I did not intend to get my doctorate. I was very fortunate to be working with faculty who are in the doctoral program and who were always encouraging me to pursue the doctorate degree. So finally in 2018, now that my kids were a little bit older, I felt it was the right time in my career. And as well as with my family. But I did hesitate because I had both my undergrad and my graduate degree from this institution and after a conversation with the department chair who was very encouraging thought that this would be the right path for me. I did pursue it but I also did look at other institutions first. I just didn't see them as a good fit for me. And after further discussions with the department chair, I finally felt like the right fit for me here. So, I started my doctorate degree in 2018 and finished in 2021!

Seamless transition is the goal for FGLs, primarily during their 1st year in college, the timeline represents this significant juncture. Hurtado and Carter (1997) discussed the effects of racial climates while attending early on within PWI institution they stated:

> We hypothesized a path model of students' sense of belonging that reflected a causal relationship between students' background characteristics (gender and academic self-concept), measured prior college entry; college selectivity (an exogenous institutional variable); ease in transition to college in the first year; and perceptions of a hostile racial climate in the second year. (p. 335)

Four of the five participants experienced pushback on many levels during their 1st year of attendance. The participants' stories shared how they did not have friends, struggled until they began working for the institution, and found a sense of belonging. In addition, encouragement to continue the pursuit of higher education similar, the data as resulted in regardless of degree level the participant was pursuing sense of belonging still needed to be acquired. The following examples from Ms. Master's and Ms. Doctorate describe their educational journeys on higher levels. Ms. Master's said:

> I actually started working as a work study, because when I kind of started to make more friends, because I know like in college like it's gonna be different, more harder to make friends because the classes that I had. I had different students in every class, so it was hard to make friends and to keep in touch with them. I did have a few friends but it wasn't like they were like, they weren't like my closest friends and after working in higher education as a work study, I actually built-up relationships with people that I work with. And I think that's when I felt more comfortable doing everything. And I think that's actually what helped me throughout my education because I had already built up built so many relationships with my coworkers, then I decided to work in higher education regularly.

Ms. Doctorate said:

> My doctorate degree was different, we were the clique the three Latinos who would carpool together from Springtown to Desert Town and up to Flagstone. We were kind of like getting together for group projects. We're going to do them together and then we were very selective who we allowed in our group. Who are we going to allow to be part of our group we would say? Again, there were cliques even at the doctorate level! There was a time when the group got big project and there was five or six of us and we took a chance on inviting people from the outside. And it was one of the peers who did not want to do much, but we talked it through and allowed him in. After the project we were like, never doing that again. We need to stick with people we know and we would look around. That student procrastinated like finishing his part of the assignments. One day they had their laptop up and we're trying to finish the assignment because it was due and the student, we invited to join us had his secretary correct his part of the paper. And we were just like no, wait that's not right. So, between the three of us we we're making the sacrifices of traveling and spending time like we are our own little family. We stayed together, we knew we were not gonna get help or welcome anyone else in our group We had our own sense of belonging with one another. It's like our instincts knew we're not going to help them. Yeah. And two of them were actually African American men who dropped the ball on the assignments. And the other one was M, she was fine. We are the group and we were tight, and going to have things done together. You know, so the three of us kind of like locked arms and we were our support system to get through and graduate. We moved together within the 3 years in the program all the way to graduation and this was before the word cohort

Ms. Doctorate continued:

> In undergrad, I saw some people who we've always sat together with and we're already friends and then there was me autonomously. It was hard to penetrate a new group, we didn't know anybody and I saw the same thing. Even in my master's degree, very cliquish, and I'm like, I went in as kind of a stranger. And for the first time, finally in my doctor degree, three Latinas! That was the first time there was ever any kind of connection. Then we were the clique, people trying to get into our little group and we're like no, because we did all the work. Yeah, we were tired. We were emailing and we were like why aren't we hearing from C here's the worst part of this this guy was in Hawaii on vacation. When we asked him for his part of the assignment, "he's like I just flew in from Hawaii." I'm like, "are you kidding me, right?" I'm like, "this was a big assignment." And we even asked if we even gave him the assignment would he, do it? We ended up doing all the work that was not fun.

Ms. Doctorate then said:

> The combination could have been our age or maybe our professional levels, you know already there at the college for years I don't know, but there was just more of a competence. And to think it all began because I had realized that I have to drive up to campus and I have to get a hotel room well, that costs money! Which at the time was very pricey and there was somebody at the orientation that we had that came up and introduced herself to me she was oh you were with my mom at Pima and I'm like, oh yeah! And then I happened to sit with her then when we found out we had to come back the following and drive up here I called V no, I sent her an email like hey, Vanessa, is there any chance that you want strangers that you'd like to drive up with you?

Ms. Doctorate said:

> Just worked out for us. You know, you go up there and you have that car conversation. And then she and I became really tight. And then another person we learned was driving from town to Flagstone on her own. And she kind of had the tenacity by herself to join us. We're like you know, so we talked amongst ourselves. I'm like, well, now we can split it three ways. So, we did, she was one of those um students, she had some strong opinions in class and I don't know if I can be in the car with her and but we let her join us in then we became the best of friends so I really felt like I got out of my comfort zone to approach somebody. Honestly, I did not mind because I did not know how I was going to fund this on my own. You know, the travel piece of it.

Ms. Doctorate finally said, "The girls and I stuck together and we're kind of like a core group. We were a little clique!"

Ms. Doctorate shared her experience with her own voice, the involvement she felt and her confidence in her ability to succeed in her doctorate degree. Although she described cliques around her during her undergraduate years, she became part of a clique in her doctorate degree. However, not everyone around her supported her efforts to obtain her doctorate degree, especially her in-laws. She said:

> Both of my parents were born in Mexico. My husband's mom was a bookstore manager and his dad worked for the railroad system so they were a little further along. Then us kids, even though my mom didn't know how to maneuver the college system, it was still something very important to her that we got an education and we did good in school. That was not the case on his side of the family. I would just be really low key about my schooling and when they heard I did get a degree at any level? Crickets. It seemed like

> more within my professional circle was more acknowledgement of my degree. And I think it took a while for his family to hear a "congratulations." I remember that so vividly. I'm like, "I just finished my degree!" Me and my husband and the kids went out to dinner but days go by and even weeks go by and then you know, I attend graduation. Then a couple months later I think around that time there was some acknowledgement or finally they told me, "Congratulations" you know after the fact.

In addition to experiencing push back from family members and not having mutual support in her ambitions to pursue a doctorates degree, Ms. Doctorate also experienced isolation in her most recent career working at the executive level with a doctorate degree. In the following quote she explained how she felt isolated working in academia, especially among people of the same executive level as her who were Caucasian. The findings demonstrate the importance of Latino representation and establishing sense of belonging. The dynamics relate to team efforts and trust within the group, the elements triangulated with a strong desire to work harder results in strong work ethics and comraderies. She wrote, "It is imperative that they [Latinas] are immediately connected with supportive organizations, educators and peers that can help them adjust to their new school environment." Gilroy (2011) stated:

> Institutions and departments need to be proactive to providing Latinas with information and experiences that make them feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to their new academic homes. These efforts greatly diminish the balancing act that Latinas engage to, thus freeing them to better engage in school and their departments. (p. 46)

Ms. Doctorate said:

> Although getting my doctorate degree, I still felt semi-isolated professionally. The vice provost who was overseeing statewide initiatives and then under her is my boss, boss M.

> There wasn't a lot much information floating around in the meeting. I sat there trying to get an understanding of my role in this meeting, and so I repeated what the VP [vice president] was saying, then the lady who was White she was so rude she's like, "it's not hard to understand!" And at that point she just like attacked me and I'm like, "okay, just wanted to make sure that you were the person because of the work somebody at your level shouldn't be doing. So, I just wanted to be clear you indeed were the person who's doing this or is it somebody else?" And again, she snapped at me and says that this isn't rocket science. I just said OK. And then Y, my immediate boss who is Latina, after the meeting, she came to me she was like I can understand your frustration. I appreciate it that somebody else recognizes the discomfort I was feeling in that exchange. Y understood and saw it all unfold as well as everyone else in the group saw that too it was embarrassing. Here I am with my doctor in my role and I'm still struggling to fit in with the college, why?

Ms. Doctorate also said:

> I look at the leadership and prior to Y and M being hired we did not have representation. Dr. Ricon is doing an amazing job at establishing this. I don't know that they would have recognized it or would have backed me Y didn't do anything to embarrass me in the group. She did a wonderful job of just keeping the meeting going then talk to me in private. It's really nice to see now where I am professionally. Seeing that representation where I didn't see it early on, and I guess I saw these like, these White women who were my role models at the time and gave me that foundation of how to perform professionally. So, they were the foundation that kind of gave me standards of how to act professionally. Now, I have a boss who is just hilarious. And I feel like you know, with

> her little humor that she had I was able to kind of bounce off her and just kind of like, oh, there's your coworker was a team not a boss you know? I felt like I could trust her enough to say there's your team player and she's inviting us over for a chat when it was a meeting, with the leadership that I have now there's a little bit more trust

Ms. Doctorate shared:

> I did not see diversity reflected at the instruction level. I didn't even see one person who was an African American. Oh, I'm not complaining the instruction was amazing but there was nobody that represented Latinos all of the instructors were Caucasian.

Ms. Doctorate also said:

> Educational equality is finally happening here on campus even if it's at the at the end of my professional career because I'm at the tail end where there's finally after going through different jobs, different supervisors that finally three Latinos in my doctoral program that were supportive of each other and that did not happen in my undergrad or master's, but it happened here and at the end of my career. There are finally brown women who are on the team. You know, you've got M, J, who's Native American, myself, and our supervisor who's Persian and it took like 20 something years yeah, this to finally happen so a major internal change must have taken place somewhere, somehow.

