¡Sí Se Puede!: Understanding The Experiences Of Latina Students During Their Doctoral Journey At A Hispanic-Serving Institution

Flor del Rocio Acevedo
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¡SÍ SE PUEDE!: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA STUDENTS DURING THEIR DOCTORAL JOURNEY AT A HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION

ROCÍO ACEVEDO-CARRANZA

DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN TEACHING, LEARNING, AND CULTURE

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Dean of the Graduate School
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by

Rocio Acevedo-Carranza, M.F.A.

2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mami, una gran guerrera; to all those women who have paved the path for intellectual, social, and spiritual change; and to all those individuals who never give up despite all the challenges, biases, obstacles, and injustices in the world. Keep pursuing your own truths!
“Every moment is an organizing opportunity,

every person a potential activist,

every minute a chance to change the world.” Dolores Huerta
¡SÍ SE PUEDE!: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA

STUDENTS DURING THEIR DOCTORAL JOURNEY

AT A HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION

Submitted

by

ROCÍO ACEVEDO-CARRANZA, M.F.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
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of the Requirements
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DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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“The world is filled with the glory of God, but we have to experience the divine in our souls before we can find it in our surroundings.” Rudolph Steiner

This dissertation is a clear example that it takes a village for people to accomplish great things. There were wonderful individuals who supported me during my doctoral journey. First and foremost, I want to thank all the women who participated in this study. I am truly honored that you gave me the opportunity to hear and share your story. You are a source of inspiration to me and a powerful testimonio of ¡Sí Se Puede!

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**Sunset at Saint Clair**

As I witness with devotion the soothing waters of Lake Saint Clair, I dare to bury the fugitive demons of my mind…the accumulated ashes of my fears…the roots of all my nightmares…! As if I was born again, I sense a NEW version of me reflected on the lake while a mystical lullaby of swaying waves give confession: The NEW version of ME is no longer afraid of YOU in my reflection.
And I’m no longer afraid because we are in this journey together!

I feel a NEW me with an open heart to make communion with the Universe; with God; with Mother Nature! With loving-kindness, the dazzling sunlight caresses every single cell inside my anthropomorphic, yet ephemeral body, and my relentless heartbeat makes me realize that I’m not dreaming; that the NEW version of me is real, alive! I’m no longer a slave because my inherited pain uncovers my deepest truths; my obstinate ignorance; my lack of faith in all that is Unknown to the eyes of humanity.

With immense gratitude, I vow to the Sun that blares my sight to whisper that you just arrived to take a walk with me under an angelic sky that opens its majestic wings. Gently, you appear; ethereal before my humbled eyes; looking at me with infinite compassion, accompanied by the celestial chants of our Ancestors. And you give me no choice but to cry…my tears purify my Soul!

And I’m no longer afraid because we are in this journey together!

As we promenade, you remain muted. Silence is your language! We’re side by side, holding hands, captivated by the perpetual magnificence of Life; and you listen to my most intimate litanies with no judgement. With reverence, we eyewitness the splendor of a purple halo coloring the heaven: We become Oneness!

And I’m no longer afraid because we are in this journey together!

I’m not scared because you’re holding my hand. My dreams of the Divine!
I’m not fearful for leaving you behind, for not staying close by because I see that you’re doing fine; that you have evolved into a better being. Now, we are a reflection of each other; a striking light within an altered time and space.

And the most amazing thing is that we are in this journey together!

We become accomplices of the same reality; a surreal dream that reason will never be able to explain. Why did I imprison my feelings for so long? Why did I allow my mind to control the essence of my existence?

As the vulnerable me surrenders to the magic of the scene, we make peace to each other; we coexist without remorse. I’m no longer at the clemency of a fake illusion! My resistance has transcended…!

With innocence and awe, I elevate my conscience to higher realms to savor the Sublime. I’m elated that we are reunited to find Redemption and Glory! Forgiveness and Reconciliation! Imperceptibly, we surrender to the Mystery of Death and envision ourselves conquering our furtive loneliness and sorrow…
Here we are, treasuring this endless moment, reunited by a luminous horizon that conduces to the Sacred Portal of Eternity!