The quotes support the notion of the importance for FGLs who achieved degree attainment of reaching back to the community and helping other FGLs or Latino students in general. Ms. Doctorate in particular referred to navigating her daughters who were now in college through the institution and her constant communication with them. She stated one of the questions Ms. Doctorate posed to her daughters when deciding which college to attend verbatim: "I know how to navigate university of flagstone." They were going to have to learn any other college from

ground zero. Similarly, Ms. Master's has continued to nurture the college conversations with her siblings as she continues to work for the early college program and speaking to other FGLs, especially the parents' considering college in the United States is different compared to their home colleges in their country. Ms. Doctorate shared:

> As I reflect more on my kids who are over at the institution now there's instructors that are still there when I was there. And everybody that I'm connecting with, not just faculty, but also university employees who highly encouraged me to do what I'm doing right now. They we're all Caucasian, not one person of color. And these are individuals that I am connecting my children with who are up on campus. To kind of serve as their mentors and go to individually. If you come across any problems, here is you know, S or here is C for math. There's not a single person of color at the time but I still considered them my good friends. They're all my good friends.

Ms. Master's said:

> Even if you're married you don't want to just depend on the men. So even if you have to do like maybe your own business, or you know, get an education do something but it's not always just good to depend on the men, even though I know my brother-in-law too. He's a really nice guy. He's a hardworking man. He also supports my sister so I mean, right now the baby's young, so he doesn't want her to work until he's a little bit older.

Ms. Master's also said:

> Like it's something that kind of motivated me, you know, to help high school students through early college. I went through depression, I went through all these things so I can relate to these students and I know what they go through and I want to, you know, be the role model for them. Let them know that, you know, you can do this, this is possible.

Once you get to college, it's gonna be totally different than where you go now. So, I really enjoy what I do now. In helping students, giving back to the community.

Decolonization of "American Dream"

Ideologies of the American Dream and the philosophical design have bled into the notion of White objectivity. The cultivation of systemic racism in western civilization has been in effect for hundreds of years, literally from the birth of this nation. Until we completely deconstruct the term the "American Dream," the choice to pursue higher education as a woman of color comes at a heavy price when attending PWIs in the United States. Motta (2018) stated, "Black, Indigenous, Migrant, Mestiza/Chicana and other excluded communities struggle against such destructive and traumatizing logics of dehumanization" (p. 26). Yet it is often these voices, predominantly from marginalized communities, that are drowned out by institutions of knowledge who created the political power to cater to them. This is not a coincidence. These traditions subject us to unsettling subordination. de Jong et al. (2018) stated, "They disrupt systems of thought and beings which attempt to render us as uni-dimensional, dangerous and unworthy" (p. 27). The decolonization of higher education is crucial at this juncture. In the wake of Black Lives Matter and the increasing growth of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs it is more important now to recognize these tactics that cater to the dominant population.

Hispanic serving institutions are just at the beginning for marginalized representation. Systemic racism did not just happen. de Jong et al. (2018) stated, "These traditions foreground how the violence of living under siege and containment create 'soul wounds', as we are rendered the objects of intervention, to be known about, labeled, named and contained" (p. 27). The soul wounds are referred to as the feelings one may experience walking through the college campus while attempting to establish a sense of belonging, or the psychological challenges of negative

thoughts that haunts students. Words include phrases such as “you are not worthy,” “you’re not included,” “why are you even here,” and worse yet, “you don’t even belong here.” As de Jong et al. (2018) shared, “We can come to believe in parts of our being – as Frantz Fanon (1961) and bell hooks (1990) so forcefully demonstrated – that we have nothing to offer, that our lives and experiences lack value and that we are unlovable” (p. 27). Opposition is a liar!

My attendance in college during the 1990s was built to cater to the elite; my own struggle to assimilate in a culture where I began behind the gate took time, and I mean years. Manifestation of belonging began to attract me to our group such as the charisma of a professor who happened to be Latino. His energy in teaching significant historical documents based on Mexican Americans and his passion demonstrated the hope I was looking for. He shared his own stories of his struggle to assimilate and get his doctorate degree. The dynamics of the professor and the material for our history attracted me on a scalable level, and suddenly, I began to want the ability to inspire others in the same way—to get my doctorate and teach.

One day, I daringly shouted, “I want to teach for the college like you!” He said, “Oh yeah? You need a doctorate, and only 1% of Latinos get their doctorate, not including Latinas!” The odds put a fire in my belly I have yet to forget; little did I know the long road ahead of me. My educational journey took a toll and I paid a heavy price for opportunities for higher education. However, I was misled that I wanted the American Dream, which still meant I had to compromise my identity. I wanted my piece of the American pie even at the expense of my identity. The decolonization of the American Dream is significant for the continued support and transformation for national citizens in the United States.

Ms. Master’s and Ms. Doctorate used the term “American Dream” and its ideologies in society, such purchasing a home and nice car, and they expressed how much they wanted them.

In turn, when individuals in particularly underrepresented populations have yet to reach these milestones, they feel insignificant in society—null and void or powerless. According to Gildersleeve (2018):

> When Fanon states that "the dreams of the colonial subject are dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality," Fanon identifies that fundamental to colonialism's pathology is a reliance on inhibiting, even destroying the mobility and agential capacity of a whole group or groups of people. (p. 25)

In this case Latino communities. Institutions convey a powerlessness for marginalized populations, the implemented strategic plans thrive and are stealthy. Gildersleeve (2018) further stated:

> It is such petrification–and the means of reproducing it–that must be challenged. One of the most generative aspects of Fanon's work is his advocacy of human agency–his foregrounding of the human as a being who can act in and upon the world, and in history. For one thing, this way of thinking presents an antidote against the threat of powerlessness that one might experience before the problems of our time, and arguably against systems of oppression at large. In this spirit, and in order to move beyond a general commentary on the unjust global order, another moment in the "Conclusion" begs our attending. (pp. 25–26)

Ms. Master's said:

> I remember before getting this job, I was working. I was making a lot less than what I'm making now. But I kept so committed to buying a home you get the American Dream. I was like, I know I'm gonna make it in a house one day. I was so positive about it. And I was kind of manifesting everything that it was going to happen in this country and it did!

> I know I didn't mention this, I usually don't tell people a lot about things like my personal life but I knew I needed money to get a house so I knew I needed a good job, and in order to get that I needed a good education. Always, like it's always been my goal. I mentioned in my previous interview that my parents and I purchased a house, but it was actually me who purchased the home, it was actually me who purchased my first house in my name.

Ms. Doctorate said:

> I let my kids know that we sacrificed so if I was willing to move to the Flagstone campus or even the Desert Town area, I would probably be in a different role. But it was important that you know, we help my husband and help our aging parents. Mine had passed away since. I mean, a lot of sacrifices in staying in Springtown and doing my job and doing it very well was a sacrifice. I look up and I see how some colleagues have gone further along than I have and accomplished the American Dream. Oh no, I'm okay with it. I'm at peace with it. Yeah, I'm at the tail end of my career, and I just got one more year I need to get through because I have to figure out that health care system. Yeah. But I think this is the best I could do that soon. I love what I do. Yeah, it was worth pursuing the dream. It's definitely worth it especially at close to six figures a year.

In addition to the deconstruction of the American Dream, deconstruction of the ideologies that cater to Caucasians within elite colleges and universities are necessary. Necessary strategies are required to maintain students of marginalized identities. Learning academic programs, opportunities for resources on campus, or navigation of terms and good grades while juggling robust schedules and establishing a sense of belonging are necessary. All of these elements culminate in academic success and progress is made in the scholarly world. We are

slowly but steadily making progress. Part of belonging is citizenship, and my participants in this study demonstrated they needed belonging within the PWIs; they also needed to have feelings of belongingness in the United States as a country.

Why Are We Still Here?

Recently, I found myself upset while driving to work. While on the phone with my husband, I cried out for help in my desperation. I said, "Why should we have to pay a price for a decision we had nothing to do in creating? Because I was born brown or Latina? Because you are dark skinned and from the Philippines? Why?!" I had become angry and frustrated at my workplace, which claimed to be Hispanic serving. I have yet to find solid fitting in my role and use my skills appropriately; daily, I see my counterparts whose skills are underused. I am not asked for an opinion nor invited for a roundtable discussion up for collaboration on projects or plans. I have many years of experience working for a university; I have background implementing a bachelor's degree within a 2-year college. I constantly find myself on the receiving end of my program and that is where I sit. My door is mostly closed. I am a silo.

Resources and ideas are procured and implemented; yet, we are void of team participation. There is no comradery or involvement in major decisions that affect daily schedules or job descriptions for specific responsibilities which ultimately devalue our current pay. There are days I am penalized, not for something I did but what I was born into, because of my awareness of microaggressions and unequal pay in the workplace. I endure through patience with my own faith of powering through and making my presence known to those around me to feel validated and appreciated. The book of Ecclesiastes 1:18 reads, "For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge the more grief." The more one is aware of their common knowledge of an unfriendly or hostile environment, the more one sees through the

inequality and lack of diversity; in turn, one may become intermittently depressed or feel suppressed in their purpose and rethink their professional career.