Dear Mother:

What an idyllic day to meet at Lake Saint Clair! Know that I will visit you as often as I can to be with you; to hold your hand as we walk; to kiss your forehead before we say good-bye; to tell you that I LOVE YOU with all my heart!
ABSTRACT

The existing body of literature on Latinas has mostly been focused on the undergraduate student experience (Hernandez, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1996; Kena et al., 2016; Tinto & Goodsell, 1994; Torres, 2004). Additionally, despite the increasing participation of women in graduate education since the 1980s (Walker et al., 2008), Latinas have been and continue to be underrepresented in doctoral programs and the professorate (Myers, 2016). Despite recent increases in enrollment, Latinas attained just 8.8 percent of the doctoral degrees awarded from 2018-2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). As Latinas are projected to account for a third of all women in the United States by the year 2060 (Gándara, 2015), it is crucial to understand their experiences in doctoral programs and how their presence in higher education can disrupt the continuous dissemination of dominant culture and knowledge that reinforces the inequalities and systemic barriers in academia.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Latina doctoral students in STEM and non-STEM disciplines at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) on the US-Mexico border. Through the use of Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) as the conceptual framework, combined with Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 1998), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and testimonios, (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Pérez Huber, 2009) the research explored the ways in which the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and race, amongst other salient identities, shape Latina women’s doctoral experiences and the support systems and coping strategies these women utilized during their doctoral study. The findings illustrate how a lack of cultural sensitivity in doctoral programs resulted in various challenges, including micro-aggressions, racism, and other biased behavior, compounded by poor mentorship, stress in balancing academia and home
culture, imposter syndrome, and heartbreak. Nevertheless, through the participants’ own agency (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) and various support systems, such as family, peers, faculty advisors, and mentors, the participants were able to navigate academia and persist through their programs. They used the experiential knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002) they gained as doctoral students to strengthen their voices, using their language and culture to resist and decentralize the normative hegemonic ideologies and practices that have been and continue to be detrimental to Women of Color and other minoritized groups. Ultimately, this study showcased the lived experiences of 14 Latina doctoral students from their own perspectives to inform future research, institutional practice and policy.
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CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” Eleanor Roosevelt

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

The first doctoral degrees were granted in theology (Th.D.), Law (J.D.), and medicine (M.D.) in the twelfth century in Paris, France. Several centuries later, in the early nineteenth century, most college graduates chose to study in Europe, particularly in Germany; as consequence, an estimate of 10,000 Americans earned German degrees (Walker et al., 2009) and the first doctorate of philosophy was conferred at Berlin University (Maddox, 2017, as cited in Cox et al., 2011). In 1861, Yale University awarded the first doctoral degrees in the United States, soon followed by the establishment of Johns Hopkins University in 1876 (Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Millett & Nettles, 2006). The degrees were created with the intention to provide an opportunity for students to become experts or leaders in their specific fields of study (Golde & Walker, 2006). As a result, during the early 1900s, academic departments established positions in universities, along with professional associations, and peer-reviewed journals, which indicated the forthcoming presence of a research infrastructure that increasingly promoted doctoral study. In particular, the German research university model significantly influenced the history of U.S. graduate education, which highlighted two specific characteristics: The emphasis on scientific inquiry and the expectation that faculty members would engage in research (Walker et al., 2009).

In addition, the opening of Johns Hopkins University, a university exclusively dedicated to graduate education, marked the inception of U.S. graduate education with evident influence of the traditional German model. The focus at Johns Hopkins University comprised PhD degrees in sciences and arts, including financial aid assistance through the use of fellowships given to
White men in their 20s (Walker et al., 2009). Interestingly, before 1950, most graduate students were White males in their mid-to late 20s and there was a very limited participation of women, American minority students, and foreign students (Ullman et al., 2020).

In the beginning of the 1950s, the United States became an important place for scholarship and advanced education, attracting scholars and students from around the world to obtain advanced degrees and to pursue their intellectual endeavors mostly in the sciences, engineering, and other fields related with the development of American industry and new businesses (LaPidus, 2001). One of the main reasons that U.S. universities attracted students from across the globe was the significant investment the federal government made in them. Along with advancements in science and technology that began during World War II, congressional support to establish and fund agencies such as the National Science Foundation, as well as graduate research programs (LaPidus, 2001), made the United States a desirable place for graduate study.

By the late 1950s, attending graduate school became a matter of not just pursuing a degree but also a good career decision as the rapid technological and scientific advances propelled an increasing demand in hiring people with a PhD. From 1950 to 2000, the American graduate education approach was not only prestigious, but it also served as model for many other countries. As a result, between 1960 and 1976, the number of U.S. institutions awarding doctoral degrees increased from 208 to 307 and the number of doctoral degrees conferred tripled to approximately 32,000 annually (LaPidus, 2001). During that time, the conversion of normal schools, or institutes of teacher education, into regional state universities shaped the continuous development of graduate school programs, many of which were concentrated in the field of education. In the 1970s, there was a dramatic increase in the participation of international
students and of women born in the United States, but a very slow one for American racial and ethnic minorities in general. By the beginning of the 1990s, the number of students studying for doctoral degrees held steady at between 32,000 and 34,000 per year (LaPidus, 2001). In addition, by the mid-1990s, American married women in their 30s became the typical part-time graduate student and this time was characterized by demographic changes in the country causing an increase in the number of White women and international students earning a doctorate (Syverson & Bagley, 1999).

Walker et al. (2009) designed an approach to understanding the history of doctoral education, involving five stages: 1) the establishment stage, a period from the 1880’s to the 1930s where the American model of doctoral education was recognized, which involved creating infrastructure to support doctoral study in the United States; 2) the expansion of doctoral education stage and the link to funded research; 3) the retrenchment stage, usually referred as the “new depression in higher education” due to federal funding decline in response to economic difficulties in the early 1970s, including the innovation due to the powerful voices of students who expressed their concerns about the relevance of what they were studying. As a result, student dissent contributed the creation of new fields of study, including gender studies and ethnic studies; 4) the diversification and fragmentation stage, which happened when the fields of study in doctoral study fragmented and diversified as new areas of study continued to emerge with new scientific inquiry emerging, including interdisciplinary efforts in research as graduate education came to the forefront in this country as the student population also diversified considerably in the 1980s and 1990s. It was during this time period that doctoral education opened fully to women. For instance, in the 1990s, 40% of women were awarded a doctorate and most international doctoral students came from China (Walker et al., 2009). These elements of
doctoral diversification provided crucial changes that influenced the impact of the fifth stage:

Waves of reform. Reform efforts originated dealing with the purpose and quality of doctoral education in order to achieve competence addressing new sociopolitical realities of the time. New approaches and structures were established to guide the future of doctoral study locally and nationally, such as the creation of the AAU, the National Board of Graduate Education, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), and especially the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which has contributed to the improvement of doctoral education over the last century (Walker et al., 2009).

As a result of the fast and extensive expansion of higher education, there has been a large increase in enrollment for doctoral studies since the 1980s. In 2008, 43,000 people were conferred a doctoral degree in the United States, as efforts to improve doctoral education were imminent through foundations like the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and several scholarly texts such as In Pursuit of the PhD (1992) (Walker et al., 2009). Most notably, women have entered graduate school with resiliency and determination regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, social, and linguistic traits (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). This is a strong reason for Latinas, and women in general, to continue gaining and sustaining a dignified place in higher education and in society.

**MAJOR TRENDS IN DOCTORAL STUDENT ATTRITION**

In 2007, over 1.5 million students were enrolled in masters and doctoral degrees in the U.S. universities; nevertheless, doctoral education is thriving with high rates of student attrition. Inadequate training for teaching and research, excessive workload, and time to degree, and limited academic job opportunities in some fields as well as funding difficulties are the main issues in doctoral education in the 21st century (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). These critical issues
have produced numerous studies that seek to better understand the processes, main purposes, and outcomes of the doctoral socialization experience (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Interestingly, the demographic trend shows that there would be an increase in minority students entering doctoral programs based on the population growth; unfortunately, there has been an alarming 57% attrition rate among all doctoral students across disciplines in the United States; and, in the humanities and social sciences, it reached nearly 67%; moreover, the attrition rates of underrepresented populations, especially women, have been reported at even higher rates across disciplines (Council of Graduate Schools, 2003). For instance, in 2007 there were 5% Hispanic doctoral recipients from which only 2.8% were women (Gardner, 2008). A review of doctoral demographic characteristics for all disciplinary fields between the years of 1975 and 1999 illustrate that minority doctoral recipients represented less than 10% of all doctoral degrees awarded in the U.S. (National Science Foundation, 2012). Also, from 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, there was a scarce increase of Latina women who were conferred a doctoral degree. This increase represents 1.1% distribution and 6.6% of doctoral degrees conferred to Latina women within a decade.