Progress *Not* Regress

Lift your heads, "progress not regress," and continue the good fight of faith! Increasingly, resources and programs for professional learning have increased awareness for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Resources, programs, and training practices are increasingly available. Perception is keen, providing training opportunities and higher education practices that allow employees to earn professional certifications and receive incentives and promotions or obtain professional development funding for their time. In partnership with the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE), some of the programs at the local schools provide an 8-week training course. The focus is on managing the impact of biases, reducing microaggressions, addressing imposter phenomenon and stereotype threat, and finally, creating an inclusive learning environment. The objective of the program is to foster a culture of belonging, the catalyst to academic success as demonstrated in this study. The program offers the knowledge and education to apply the actional practices in efforts for the employees to cultivate an environment in which others feel seen, heard, and valued—elements that humans' innate characters thrive for and need to be successful regardless of their roles in higher education. This is just one of the many provisions to decolonize higher education and increase educational equality among men and women of color, cultivate a sense of belonging from the top of the hierarchy, and increase retention and overall increase underrepresented populations to degree attainment.

The purpose of this initiative is to decolonize higher education and implement educational equality. For example, a journal written about a course offered by Benson Clayton

(2021), author of *Refocusing on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Lessons from a Community Practice*, who provides the diversity, equity, and inclusion course stated the following:

> We understood how critical it was for colleges and universities to continue fulfilling their respective missions. The spring 2020 transition to remote learning and work models exposed inequities among our students, faculty, and employees and illuminated the importance of addressing the different needs across these populations. Tackling these inequities required real-time strategies and solutions that would endure over time. (para. 8)

Strategic plans similar to this format demonstrates the ongoing growth of diversity, equity, and inclusivity for the purpose of establishing educational equality throughout the country, regardless of whether the campus is at the community college level, university status, or termed as PWI. College campus communities need to cultivate spaces for FGLs assist in establishing sense of belonging, become familiar with other individuals on campus who are from diverse populations and who have struggled for inclusivity. The next section includes individual testimonies from the participants experienced in an intimate and personal setting and from their own experiences however, first to learn further regarding testimonios and their purpose

Testimonios

Testimonies shared in this chapter capture the counter narratives found in *Campus Service Workers Supporting First-Generation Students: Informal Mentorship and Culturally Relevant Support as Key to Student Retention and Success* (Guzmán et al. 2023) stated:

> Citizenship is belonging, not just membership, and belonging is articulated in multiple forms. It is awesome, and it is awe-inspiring. Dad was, indeed, his school's most

> important person, and arguably its best teacher. For my dad, teaching was about moving beyond education (as it is) to moving toward education. (p. 29)

Change is inevitable and deconstruction of the American Dream phenomena in academia is possible. FGLs experience inadequacy coming to the United States, constantly attempting to assimilate in the country, not only when they attend college, but also when they attempt to feel accepted or validated such when they are purchasing a home in the United States.

Increasingly, the men and women of color who are placed on the frontlines at colleges and universities are more than just campus services workers. Employees are becoming educational leaders because institutions now hire intentionally with diverse ethnicities. This allows for future FGLs to see that familiarity and feel comfortable attending PWI so they can succeed, unlike what the participants shared in their interviews about not seeing familiar faces or brown faces. Guzman et al. (2023) stated:

> In the past several years, more universities have admitted more students of color and more students from low-income backgrounds, contributing to an increasingly greater number of first-generation students. Still, higher education is getting more expensive and funding continues to decrease and are losing students on massive levels, First-generation students are starting their journey in an unequal and increasingly crowded field where their perceived lack of social and cultural capital adds extra barriers. (p. 29)

Further research is needed to address underrepresented Latinas and higher education. FGLs must continue to learn and observe the progress, prevent regress, recognize transformation is taking place, and continue to cultivate diversity in higher education. There is always space to push through scholarly limitations for overall improvement and provisions for men and women of

color. Educational equality is worth the fight; however, FGLs must share our testimony and tell the world how we overcame for others to be encouraged and thrive in higher education.

The purpose of these letters was included in the testimony prompt as part of the research design was for participants to reflect on everything, they have learned about themselves, their feelings, and life choices after attaining their degree. Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) stated, "Once introduced to *testimonios,* both the narrator and the listener experience cathartic epiphanies that open their eyes to the power of individual accounts that ensure that social and political events become part of the greater human consciousness" (p. 33). The stories are freeing; the question I posed when I asked participants to write these letters was: what you now know post college experience, what would you tell your younger self (see Appendix E). They did not have a minimum or maximum requirement in written length, the goal was to write with sincerity and reflect on their own educational journey and to write this letter as if they were able to tell their younger self anything to help prepare for their arduous journey.

Significant commonalities among the findings in the written testimonios were a strong sense of healing and faith. After the letters were written, I reached out and thanked the participants because I found their letters so touching. All the participants, including myself, shared how the letters were therapeutic. One participant stated she had never been asked to write such a letter and enjoyed it very much because it alleviated any remnants of negative memories she still had. Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) stated, "Narrative *testimonio* demonstrates the power of the personal account as a tool, not just in storytelling but also as an aid in the process of healing" (p. 525). I did not consider therapeutic feelings as an initial objective in the study; however, this was a pleasant surprise. The written letters further established trustworthiness that is vital to any research and created a triangular relationship of healing, academic success, and a

sense of belonging in the data.

The following written letters are not included in any particular order as significant findings located through coding tactics varied. Coding showed familiarities and numerous differences, compared to my experience as the author and researchers in the literature review. For example, according to Ms. Bachelor's, "We notice that it is difficult to make connections to your college when you see little representation apart from your peers." The written letters reinforced academic achievement, a sense of belonging however, achieved degree attainment. She said, "However, our journey as a first-generation Latina in a predominantly White institution came with barriers and mixed feelings."

Representation or the lack thereof as discussed in the literature review written by the researcher was demonstrated in the written testimonios. Ms. Bachelor's said, "However, we will also begin feeling frustration and isolation because we will see that there is also a lack of initiative and lack of representation at the professional level." The culmination of data created achieving goals as a challenge, yet possible, for FGLs attending PWI. A strong commonality they expressed in their testimonies was the price each participant was willing to pay for their education. Other commonalities included how they were all surprised by their achievements and how far they have come. They mentioned salary pays and positions held on campus, and especially, the ability to reach back to the Latino community and inspire other students in reaching their full potential.

Ms. Master's

Ms. Master's testimonio highlighted commonalities such as having family support with her parents, embracing the United States, and coining the country as the land of opportunities (see Appendix G). Throughout her interviews, she quoted her father numerous and mentioned

him again in her testimonio when she said, “America is a land of opportunities but you must work hard to achieve your goals and dreams.” As stated earlier, she experienced health challenges, combined with the arduous journey of having to learn a new language and assimilate in a country that was foreign to her; thus, self-care became a priority in her educational journey in addition to personal healing.

Ms. Masters shared the experience of how doors that may or may not open posed a challenge; however, it was worth the ask: “Remember not to be too hard on yourself. Receiving ‘no’s’ and ‘yeses’ in job applications is common, but it is essential to keep trying and not give up.” The participant reinforced her commitment to her educational journey, like other participants, and the importance of serving others as a leader. The theme strongly correlated with all the participants. She said, “Remember that leadership is about people, and success comes from helping others.” The feelings she expressed were similar to my feelings and Ms. Bachelor’s in the study—their decisions to lead and inspire others in their educational journey ensuring they reach back to the Latino community. Ms. Master’s also demonstrated the same theme for courage, and all participants shared and expressed faith in achieving overall life’s aspirations.

Ms. Associate’s

Based on findings for Ms. Associate’s, the youngest of all the participants, she still harnessed the faith to believe in herself, an overall theme identified in the testimonio letters. Ms. Associate’s also established her connection with family and their role in support of her decision to attend college. The findings for all the participants for family support varied; the differentiation may be due to the age of the participants and the generation. Further research is needed; however, the participants in the study and the written letter Ms. Associate’s shared included the tremendous support of her family and how proud they were of her and the overall

purpose (see Appendix H). She clearly stated who she was doing this for, similar to my purpose of higher education, as she said, “Not only are you doing this for yourself, but also for your parents and your siblings.”

Ms. Associate’s also signified her sense of belonging within a group. Ms. A said, “You have finally found the friend group you needed growing up. You can rely on them for support and encouragement.” The sentiment positively reinforces the need to have that sense of belonging in one’s inner circle. In addition, in the testimonio, she also established a sense of belonging with her workgroup. She said post-employment at the PWI, “Moreover, you share an incredible connection with your colleagues and have been a source of support for them ever since you joined their team.”

Finally, Ms. Associate’s expressed her own notion to reach back to the community within her industry to inspire others through teaching post master’s degree. She said, “Once you’ve achieved that, you plan on going back to school for a master’s degree so you can teach future nursing students.” There was an amazing connection between all the participants and their yearning to believe in themselves and achieve their aspirations. Ms. Associate’s said, “You will continue to strive until you achieve the RN-BSN designation next to your name, soon to be Ms. Associates, RN-BSN” almost as if I’m unstoppable.”

Ms. Doctorate

The findings for all participants were similar regarding the importance of establishing a sense of belonging, purpose, or how to even begin their educational journey. The study represents five participants who began their education at the community college level. Just as the degree levels the participants achieved were not intentional, neither was the fact that all participants began at the community college. Almost all the participants identified their 1st year

in college was attending a PWI institution at the community college level. This demonstrated undergraduate institutions in the community are just as significant in representing marginalized populations as they are at the university level, except for Ms. Associate's experience.

Ms. Doctorate's letter described her experience at the community college as unsure of her major and her career path (see Appendix I). Representation on campus is important; as a Generation X student, she found a sense of direction when her advisor suggested a major to her. Ms. Doctorate wrote, "You have uncertainties about your career path however, through a conversation with an advisor, a seed is planted, conversations of communication degree and attending university you think right away that it wasn't a path for you because you knew your family could not afford to send there but as destiny would have it, you go to Flagstone University " The participant shared, to her own surprise, the accomplishments she reached not only in attending the university but also in being able to work at the institution: "Little did you know it was for your education and career too!"