Unfortunately, the doctoral attrition rates continue to be alarming in the United States. The most recent research shows that there is a 50% doctoral attrition rate for face-to-face programs and 50-70% for online doctoral programs (Lott et al., 2010; Rigler et al., 2017). Similarly, previous research reported that approximately 57% of students leave before completing their doctoral program (Lovitts, 2001; Sowell et al., 2008). Therefore, understanding the reasons for departure is imperative in order to assist institutions with accountability issues and assessment of institutional practices (Bair, 1999; Golde, 2005; Maddox, 2017; Rigler et al., 2017).
Unfortunately, the reasons for this significant attrition have not been sufficiently investigated. The students who leave a doctoral program are generally not acknowledged and their experiences are understudied (Lovitts, 2001). The existing literature regarding the factors influencing the doctoral student departure is limited (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Tinto, 1997; Maddox, 2017) and even though quantitative data about doctoral student attrition has become available in the past 15 years, it does not explore why this level of attrition has stayed so constant in doctoral programs (Maddox, 2017). Furthermore, nationwide databases, such as the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) have very reduced data on the reasons for doctoral attrition (Maddox, 2017).

Regarding doctoral student departure, Lovitts’ (2001) research study showed little to no academic difference between those students who complete the doctorate and those who leave. The study also found that students with lower levels of academic preparation in terms of standardized test scores and undergraduate GPA were as likely to complete the program as their peers with strong academic records and standardized test scores. According to some scholars, attrition rates can often be due to various factors within the environment, such as expectations and norms of the academic field, advisor/advisee relationships, socialization into the field, and current field demographics, some of which disproportionately affect underrepresented student populations in the United States (Lott et al., 2010; Maddox, 2017).

In his seminal and foundational research study of graduate education, Berelson (1960) interviewed faculty members and administrators about their own personal impressions of the reason for student attrition in graduate education in the late 1950s. The majority of the participants attributed student attrition to student problems: lack of capacity to do the academic work, lack of motivation, and a lack of financial resources. Berelson (1960) also interviewed an
unknown number of recent doctoral recipients about their impressions of this attrition; most of the students with whom he spoke still attributed attrition to the student’s lack of intellectual ability to do the work (52%), followed by the reasoning of not needing the degree for a specific professional path (49%). Berelson (1960) surveyed all his participants using six specific options from which to choose; however, none of these options were specifically concerned with issues related to doctoral peers, the program, or institutional socialization processes. Given that this study was published in 1960, issues of gender, race, ethnicity, or class were absent.

In contrast to Berelson’s study, Barbara Lovitts’ (2001) conducted a pioneering study with individuals who had been in a 1982-1984 doctoral cohort. Her study provided a personal face of doctoral student attrition for administrators and faculty. Lovitts (2001) used surveys and conducted interviews with graduate advisors, students who had left the program, and faculty members. Focusing on the perspectives of faculty advisors in relation to what they attributed doctoral student attrition, Lovitts (2001) found that two thirds of the advisors’ responses attributed the students’ leaving to the students themselves. Only one-third focused on situational reasons, such as finances. However, only three of the 33 faculty interviewed suggested academic incompetence as a reason for student departure at the doctoral level. Interestingly, when Lovitts (2001) spoke with students who had left their doctoral programs, she found a totally different reality. When choosing among options of academic, financial, or personal reasons for attrition, the students were also prompted with open-ended follow up questions and 49% of the students’ main cause for leaving was due to the academic culture; 23% responded with personal reasons; and 19% due to financial reasons. In both Lovitts’ (2001) and Berelson’s (1960) studies, the faculty and administrators attributed doctoral student departure to the students themselves. In
contrast, when Lovitts (2001) interviewed the students, almost half of them (49%) expressed that they had left due to the academic culture, not to their academic capacities.

Rigler et al. (2017) conducted an extensive critical review regarding doctoral persistence and attrition that included a total of 79 studies. Four final constructs emerged from in-depth, critical data analysis that indicated that internal factors from within the doctoral program have affected attrition and persistence: a) chair agency or willingness to assist their mentees and chair-candidate relationship; b) candidate socialization and support systems; c) candidate preparedness; and d) financial considerations. The authors culminated their study by providing the following recommendations for institutions to decrease attrition rates: 1) encourage educational leadership to implement strategies to improve dissertation chair practices through professional development; 2) increase socialization opportunities and candidate support; 3) create clearer pathways from academic to dissertation research coursework; and, 4) improve financial support, research, and publishing opportunities for doctoral candidates. Therefore, it is crucial that doctoral-granting institutions continue with the complex challenge of diagnosing the main contributing factors for doctoral attrition and persistence in order to develop effective corrective methods that can improve the internal and external accountability entities.

Who Gets to Be a PhD?

A Doctor of Philosophy degree is considered the highest degree in a specific discipline or field, requiring years of intensive acquisition of new knowledge and specialized skills in order to produce scholarly work and innovative research. The main purpose of doctoral education is to generate and disseminate new knowledge through groundbreaking ideas and discoveries (Council of Graduate Schools, 2005). A report by the Council of Graduate Schools (2008) claims that doctoral education can serve society in the following areas: a) create the workforce for the
new globalized economy; b) conduct innovative research; c) prepare leaders for government sectors, business, and non-profit work; d) facilitate technology transfer; e) develop innovators and entrepreneurs; f) prepare the K-12 educators; g) prepare future college and university faculty and administrators; h) create jobs through startups; i) foster social action to strengthen communities; j) support public health initiatives; and, k) enhance society through social sciences, arts, and humanities. Nevertheless, in order to continue serving the needs of the American society, it is imperative that doctoral education also meet the needs of its increasingly diverse populations, particularly Latinxs, as they are projected to be the largest minority group in the U.S. by 2050 (Murdock et al., 2015). (Latinx/s will be used throughout this dissertation, unless noted otherwise by the literature or a participant, to be inclusive of those who do not identify within the gender binary).

In relation to providing more opportunities to women and People of Color in higher education institutions, several scholars have suggested that some academic practices have indeed presented barriers for them, while facilitating the progress of White men in academia (Finkelstein, 1984; Mitchell, 1982; Nettles, 1990). They argue that disproportionately fewer women than men achieve high levels of success in the academy (Gardner, 2010; Sallee, 2011; Turner & Thompson, 1993). For instance, Delgado's (1984) research on the imperial scholar showed how scholarship in the civil rights area was defined by a single perspective, that of an elite of White male academic, which resulted in the production of limited ideologies and discourses that supported and sustained the dominant group’s perceived superiority. Eight years later, in 1992, after further study, Delgado (1984) found that the work of Scholars of Color had still not been meaningfully included in the scholarly literature.
Hill (1991) describes higher education as institutions that perpetuate self-containment and marginalization for minorities in the United States, and some researchers have asserted in their seminal work that gender and race have been interconnected sources of marginalization in higher education (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Collins 1989; Carter, 1988; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). Furthermore, other scholars have emphasized the importance of socialization for the academic development and success of students (Austin, 2002; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gardner, 2010; González, 2006; Keith & Moore, 1995; Weidman, 2003), and the effects of the intersecting identities among Women of Color (Crenshaw, 1989; Shields, 2008). Latina doctoral students share similar challenges with other female doctoral students; however, the cultural and academic expectations related with their gender, racial, and ethnic identities, amongst other identities, may significantly conflict with white mainstream educational values. As a result, this cultural conflict may be the source of “acculturative stress” as Latina students navigate their doctoral journeys. Acculturative stress consists of psychological and social stress experienced due to an “incongruence of beliefs, values, and other cultural norms between a person’s country of origin and country of reception” (Da Silva et al., 2017 p. 2). Moreover, this kind of stress also may be generated by perceived feelings of “otherness” or inferiority, language barriers, discrimination, immigration status, or poverty (Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry, 2006; Da Silva et al., 2017).

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The problem that influenced the selection of this topic is the low number of Latina students attaining doctoral degrees in comparison to other women. For instance, from 2018-2019 just 8.8% of Latinas earned a doctoral degree compared to 63.6% of White women, 13.1% of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10.9% of Black women (National Center for Education Statistics,
Additionally, staggering attrition rates at the doctoral level have remained constant despite increased efforts for improvement (Rigler et al., 2017). Why do Latinas continue to be ranked in the lowest percentages of doctoral attainment? Moreover, statistics on demographic changes show that Latinx population growth will continue increasing, thus, playing an important role in the socioeconomic future of the United States (Murdock et al., 2015). Finally, as Latina women will encompass one third of all women in the United States by the year 2060 (Gándara, 2015), it is essential to examine their experiences to better understand the reasons why they continue to hold a low rate in doctoral degree attainment compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