The theme continues in her letter regarding establishing a sense of belonging as she said, "You began to feel a sense of belonging with your fellow employees and supervisors, and to your surprise they took an interest in you. This is the first time in your entire life, at Flagstone University individuals invested in you." The participant shared an expression that is crucial to student attendance and sense of belonging—once she felt invested, she reciprocated the sentiment like the rest of the participants. Strong similarities in her written letter shared the commonality of giving back to the community and inspiring students. She wrote, "And once you graduate you get your first job working on campus in the advisement center, dreams you never thought imaginable, the spark was ignited. You take your own experience and you share the same passion with your students."

All participants were surprised by their ability to gain an education and work for the institution; however, early Generation X participants seemed to be the most surprised at the opportunity to give back to the community. Ms. Doctorate wrote:

> You evolve throughout the university system, get your master's degree on campus, take a class here and there and grow into a career path working within the community, school districts and the government, giving back to who you truly love. You really love looking at degree progress to make sure when students complete their degrees through college at Flagstone University they will get into the workforce and get a job.

Overall, the letters represented the excitement of the journey, their genuine thoughts as they wrote about the topic, and their memory recall. More importantly, they showed their shock of their degree attainment and where they have come from, as Ms. Doctorate said, "Quite the journey for a little girl who started in Desert Town Puma community college."

Ms. Canlas – Me, the Researcher

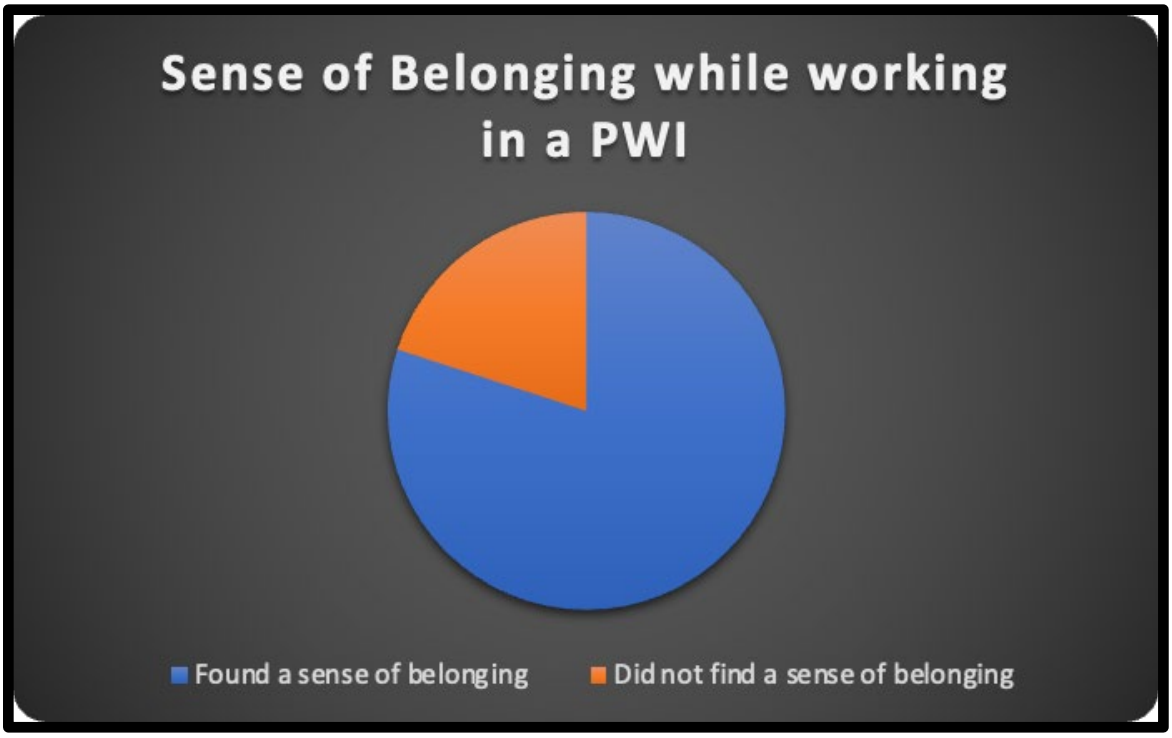
The similarities in comparison from the participants from the written letter to our younger selves on behalf of me as the researcher and the participants varied (see Appendix J). For example, all participants were FGLs and all experienced expectations in the home, and when the participants began to attend PWIs, all experienced pushback and a sense of belonging. Commonalities continued based on their surprise of being able to accomplish their dreams, as the participants said, degree attainment, and working for the institution. Additionally, finding the sense of belonging through working for the institution further guided the participants to seek full-time work at the institution.

A monumental theme among all the participants is they began to work on campus as federal work study students then later as full-time employees post establishing sense of

belonging. The findings demonstrated an increase of inclusivity due to the fact the participants worked on the college campus and acquired academic success. The participants positioned themselves in roles and had the ability to give back to their community; each wanted to show their appreciation to their immediate families by having a well-paying career with benefits, which may have not been possible without the persistence needed to acquire degree attainment (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Sense of Belonging While Working in a PWI



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Autoethnography is the story self-told through the words of the researcher and participants. In addition to the interviews, findings were gathered through letters to their younger selves. My hope is the study inspires autoethnographic research, utilizing the non-traditional format for dissertations and stories told through narrative voice. Writing throughout the chapters via autoethnography voice allowed the flexibility and supple approach to expand topics for further understanding. Topics that may only be understood through first-person narratives such as Chicana feminism, Latino expectations and establishing sense of belonging to achieve a college education. The value of the stories told by the participants could have had debilitating feelings from the memories recalled however, individually, I witnessed their courage, tenacity and perseverance to share throughout the interviews. Consensually, all participants eventually agreed the empowerment the study holds, the vision and the purpose worth the cost for other future FGLs and to them I am thankful for.

Therefore, the study concludes with all five participants who were interviewed completed the letter to their younger selves. Through their sharing, each was significantly emotionally charged. The directives for the letters to their younger selves asked "what would they tell your younger self at the onset of the educational journey, with what you know now?" The letters concluded Chapter 4 and captured each participant's story from the challenges they experienced in higher education to degree attainment. Asking for letters to their younger self was suggested by one of the committee members Dr. Lauren Contreras, who I highly appreciate, considering the findings were significant and empowerment the narratives delivered. When I read the touching letters, I discerned the power in their voices, the tone when they had celebratory

moments, and finally, their overall achievements or wins working for the predominately White institutions (PWIs). Recalling the memories stirred up emotions; many tears were shed not only by me when I read the letters, but also by the authors! They later shared with me how they felt after they had written the letters. At best, the readers will feel the same encouragement and faith to dream the impossible and achieve their degrees.

The shared experiences captured in the letters culminated in a woven tapestry that holds lasting impressions of each participant on an individual basis. The letters brought about hope and faith to overcome expectations from Latino culture. The good fight of faith is not in vain, participants are compensated with rewards through the value their education earned. Again, I say to you, future FGLs, "fight the good fight of faith;" together we are empowered, our voices are heard, we thrive, and we are victorious.

The research questions asked how first-generation college Latinas (FGLs) navigate academic success within PWIs. The questions were answered with an autoethnographic approach through 12 complete interviews that generated impactful results in powerful stories. Themes and subthemes emerged from the gathered data to further conclude this study. Themes such as expectations in the home and strong opposition among family members were supported; however, family did not have the ability to help guide or advise the student in the home. Examples of themes were expectations in the home, strong opinions of family matters, lack of sense of belonging, isolation, and finding a sense of belonging, especially after they began working for the institution. Further commonalities showed all participants worked in higher education as student workers and later after graduation as full-time employees using their benefits for reduced or waived tuition. Finally, the overall shared interest that defined the participants was their desire to give back to the Latino community via higher education.

The research questions, literature review, and findings triangulated the vital elements to cultivate academic success among Latinas and allow the marginalized population to thrive when achieving their college degrees. The findings add to the literature review by identifying the challenges FGLs experienced; awareness is key. Using resources and programs, underrepresented students learn to be proactive in PWIs as opposed to being reactive. The findings from this study validated FGLs attending PWIs and their challenges establishing a sense of belonging. These participants faced tremendous challenges navigating their college schedule, adapting to their new environments, experiencing cultural dissonance, and finding little to no support from the institution. This is why it is important to refer students from underrepresented backgrounds to the resources and programs available early on and establish support on campus.

Cultures collided while attending PWIs and feelings of isolation continued throughout the study when the participants shared their stories, aligning with the literature review context. However, as young Latinas, one learns to adapt to the campus culture by adjusting their attitudes and behaviors even while maintaining their own cultural values, identities, and beliefs. The behavioral change refers Castillo et al.'s (2004) research, as they stated, "Acculturation on an individual level is referred to as psychological acculturation and pertains to the changes in attitudes and behaviors in individuals as a result of acculturation" (p. 151). Together we remain strong, sharing commonalities and struggles experienced in the classroom, such as the food choices in the cafeteria on the college campus.

The literature review largely connects to the participants' stories and supports their narratives. The data collected, regardless of generation or level of degree, showed all five participants felt isolated attending college during their 1st and 2nd year until they worked on campus. All five participants became involved with the institution when they began working for

the institution and they were encouraged to engage with on campus activities and academic events. The findings and themes in the stories suggest the need to cultivate a welcoming environment intentionally on PWIs, and the value of having intercultural or multicultural departments where students from marginalized backgrounds may come to become familiar with other students and the campus, continuing to help them feel welcomed in the community.