**Latinx Growth in the United States**

The growth of Latinxs in the United States has been significant in the last six decades. We remain a significant part of the nation’s overall demographic growth. For instance, the Pew Research Center reported that, from 1960 to 2013, the Latinx population grew from 6.3 million to approximately 54 million and that it will continue to grow with an estimated 119 million by the year 2060, which would lead to our comprising almost 28% of the U.S. population (Stepler & Brown, 2015). The most recent report from the Pew Research Center indicates that the U.S. Latinx population reached 60.6 million in 2019. Between 2010 and 2019, the Latinx population increased from 16% to 18% accounting for about half (52%) of the entire U.S. population growth over this period. Thus, Latinxs are the second largest racial and ethnic group, behind White non-Hispanics. Therefore, as the Latinx population continues to increase, it is important to understand their educational experiences.

Even though the percentages of Latinxs in the educational sector has increased, Latinxs have one of the lowest rates of graduate degree attainment in comparison to other ethnic and racial student populations (Santiago et al., 2015) mainly due to the historic marginalization and
oppression within the educational system (Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995; Yosso, 2005, Yosso & Solórzano 2006; Yosso et al., 2009). For instance, in 2015, the Excelencia in Education Factbook on Latinos in Education acknowledged the advancement of Latinxs during recent years. This increase caused a change in student population in institutions of higher education; as a result, there are currently 370 Hispanic-Serving institutions (HSI), where the composition of the Latinx student population is 25% or more (Santiago et al., 2015). Despite the increase in enrollment in education, the National Center of Education Statistics (2019) reported that Latinxs students are still struggling in educational attainment across the board. Moreover, statistics on demographic changes show that Latinxs will affect the socioeconomic future of the United States, as they will account for 61% of the nation’s 2010-2060 growth and 71% of 2010-2050 population growth in Texas (Murdock et al., 2015).

According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates (2020), the number of doctoral degrees awarded by U.S. institutions was constant between 2018 and 2019, with a total of 55,103 doctorates awarded in 2018 compared to 55,703 in 2019; and, over time, the number of doctorates awarded shows an average annual growth of 3.2%, interrupted by periods of slow growth and decline in doctorates earned (National Science Foundation, 2020). From 2000 to 2008, the share of female doctorate recipients grew from 49% to 52% among U.S. citizens and permanent residents and from 29% to 35% among temporary visa holders. Since 2008, the shares of female doctorates in both citizenship categories have changed little. Overall, women were conferred 46 percent of all doctorates in 2019 (National Science Foundation, 2020).
The participation of underrepresented minorities in doctoral programs who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents is increasing. From 2010 to 2019, the number of Hispanic or Latinx doctorate recipients increased from 1,842 to 2,848. As a result, the proportion of doctorates earned by this group grew from 6% to 8% during this period; also, during this period, the number of Black or African American doctorate recipients increased from 1,939 to 2,512, and the proportion of doctorates they earned increased from 6% to 7%. The number of American Indian or Alaska Native doctorate recipients changed little, from 117 in 2010 to 120 in 2019, remaining under 1% (National Science Foundation, 2020) (see Figure 2).
In addition, as shown in Figure 3, most of the growth in the number of doctorates awarded to both men and women has been in science and engineering fields. From 2000 to 2019, the number of female doctorate recipients in S&E fields increased by 75%, though starting from a small base, compared with 47% growth in the number of male S&E doctorates. Women’s share of S&E doctorates awarded increased from 38% in 2000 to 42% in 2009, and it has remained stable since then (National Science Foundation, 2020).

In non-S&E fields, 58 percent of doctorates were awarded to women in 2019, a share that has changed little since the late 2000s. The number of female non-S&E doctorate recipients declined by 5% between 2000 and 2019, while the number of male doctorate recipients in those fields declined by 15% (National Science Foundation, 2020).
These statistics clearly acknowledge the increase of women in the educational pipeline. However, most recent data also display the continued disparities in the doctoral degree attainment of underrepresented populations, when compared to their White counterparts, as clearly represented in Table 1 below:

Table 1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Females</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/ Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/ Alaska Native</th>
<th>Two or more races(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The preceding Table 1 clearly shows that from 2013 to 2019, the percentage of doctoral degrees attained by Women of Color was very small when compared to their White counterparts. For instance, from 2018-2019, 63.6% of White women earned doctoral degrees; 8.8% were Latinas; 10.9% were Black/African American; 13.1% were Asian; 0.4% were American Indian/Alaska native; and 3.2% were Mixed Race. These statistics continue to be staggering, because in a period of six years, Latina doctoral degree recipients increased 1.8%; African American 1.2%; Asian 0.2%; Mixed Race 1.2%; and, unfortunately, American Indian/Alaska Native attainment decreased 0.2% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Certainly, there is a strong need for further exploration of the doctoral experiences for Latina students to gain insight into the why of these statistics, especially given that the Latinx population is rapidly increasing.

Consequently, recent research has focused on documenting the lower levels of educational attainment among Men of Color than among Women of Color (Pecero, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to continue investigating Women of Color to understand their experiences across all levels of higher education, as they confront unique struggles and experiences due to the multiple marginalized identities they hold (Crenshaw, 1991; Romero 2017). They must face the challenges related with not only being a woman, but also with being a Person of Color. Additionally, the cause of the marginalization and discrimination they experience cannot be reduced to just one of these identities but to the intersection that occurs amongst them.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this critical narrative inquiry was to explore the socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students studying in a variety of disciplines in a Hispanic-Serving institution. I
seek to understand, through the use of Latino Critical Theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, 1998) as conceptual framework, how gender, ethnicity, and race, as well as other salient identities shape the experiences of Latina doctoral students during the completion of their doctoral programs. As Latinas continue to be a very small percentage in the doctoral student population in the United States, just 8.8 percent from 2018-2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), this study aimed to identify the challenges/struggles they face that can explain why some do not continue until graduation, as well as uncovering the support systems that may contribute to their successful completion of their degrees. Finally, this study showcases the socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students from their own perspectives to inform future research and institutional practice.

**Research Questions**

To guide this study, I asked the following research questions to better understand Latina doctoral experiences during their doctoral study:

1) In what ways do the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and race, amongst other salient identities, shape Latina women’s doctoral experiences?

2) What are the support systems, if any, that Latina doctoral students utilize during the completion of the doctoral degree?

3) How do Latina doctoral students cope with academic challenges or conflicts, if any, in their doctoral programs?

The use of Latino Critical Theory as a theoretical framework is most appropriate to this study as it provided a lens to examine the complexities of Latina doctoral student identities and socialization experiences and how those multiple identities challenge the status quo of graduate school and academe.
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

I examined the lived experiences, or testimonios (Pérez Huber, 2009) of Latina doctoral students who were currently enrolled in their doctoral programs at a Hispanic-serving institution in the Southwest. I utilized a narrative inquiry approach within a Latino critical theory paradigm. I selected a qualitative research design for this project, as I reflected on the purpose of this study and the types of answers I was seeking (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth often through open-ended questions which allow for a better understanding, capturing the worldview of other individuals without predetermining it through prior specific questionnaire categories (Butina, 2015). As such, this qualitative design allowed me to explore more in-depth the participants’ socialization experiences and salient identities as this emergent design acknowledges the intrinsic complexity of the human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The criteria for the selection of the participants were: (a) self-identify as Latina; (b) be enrolled in the institution where the research study was conducted; (c) have completed at least one academic year of doctoral coursework; (e) be 25 to 65 years of age. The data collected for this qualitative study included (a) a demographic survey; and (b) one testimonio (Pérez Huber, 2009). Each participant was asked to provide a testimonio of their experiences in their doctoral program. The participants were provided with prompting questions, but how much and the way they choose to showcase their narrative was ultimately up to them in order to keep the authenticity of their story. I coded and analyzed each testimonio. Thematic narrative analysis was used to analyze the data. A more detailed explanation of the methodology, methods, and analysis used can be found in Chapter 3.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The existing body of literature on Latinas in higher education is mostly focused on the undergraduate student experience that has culminated in an extensive amount of research, especially on the first year experience for undergraduate students (Pecero, 2016, as cited in Hernandez, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1996; Kena et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 1998; Tinto & Goodsell, 1994; Torres, 2006), which has aided in the creation of new initiatives to benefit the undergraduate students at college and universities. This study contributes to the literature regarding Women of Color, specifically Latinas who have completed the first year of doctoral study or more. Therefore, this dissertation adds to the literature regarding Latinas in graduate education and the use of critical race methods and epistemologies in higher education research (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012; Gándara, 1982; Gloria, 1997; González, 2007; Pecero, 2016; Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020).