Additionally, universities can hire staff members and faculty who are influencers as educational leaders and who represent the Latino community so FGLs have a level of familiarity and can become comfortable. The participants shared numerous times how they looked around their classes and were unable to identify with other students or professors—the lack of brown faces, in other words. Another participant stated her appointments at the learning center for tutoring were uncomfortable because the tutor was Caucasian and the participant felt intimidated, all this while to learn challenging material. The lack of a conducive atmosphere made learning new material even more challenging. Throughout the study, participants shared advisors, administrative staff, and faculty, including custodial staff, have a significant impact on FGLs—faces who appear familiar to them to help them navigate college and achieve academic success.

Another recommendation is to provide training and education workshops for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The purpose of professional development is to further assist professionals in understanding FGLs and other students of color who face challenges attending PWIs. The cultivation of first-generation communities in college campuses is made possible through awareness of micro- and macro-aggressions. For example, these may be subliminal remarks made directly toward students who are from different cultures, a lack of understanding about indigenous backgrounds, or providing recognition as part of the diversity, inclusivity, and equity program. A strong recommendation is to increase faculty involvement with clubs and

organizations. As one participant stated, her involvement began when a professor challenged her educationally. The relationship between the student and the professor would have not been made possible if the student could not relate to the professor with a Latino background; familiarity was key in the dynamics of the classroom and cultivated a sense of belonging.

Further research is needed surrounding recruitment programs at PWIs. One may ask how recruitment is conducted on PWIs when it comes to educational equality. Who is doing the recruitment? Are the admissions officer's representative of the Latino community? Is the marketing material considering diversity, inclusivity, and equity student populations when they placed their marketing material in the hands of Latino prospects? This study demonstrated 3 of the 5 participants worked in early college and the participants met regularly with the Latino population in high school. The interview responses showed how participants were fulfilling their purpose when they were able to talk to a high-school student and explain higher education. Most of the time, the conversation was held in Spanish with the students' parents present. The college represented is a Hispanic serving institution and all the participants in the study currently worked on campus. After all, people gravitate toward those people who are familiar with who they are; these students felt very comfortable, especially when the early college representative started speaking in Spanish.

One of the participants demonstrated significant depression and was hospitalized for a few months. The challenges she shared in the interview showed increased levels of stress from having culture shock living in a new environment to learning a new language. Suwinyattichaiport and Johnson (2022) stated, "There is ample evidence to suggest that stress directly influences student success, motivation, and adjustment among Latino/as, particularly those from low-income households" (p. 299). Emotional well-being programs are highly recommended moving

forward on not just PWI campuses but on all college campuses. Students experience high levels of stress from the onset of completing applications, through the admissions process of acceptance or declinations, to attendance while navigating their robust schedules. The intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors are reciprocal to the environment around them; and if they are in a harsh environment with the pressures and demands of higher education on a daily basis, students may become stressed or depressed. Balancing life, work, and school are learned behaviors; professionals are highly suggested to help facilitate education of coping strategies for FGLs. The approach will help students further adjust to their new campus environment and teach them strategies to address when they begin to experience symptoms. Through education of well-being for FGLs, Latinas could learn how to recognize the triggers and curtail depression or other bouts of anxiety and fear.

Another recommendation involves creating programs to help students on academic probation, students with academic warnings on their student profile, or worse, students who have been academically disqualified. When alerts occur on a student's profile, hired staff members who are trained can reach out to the struggling student. Advisors that may have had the same experiences and overcame them may be helpful; these are adequate staff members to advise the types of students who are struggling academically. Throughout the interviews, themes revealed the participants' choice to work for the institution such as belongingness, inclusivity, and feelings of supportiveness. More importantly, they wanted to be in a position to support and influence other FGLs. The recommendations, practice, and strategies largely assist when an institution chooses to rebrand their environment, especially as a Hispanic serving institution. The roles and goals of the executive level leaders are to acquire a favorable environment for FGLs on PWIs.

Additional supporting citation by Rodriguez et al. authors of Latino Educational Leadership Across the Pipeline (2016) aligns with the findings of the study and the recommendations suggested. “In their efforts, many HSIs have identified and utilized effective strategies to support Latina/o academic success and increase their college completion rates. These are Rodríguez et al. strategies that other higher education institutions serving Latina/o students can learn from. Approaches include providing academic cohorts and adequate support programs” (Benitez & DeAro, 2004; Cortez, 2011, 2015) (Rodriguez et al. 2016, p. 147). Significant academic programs are necessary to catapult FGLs forward considering low degree attainment and academic probation challenges. In addition, to regular advisement sessions and guiding students with educational plans. The journal continues to discuss the importance of inclusivity, financial affordability and intentional hiring practices of faculty and staff committed to diversity and excellence (Rodriguez, 2106).

As they shared their stories, all participants were surprised about how far they have come in higher education in terms of degree attainment and working for the same institution they struggled in during their 1st and 2nd years of attendance. Increased programs to celebrate the students’ specific milestones should be implemented, the visual strides the student is making will help them see and feel their achievements. Overall, the visuals may help students feel closer to their graduation date and the conferral of their degree. All participants felt a sense of accomplishment, and the ability to give back to the Latino community was their reward. Establishing a sense of belonging for other FGLs is their goal when they initially meet new students, in addition to achieving their academic goals and helping them be included in a country where many Latinos may experience educational inequality.

Another unexpected finding was faith: stay in the "good fight of faith!" The study demonstrated tremendous amounts of faith regardless of religion: the faith to dream and to decide to attend college; the faith to believe tuition can be paid and the ability to achieve good grades; the faith to navigate college, overcome expectations in the home and on the college campus; the faith to see the light at the end of the tunnel for graduation; and the faith to execute their education in procuring their careers within the institution. The faith of a mustard seed moves mountains. Staying in the good fight of faith and change on a scalable level is inevitable for the Latino community and higher education. Through our faith, together in numbers, we are empowered. Our narrative speaks volumes and our stories encourage and enhance those around us who have the same aspirations of higher education. The goal is to increase education equality among the Latino community and FGLs; however, there is much more work to be done. We have begun. ¡Adelante! Or as my chair Dr. Rose Ylimaki said during a stressful time in my life while writing my dissertation, "Onward!"

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Appendix A

Recruiting Materials (Sample Email)

Hello [Prospective Participant],

I trust that this email finds you well.

I am a doctoral candidate in my 3rd year at Northern Arizona University, Doctor of Education-Educational Leadership program, and seeking study participants for my research on first-generation Latinas who experience achieving academic success in predominantly White institutions through a sense of belonging.

I am seeking four participants for this study and will employ interview autoethnography methodology and qualitative research. Yes, tell your story! Are you a female first-generation student and college graduate? Were you raised in impoverished geographical locations, did you face many challenges when you wanted to attend college from family and friends and when you finally did attend was it a predominantly White institution? Did you have challenges acclimating to your new environment? Did you feel as if you belonged or did you struggle? Did you fail any of your studies in the beginning? Did you later find academic success through a sense of belonging and ultimately achieve academic success? Post-graduation now that you work for a higher educational institution do you feel the college education and overcoming opposition has been worth it? Do you feel you have established a better quality of life on behalf of yourself as a woman of color and behalf of your family?

Data collection will take place during Fall 2023 after IRB approval. There will be beginning, midpoint and conclusion a total of 12 interviews combined among the four participants. Each interview will take about 60 minutes. I would ask you a series of questions to prompt responses regarding the following topics and you will be recorded using Otter recording software. Discussions will take place between the interviewer and interviewee regarding background of participants, cultural upbringing, how they decided to attend college and their own experience of academic engagement, success, challenges and/or overcoming situations, failures or found the transition seamless and easily acquired degree attainment. Post graduation, specific chosen career paths working for higher education, roles they currently perform today and how they inspire other women of color and immediate future goals involving the support and representation of FGLs.

Kindly reply directly to this email and indicate whether you have an interest, and the availability, to participate in my dissertation research. You can reach me directly on my mobile number at 623.707.7723 or email mbc58@nau.edu.

Thank you in advance for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Maile Canlas
Doctoral Student
Department of Educational Leadership | College of Education

Northern Arizona University
mbc58@nau.edu | (623) 707-7723

Appendix B

Phone Screening Questionnaire for Prospective Participants

Candidates interested in participating in the study will receive a preliminary phone call from the researcher. The purpose of this call is to (a) provide a background and the intent behind the study, (b) provide an opportunity for the researcher and pre-qualify the candidate to determine they meet all the criteria for the study, and (c) provide the candidate an opportunity to ask additional questions before confirming their participation. This preliminary phone call should last approximately 15–20 minutes.

1. Full name
2. Degrees completed, school attended, and job title
3. Do you identify as first-generation Latina?
4. Describe your experience growing up in your neighborhood, experience in college, assimilation, support resources experienced or not and finally, opposition from family?
5. In this study, I seek to learn about the ways for FGLs and academic success, establishing a sense of belonging to succeed, and eventually graduate, achieve upward mobility and have a successful career at the institution.
6. You have the option of using a pseudonym to retain privacy as it relates to your participation in this study.
    a. Would you like to use a pseudonym for your identity and your employer/ institution for the purpose of this study
    b. Alternatively, you may opt to have your full name, job title, and employer/ institutional affiliation revealed and identified because of this study. *You may inform me at any time that you wish to use a pseudonym. You may also withdraw your participation from this study at any time, at which point all data and interview notes/recordings/artifacts will be rescinded from the study and destroyed.*
7. Are you interested in participating in this study?
8. What questions or concerns do you have for me at this time?

Thank you for your time,

Maile Canlas

Appendix C

Participant Interview Questions

Experience

The purpose of this study is to understand first-generation Latina, raised in an oppressed geographical location, faced many challenges attending college yet yearned for upward mobility. Once attending PWI, stories how they may have failed, yet through a sense of belonging academically thrived. In addition, fast forward work for an institution in higher education identified as a predominantly White institution and influences marginalized populations and partakes in the cultivation of a sense of belonging for future marginalized populations.

- What was your geographical upbringing like? Location? Economic levels?
- Please describe your experience when you began college on PWI.
- What was your first year of attendance like?
- How long did it take you to navigate college, assimilate? Any doubts you'd finish?
- While attending PWI did you find a sense of belonging easily or did you rely on resources for support? Or if you transition was seamless tell me more about that
- Do you feel what your academic success now elicits or inspires the next generation of underrepresented students?

Identity

- Can you describe/locate your Latino Heritage? Ancestry? Second languages?
- How did you and/or your family emigrate to the U.S.
- What formative memories stand out to you when thinking about college growing up? Was it encouraged? Discussed?
- What does your Latino ethnicity identity mean to you?
- How do you remain connected to your Latino identity?
- What activities do you engage in to replenish your connection with your Latino identity?

Significance of Experiences

- Can you tell me how transformative experiences in your life (through childhood/or educational experiences) shaped or informed your views today towards academic success and the next generation of FGLs?
- What are some challenges you face as a woman of color?
- Please describe your professional or life goals in the educational institution.

Preventative Services and Counseling Offerings

Paradise Valley Community College Counseling Services
Counseling | Paradise Valley Community College

Arizona State University Counseling and Consultants
https://cfo.asu.edu/counseling-consultations

Northern Arizona University Counseling Services
https://in.nau.edu/campus-health-services/counseling-services-our-staff/

Appendix D

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

First Generation Latinas, Sense of Belonging and Academic Success Attending PWIs

J. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study is to understand first-generation Latina, reared within suppressed geographical location, faced challenges attending PWI and transitioning within the dominant culture, maintained attendance and reached degree attainment for upward mobility. Once stories of success or failures through a sense of belonging or academically thrived immediately. Fast forward, work for an institution in higher education identified as a predominantly White institution and influence marginalized populations and partake in the cultivation of a sense of belonging for women of color around them.

The researcher, Maile Canlas, is a doctoral student at Northern Arizona University conducting research for a Doctor in Education.

1. How do you identify as a first–generation Latina?
2. How was the college you attended, where was the college located?
3. How did you find academic success on college campuses?
4. Did you have a network within your community?
5. Post-graduation how has your quality of life been?

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

1. You will be interviewed 60 minutes at a time with a beginning, mid-point and ending.
2. Approximately 4 months (June-August 2023).
3. Interviews will take place with a preference for in-person format and will take place at a time and (quiet) location most convenient for you AND WILL BE RECORDED.
4. Accommodations to conduct interviews via Zoom will be available. Zoom interviews WILL BE RECORDED.
5. The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers via email.
6. All interviews will be recorded via digital media and transcribed. You will be provided a chance to review transcriptions or recordings for accuracy prior to the researcher's submission of the dissertation.

C. RISKS

There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of interview questions regarding your relationship to others or your work: you may answer only those questions you choose to answer and can stop participation in the research at any time.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is kept as the utmost importance however, for your protection pseudonyms will be used in lieu of your professional name.

E. DIRECT BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefits to participants in this study.

F. COSTS
The only cost associated with participation of this study would include the cost of transportation to interview meeting times of your choosing.

G. COMPENSATION
As part of your voluntary participation, the researcher will pay for meals, snacks, or drinks at the time of interviews, as appropriate.

If the meeting place requires payment of parking fees, the researcher will compensate the participant for those fees based on location and interview duration.

H. ALTERNATIVES
The alternative is not to participate in this research study.

J. QUESTIONS
You have spoken with Maile Canlas about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at XXXXXX@nau.edu or phone, (XXX-XXX-XXXX). You may also contact the researcher's dissertation committee chair: TBD

J. CONSENT
You agree that you meet the criteria listed in Section A of this consent form. You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at Northern Arizona University.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Research Participant

Signature _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator/Researcher

Appendix E

Testimony Prompt

The purpose of this study is to reflect on everything we have learned in life post degree and overall achievements. Our lives all change through progress, it is significant to stop and recognize our wins, identify the place we are at in life, the goals we have achieved and future ambitions. We all have challenges however, through the eyes of the story teller through a written letter to their younger selves is powerful. This is the time to tell your younger self things you wish you knew and although you did not, success is inevitable.

Please submit your letters via email in (.doc or .docx) format to EMAIL Remember, this may ring true to the interview questions and answers, write from your heart.

There is not a minimum or maximum requirement in length, the goal is to write with sincerity and you reflect on your educational journeys and ambitions for your future self.

Write this letter as if you are able to tell your younger self anything to help prepare you to succeed for your educational journey or while achieving your goals. Please have this turned in post interview within ten days so the information is still fresh in your mind.

Thanks M~

Appendix F

Ms. Bachelor's Letter to Self

July 27th, 2023 @2:50p

Dear Bachelor's,

Ever since you can remember, our parents have reminded us of the importance of education and college. The conversation of college was big in our household, and it still is after so many years. You are entering your freshman year of Highschool and your stress is at an all high. There is plethora of emotions that you are feeling and many thoughts running through your head. One of them being the outlook of your future.

If you've ever wondered what your future looks like, here it is. The weariness of stress and having many recurring thoughts is a constant thing while you are trying to figure out your future. The idea of attending college is important to you, but we find ourselves struggling in grasping the understanding of how everything works. We struggle to understand the difference between college and university and the order of degrees. We seek answers from Mamá and Papá but they are as confused as we are. You see, Latin American higher education is quite different from American higher education. And even if they were remotely similar, we would still find each other clueless because Mamá and Papá did not have the opportunity to attend college…or even finish high school for that matter. You will quickly realize in your junior year that you are a first-generation student. Now, that term alone will be confusing at first, however, it perfectly describes us and it will go on to become a representation of us. Beyond having difficulties understanding American higher education, we struggle to comprehend where to begin.

Fortunately, we will be given an opportunity of a lifetime. We will become a candidate and recipient for Monument Valley Community College's ACE program. There is excitement all

around as this became a ticket to success. Our time in the ACE program is quite special as there will be many first-generation college students who we will connect with. In addition, we see students who look like us and speak our language. However, between the good there will be moments of frustration and isolation. We notice that it is difficult to make connections to your college as you see little representation apart from your peers. At home, there are times where Mamá and Papá do not understand why we are always busy doing homework and question why we have not spent time with our family. We will experience frustration with learning how to balance *familismo*, work, high school, and college. In the end, we will go on to complete 24 college credits as a high school senior, have created a support system at the college, and have found some clarity with our journey. We decided to continue our education at PVCC. We feel prepared all thanks to the support of the ACE program. However, our journey as a First-Generation Latina in a predominantly White institution came with barriers and mixed feelings.

We continue to notice the lack of representation in and outside of the classroom, especially in our Honors program. And when we take courses that thrive in representation, we feel like we belong and are represented. Considering the statistics of Latinos in higher education, having the ability to experience a genuine connection whether it's cultural, language-based, or all of the above, it creates a sense of belonging. A sense that we are seen for who we are and not just solely a minority in a sea of a majority. We try to make connections and friendships in college but it becomes difficult. We notice that not many of our peers have the desire to make connections. And even if we have similarities to some of our peers, there is still difficulty. We will join a Hispanic Student Association club but there is no activity as there will be a lack of students interested. We will find that navigating the professional world is also a challenge. We will be fortunate to have the opportunity to become a student worker working in the Student

Outreach and Recruitment Office where we have the opportunity to work with a team of powerful Latinas/os. However, we will also begin feeling frustration and isolation because we will see that there is also a lack of initiative and lack of representation at the professional level.

We will find that some of our initiatives to increase and help our community will not receive full support. This is upsetting because we see that there is a great need for it and in turn it creates an ache in our heart as it opens our eyes of the work that must be done for change and innovation to happen. At last, the time as a full-time student will come to an emotional end as we prepare for graduation. From the start to the ending of my community college experience, many opportunities flourished amongst the not so good things. We build our self-branding as a first-generation Latina working in the professional world, we begin our healing journey as the oldest first-generation daughter navigating higher education, and we embark the start of our new journey at Flagstone University. We graduate with our Associate in Arts with Honors from PVCC in 2021. It will be a bittersweet moment as we reflect on the many barriers we faced and overcame.

Curious to know where we are at right now? Our unique story and the experiences we faced helped us pursue a professional board approved job at PVCC. Who would've thought that the first generation latino student who was lost in this big world, would find her space to bring change and grow? We are a Student Services Specialist (Est. Salary: $41,700). We are currently enrolled in Flagstone University 's Bachelors in Interdisciplinary Studies in Applied Human Behavior program and preparing to pursue a Masters in School Counseling with Flagstone University. Our goal in five years is to be working on our Masters in School Counseling and Interning at a local public school. It will be a journey with barriers; however, we have learned that we need to continue to be resilient and rise above what continues to bring us down. From the

words of Frida Kahlo, “Echame tierra y veras como floresco." (Throw dirt at me and watch how I flourish.). That is and will continue to be us. We will flourish beyond the disparities and become a strong and vibrant flower amongst the majority. With love..

Appendix G

Ms. Master's Letter to Self

August 02, 2023 @10:12a

Dear M,

I want to express how proud I am of you and your accomplishments. I remember the little girl with dreams and goals who moved to a new country, learned a new language, and adapted to a new culture. You have come so far since then, and I want to remind you of the wise words your dad once told you. America is a land of opportunities, but you must work hard to achieve your goals and dreams.

This letter is also a reflection on life and education. It is crucial to prioritize education, but it is equally important to take care of yourself. Enjoy life, be adventurous, travel, and meet new people. Remember that leadership is about people, and success comes from helping others. Life will have ups and downs, and it is essential to remain solid and committed. Mistakes will happen, but it is crucial to learn from them. Be mindful of the people you surround yourself with, as they can help or hinder you in achieving your dreams.

Remember not to be too hard on yourself. Receiving "no's" and "yeses" in job applications is common, but it is essential to keep trying and not give up. Courage and taking risks are crucial in manifesting what you want in life. You have done an excellent job of manifesting your education goals, completing your education with zero student loans, and becoming a homeowner at a young age. Always believe that everything happens for a reason and things will eventually work out. Keep up the fantastic work.

Appendix H

Ms. Associate's Letter to Self

August 02, 2023 @5:02p

Dear A,

I want to express how proud I am of you for your impressive accomplishments at only 21 years old. Your journey is just beginning, but you are already achieving the goals you once dreamt of. Since you were a child, you aspired to work in the medical field and help others. Today, you have been accepted into nursing school at the young age of 20, and you are currently in your second block. I know this has not been an easy path for you, but your hard work and dedication are paying off. Your late-night study sessions, tears, stress, and effort will be worth it in the end. Keep pushing yourself to the finish line, and remember that you are capable of achieving great things.

Mom, Dad, and your sisters are very proud of you and show you off as a nurse to the world. You get very shy about it, but at the same time, it fills your heart with lots of emotion and happiness. Not only are you doing this for yourself, but also for your parents and your siblings. Mom and Dad will be your biggest support system and best friends. They have helped you with your personal and educational journey.

You have finally found the friend group you needed growing up. You can rely on them for support and encouragement Moreover, you share an incredible connection with your colleagues and have been a source of support for them ever since you joined their team.

It's amazing how time flies! You graduated with an associate in arts in December 2021 and were accepted into nursing school in June 2022. You're currently studying at Flagstone University and will be graduating in December 2024. Becoming a nurse is so close! Once you've

achieved that, you plan on going back to school for a master's degree so you can teach future nursing students. You will continue to strive until you achieve the RN BSN designation next to your name. Soon to be Ms. Associates, RN-BSN

Appendix I

Ms. Doctorate's Letter to Self

August 01, 2023 @1:15p

Dear D,

You begin your career in higher education when you are enrolled at Pima Community College. There you kind of follow your best friend, enrolling in whatever she did because she really didn't know or understand what she needed to do to complete an Associate's degree. So your journey began at Pima.

You have uncertainties about your career path however, through a conversation with an advisor, a seed is planted, conversations of communication degree and attending university you think right away that it wasn't a path for you because you knew your family could not afford to send there but as destiny would have it, you go to Flagstone University

During this time, you marry and move off to Flagstaff to follow your husband's career. Little did you know it was for your education and career too! You can continue your education, work your way through the university by being a student employee first then taking every opportunity or extra hours to extra money. All for the efforts to fund your education. You began to feel a sense of belonging with your fellow employees and supervisors, and to your surprise they took an interest in you. This is the first time in your entire life, at NAU individuals invested in you.

Throughout the course of your career, you begin ask how do you get a career at NAU? And once you graduate you get your first job working on campus in the advisement center, dreams you never though imaginable, the spark was ignited. You take your own experience and you share the same passion with your students. You work the statewide programs and you have

other opportunities to interface with other departments. Unbeknownst to you, became an advisor, recruiter and scheduler! There you are in the community you grew up in. All just seemed rather natural and organic. You can continue thriving in your career throughout the 90s.

You evolve throughout the university system, get your master's degree on campus, take a class here and there and grow into a career path working within the community, school districts and the government, giving back to who you truly love. Really love looking at degree progress to make sure when students complete their degree through Flagstone University they will get into the workforce and get a job.

You eventually get your doctorate degree, and after 25 years working for the university, you are appointed Regional Director January 2023. Quite the journey for a little girl who started in Desert Town Puma community college! You are now at the tail end of your career. Continue to be very grateful because you reach goals and you continue to work in the community, in particular Puma and give back to the community and under-represented populations, you are an overcomer!

Appendix J

Researcher/Participant Letter to Self

August 03, 2023 @8:30a

Dear C,

I am here to say you will make the journey of life and education further along than you ever thought! You will thrive, overcome and be victorious in your immediate family dynamics, professional career and education. As a matter of fact, during the year 2023 you will reach your lifelong dream to teach at the community college beginning in July, your birthday month and achieve your doctorate degree!

However, to reach your educational goals, you will experience pushback at every angle, many will celebrate with you however, not many will congratulate or acknowledge your accomplishments. When you do not hear "congratulations," do not take it to heart. With the exception of your husband and youngest Son and a few members of the family, you will have all the support you need. The purpose of the letter is to let you know you will be tried, tested, and tempted to quit, and I'm here to tell you to stay in the good fight of faith (*King James Version*, 2009, Timothy 6:12).

You will experience nervous bouts, anxiety attacks, and fear throughout your educational journey; yet, you overcome with your higher power and special influencers in your life. You will be reminded you do not belong; told your goals are unattainable or unreachable. However, you work through it all, you learn early how to cry out to the one who hears and truly saves. You are humbled in the process, and you learn to thrive, love unconditionally and achieve dreams you never thought possible.

The longing in you began when you were just 6 years old. Your parents are on the verge of a divorce and fear abounds. On Christmas morning, while driving in the car crying, you look out the backseat window, and you see children playing with their brand-new bicycles and roller skates-gifts they got from their loving parents. At that moment you realize your life's goal, safety, security and financial blessings. I'm here to tell you achieve it however, not without turbulent times, remember behind every legacy there is great opposition.

You learn early the key to success is higher education; you achieve goals beyond your wildest dreams and imagination. You break barriers within the Latino culture and expectations, achieve mile makers, and find your purpose. Right before your eyes, you see generational curses broken, poverty shattered, not just for you and your children however, children's children (*New King James*, 2012, Deuteronomy 7-9). You and your family inherit the promises of life and life more abundantly, prosperity, hope, joy, and peace and the promise of long-life not just in this one but the next.

Many times, you will wonder if it is all worth your time, love, support, prayers, and fasting. The continuous pull to reach back to others, your children who may or may not reciprocate the sentiments or your own grandchildren who may or may not be allowed to know you. Eventually, they will all come home, the constant spiritual investment in your family is worth the fight! Love is war. Your faith moves mountains, continue to refill your cup with hope, love and give back to the community, this is *your* gift, love covers all!

Yes, you become a first-generation graduate and, in your bloodline, you are the first to ever achieve an associate, two bachelors, two masters, and a doctorate degree. To think you thought you could only get an associate degree because you thought you were not smart enough. Scars stemmed from the hurtful words you once heard as a child however, you will reach divine

amnesia and those memories are long gone. You push through the multilevels of abuse throughout your childhood and adolescence years, you become rebellious however, it is your determination for change that acts as the catalyst in pursuit of higher education. You experience naysayers early on who said you could not achieve the unthinkable. You lose your first husband due to Latino expectations however, you long for upward mobility and you know education is key. You face challenges attending a PWI as a divorced mother of three children on welfare and food stamps, you experience prejudices and injustices and you receive push back; however, you keep the faith and finish the race (*New International Version*, 2018, 2 Timothy 4:7).

One remarkable memory that pre-set your destiny to get your doctorate degree early on took place in your undergraduate program. You tell you Latino professor who highly influenced, you want to teach for the community college, like him! He says, "Oh yeah? Well, you need your doctorate degree and only 1% Latinos get their doctorate degree, not including Latinas!" The conversation puts a fire in your belly and a determination you never forget. I'm here to tell you do it! Post doctorates, career prospects expand, doors open and you are offered opportunities you never thought possible! You will achieve the dream to work remote as full-time faculty, travel the world as a digital nomad. Stay in the fight. Love is war!

Opposition to your dreams is the catalyst to dream bigger, when you look around the classrooms and not find the familiar brown faces, who cares! To you my younger beautiful self, I say, educate *them* by continuing your pursuit in higher education. Your ability to compartmentalize and turn your negative feelings into the positive energy to thrive is a gift! One friend in particular will even tell you, "You've forgotten where you come from!" Stay in the good fight of faith. Life has a way of moving on with or without you and time is of the essence, one of the precious commodities you never get back. Whatever the task, the stress, the challenge

you are facing within your family dynamics, education or career, continue to thrive give and back to the Latino community. Work, life, balance is key, college attendance, church membership and servitude, you are a successful wife, mother, sister, grandma, spiritual mother, and most importantly Latino Educational Leader-inspire others!

Remember to lean on your prayers, "*Lord, I want to be how you see me, live, give, love and hope as you ordain me to be*." (*New International Version*, 2018, Ephesians 1:17-18). Continue to claim all his seven thousand promises because you will inherit the promises, hold onto his word that is your strength! Your ability to fight like a warrior and see individuals through the eyes of the Lord is a gift. You may be on 4 foot 1 inches in stature; however, you are a 10-foot spiritual giant! The relationships will manifest in all areas, be patient and understanding. Continue to cultivate the fire on the family mantle, beside if you don't, who will? Ask yourself seriously, who will? Do what you always longed for and leave this generation better than how you found it—I dare you to!

You will reach accolades never thought possible. You will find a husband who loves and trusts you and the feelings will be mutual. One who believes and wakes you up every morning with the best coffee in the whole wide world; truly, to his credit, you become an early bird! Your family life will be rich not just with monetary value, but with love especially your youngest child you bare at the age of 40 while you are finishing your second bachelor's degree! Remember who you work for (*New International Version*, 2018, Colossians 3:23) rise to the occasion, continue to show up. This is how you will effectively lead others and trust me; they will take notice and follow. If leaders only lead when life is easy, then they're really not leaders are they? Lead all the time even when times get tough, do not seek sides, seek peace.

Post celebrate freedom you complete the third cycle with your spiritual family. You will gain freedom from the false fears that have ruled over you for most of your life. Stay the course, you will learn not everyone will like but they will *respect* you. You re-establish your self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence, the same characteristics that were robbed from you. Life has definitely taught you a few lessons, you will learn to set healthy boundaries for yourself and others, and when you lose your older brother, you will make it out of that tragedy with the word of God given to you by the holy spirit himself, (*New King James*, 2012, 2 Corinthians 7:10). As the catalyst of healthy relationships, your children and your children's children will have a great start right out the gate. When you leave this earth, the generation you were born into will be changed forever and opposition will hate you for this! You and your family get to travel the world, you will take your children on vacations and see things you'd never thought possible! You are equipped with the boldness and courage necessary to thrive.

Finally, you are not as crazy as you think. Yes, you have crazy bouts; however, deep calls unto deep. Your husband and son will embrace your flaws and all and show you what true "unconditional love" really is. The same love you've longed for since that hazy Christmas morning, you finally find joy and that's why you love, Love, LOVE CHRISTMAS! Your lips are anointed and you will learn triumphantly to speak with power and the ability to lead and encourage others, take your influence seriously. Continue to pursue your heart's desires, inspire women of color and help them reach their educational goals, you will gain their trust on scalable levels. Trust your instincts, listen quietly to the Lord, reach the unreachable, achieve the impossible. Continue to influence and inspire those around you and fight the good fight of faith. Love is war. Adelante'!

In Love and in Him, Dr. Canlas

IRB Informed Consent Stamp Approval

Project Number: 2052283-2
Approval Date: June 21, 2023
This stamp must be on all consenting documents

Appendix D

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

First Generation Latinas, Sense of Belonging and Academic Success Attending PWIs

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of the process is to further identify background of the participants, demographic and experience as first-generation Latina, (b) provide an opportunity for the researcher to pre-qualify the candidate and determine they meet all the criteria's of the study such as attendance of predominantly white intuition and (c) provide the candidate an opportunity to ask additional questions before confirming their commitment to the study.

The preliminary phone call should last approximately 15–20 minutes and will take place over the phone should the candidate fit the criteria an email will be sent with the following. All data gathered to this point will not be used for any research purposes. Once the recruitment is complete, all data gathered after the consideration will be deleted from the encrypted folder protected with a digital password.

The researcher, Maile Canlas, is a doctoral student at Northern Arizona University conducting research for a Doctor in Education.

Methodology During the phone interview: According to Creswell (2003), "Researchers are also sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process. They respect individual differences rather than the traditional aggregation of categories such as men and women, Hispanics or African American" (p. 34). As a researcher and participant, it is vital that questions, conversations, and general information that does not disclose the purpose of the study to avoid biased conversations leaning towards the study as opposed to truthful data and allowing software programs to analyze the data. As a researcher, I will be sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process.

Examples of questions are the following:

How do you identify as a first–generation Latina?

1. How was the college you attended, where was the college located?
2. How did you find academic success on college campuses?
3. Did you have a network within your community?
4. Post-graduation how has your quality of life been? Career and family wise?
5. Do you feel you encourage other first-generation Latinas at your place of work?

B. PROCEDURES

Post questions and phone screening, if participants agree in the research study, the following will occur:

1. Interviews will take place tentatively June 2023 until July 2023. The two-part vetting process will begin with phone screenings. Post phone screening, recruitment emails sent out with research project introductions. All data during this process will be saved to the

NAU Google Drive with encryption and duo verification not shared with anyone. Any information obtained will be protected with a passwords however, not used for research purposes during the recruitment process and all participants will be over the age of eighteen and will agree to being audio recorded with written statement and disclaimer acknowledging they are being recorded.

2. Upon phone screening completion, should they choose to continue a consent form will be sent. In addition to introductions of the research project and details, tentative timelines and the required time participant will need for the interviews.

Once all consent forms are signed and processed by both researcher and participant a copy will be provided. The researcher's copy will upload onto the NAU Google Drive encrypted and password protected. The interviews timelines will reflect 60 minutes for each meeting for 4 individuals which will result in 12 hours total for interviews to take place. The interviews will be scheduled with our first meeting immediately after locating participants and fits both our schedules. Explain this will be a volunteer opportunity without pay. All corresponding emails will be housed within the NAU Google Drive and encrypted secured drive with password protection. Any information gathered will not be used in the study.

3. At the end of our first meeting, we will schedule our second meeting we both agree to approximately two weeks post initial meeting this will be termed as the mid-point meeting and will represent 60 minutes. Additionally, for the third and final meeting (if necessary) approximately two weeks later, we will conclude the three-part appointments again for 60 minutes each combining a total of 180 minutes with all four of the participants a total of 720 minutes of gathered data.
4. Interviews will take place with a preference for in-person format or virtual appointment and will take place at a time where the location is quiet and the location is convenient either in their workplace office that has privacy and doors full close or within their home. I will reflect the same environment to ensure confidentiality.
5. The content of the meetings WILL BE RECORDED with Otter software, the data will be stored on the NAU Google Drive and only accessible via DUO logins that currently has encryptions for data/information protection on behalf of the participants.
6. Accommodations to conduct interviews via Zoom will be available. Zoom interviews WILL BE RECORDED with the Otter software, downloaded to the NAU Google Drive and only accessible through encrypted DUO password.
7. Post interviews, the researcher may contact you later to clarify any questions within your interview or follow-up statements necessary to thoroughly understand the interviewees experience.
8. The email process will have attachments, the attached will be password protected via encryption from the NAU Google Drive and only shared with the participant, the encryption, retrieval access will only be assigned by the researcher.
9. All interviews will be recorded via Otter software and transcribed via download and saved to NAU Google Drive with encryption and password protection.
10. You will be provided a chance to review transcriptions or recordings for accuracy prior to the researcher's submission of the dissertation. Recordings will be exported via .pdf and accessible via the NAU Google Drive with encrypt and password required to retrieve the data.

C. RISKS
There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of interview questions regarding your relationship to others or your work: you may answer only those questions you choose to answer and can stop participation in the research at any time.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY
Confidentiality is kept as the utmost importance however, for your protection pseudonyms will be used in lieu of your professional name. Information that may identify you may be used for future research or shared with another research studies with additional consent, collected data will remain within the confidentiality components.

E. DIRECT BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefits to participants in this study.

F. COSTS
The only cost associated with participation of this study would include the cost of transportation to interview meeting times of your and the use of your time.

G. COMPENSATION
As part of your voluntary participation, the researcher will pay for meals, snacks, or drinks at the time of interviews, as appropriate.

If the meeting place requires payment of parking fees, the researcher will compensate the participant for those fees based on location and interview duration.

H. ALTERNATIVES
The alternative is not to participate in this research study.

J. QUESTIONS
You have spoken with Maile Canlas about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at [redacted] or phone, ([redacted]). You may also contact the researcher's dissertation committee chair: Rose Ylimaki, ([redacted]) In addition to NAU IRB contact information regarding questions of your rights as research participant. NAU IRB Link: HRPP - Northern Arizona University Human Research Protection Program (IRB) (928-523-9551)

J. CONSENT
Through consenting, you will agree you are at least 18 years of age and we will have a recorded agreement on file of your full participation of this study. For example, I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study and be audio-recorded. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
You will also have a copy of this consent form to keep.
. Preventative Services and Counseling Offerings Paradise Valley Community College Counseling Services Counseling | Paradise Valley Community College Arizona State University Counseling and Consultants https://cfo.asu.edu/counseling-consultations Northern Arizona University

Counseling Services https://in.nau.edu/campus-health-services/counseling-services-our-staff/
Immediate follow-up will take place by principal investigator.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at Northern Arizona University.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Research Participant

Signature _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator/Researcher

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board for the
Human Research Protection Program

525 S Beaver St
PO Box: 4062
Flagstaff AZ 86011
928-523-9551
https://www.nau.edu/IRB

To:	Maile Canlas, AA, BA, BA, MLSt, MAIS
From:	NAU IRB Office
Approval Date:	June 21, 2023
Project:	FIRST–GENERATION LATINAS ACHIEVING ACADEMIC SUCCESS WITHIN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS THROUGH A SENSE OF BELONGING
Project Number:	2052283-2
Submission:	Revision
Action:	APPROVED
Project Risk Level:	MINIMAL RISK
Approval Expiration Date:	June 1, 2028
Next Report Date:	
Review Category/ies:	**The project is not federally funded or supported and has been deemed to be no more than minimal risk.**

This project has been reviewed and approved by an IRB Chair or designee.

- Northern Arizona University maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #00000357).
- All research procedures should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the guidance.
- The Principal Investigator should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that affect the protocol and report any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others. Please refer to Guidance Investigators Responsibility after IRB Approval, Reporting Local Information and Minimal Risk or Exempt Research.
- All documents referenced in this submission have been reviewed and approved. Documents are filed with the HRPP Office within IRBNet. If subjects will be consented, the approved consent(s) are available within IRBNet upon approval notification from the HRPP Office.

Important

The principal investigator for this study is responsible for obtaining all necessary approvals before commencing research. Please be sure that you have satisfied applicable external and University requirements, for example (but not limited to) data repositories, listserv permission, records request, data use agreement, conducting University surveys, data security, international, conflicts of interest, biological safety, radiation safety, HIPAA, FERPA, FDA, sponsor approval, clinicaltrials.gov, tribal consultation, or school approval. IRB approval does not convey approval to commence research in the event that other requirements have not been satisfied.