In addition to contributing to the literature, the study informs faculty members and administrators on the experiences of Latina doctoral students, and it is my hope to inform progressive policymakers about the needs of Latinas in graduate schools across the country, to implement initiatives that can improve their participation and success in graduate programs. The findings of this study provide significant information when creating new programs and initiatives with the intention of recruiting and retaining Latina graduate students, especially at the doctoral level. Additionally, it provides context for the challenges they face regarding the environment of graduate school and implications to improve doctoral study. Administrators can use these findings to create effective workshops, seminars, programs, and initiatives regarding the needs of Students of Color, particularly Latinas, to provide support and an inclusive environment across
the university. Finally, this study presents a case for the need of more effective mentoring practices for students during their doctoral program.

For faculty, the results of this study can provide substantial insight into the unique experiences of these women and how they can best support them through teaching, advising, and mentoring. As Moak and Walker (2014) state, “The importance of mentoring relationships is evident because many students who begin doctoral programs ultimately fail to complete the degree” (p. 428). A study on the effectiveness of the mentor relationship suggested the importance of carefully selecting faculty members that can serve as mentors for doctoral students (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). Research suggests that faculty members benefit from training in effective mentoring practices through training classes or conferences or through faculty-to-faculty mentoring programs (Moak & Walker, 2014). In addition, what has been considered a critical factor in determining which students will be successful in completing their graduate programs is the cultivation of fruitful mentoring relationships between graduate students and their professors (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Gardner, 2009; Moak & Walker, 2014).

Furthermore, good mentoring can provide a better experience, especially for marginalized students, which imply knowing the experiences, challenges, and systemic barriers that the students face. Indeed, most minority graduate students will have faculty of different gender, ethnic, racial, and other social identities than themselves due to the lack of Faculty of Color (Pecero, 2016). Therefore, faculty, advisors, or mentors, regardless of whether they are a Person of Color or White, should be supportive and culturally sensitive to the issues of historically underrepresented student populations by not promoting an assimilationist approach to their teaching, advising, and/or mentoring. In sum, effective faculty mentoring and institutional support for Latina doctoral students is critical for promoting positive socialization, research,
scholarship, degree completion, and career development especially when their intersecting social identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, class, sex, age, language, nationality, religion, etc.) are taken into consideration.

Finally, as Latina women will encompass one third of all women in the United States by the year 2060 (Gándara, 2015), this study is significant in that the success of Latinas is critical for the advancement of society. If more Latinas attain doctoral degrees, their opportunities to enter high status jobs, especially in the education field, can aid in making education more inclusive and accessible for other Latinxs students and underrepresented populations. Research as shown that having more Latinx faculty and staff can be valuable for Latinx students, as they tend to persist more effectively if they have a sense of belonging. In addition, several studies on Latinx students have recommended higher education institutions to hire a more diverse faculty and staff (Pecero, 2016). Latinxs presence in education can be a way to disrupt the continuous dissemination of dominant culture and knowledge that reinforces the inequalities and systemic barriers in academia. Research has shown that there is still a small number of Latinas as faculty members in higher education institutions (González & Myers, 2016). Therefore, it is vital to understand the experiences of these Latinas as doctoral students in order to create change, which helps provide understanding as to why some may decide to leave their programs or continue in the academy.
CHAPTER I SUMMARY

As the participation of Latinas in higher education and in the workforce continues to grow and as the demographics of the United States tilt more toward the Latinx community, it is imperative to understand what kind of experiences, knowledge, and opportunities Latinas are gaining, as well as the barriers and challenges they need to overcome, and how they affect their life chances. Moreover, by understanding the experiences of Latinas, it can lead to organizational structures that encourage more Latinas to continue their study, resulting in a more educated workforce in the nation. It is important to consider the educational experiences of one of the fastest-growing minority populations in the United States and how we can make the educational climate better and more effective in getting Latinas into the professoriate.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

I divided this dissertation into the following five chapters, including appendices and references. In Chapter I, I provide a brief history of graduate education, doctoral attrition, an overview of the problem, the purpose of the study, its’ significance to the scholarly literature, an overview of the research design, and the overall organization of the study. In Chapter 2, I review the literature, exploring major trends in doctoral student socialization experiences. I follow that with my theoretical framework, which weaves together the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit). In Chapter 3, I provide an in-depth examination of the methodology I employed for this study, including the theoretical framework and my epistemological assumptions, research design, my positionality, the data collection and sampling methods, my approach to data analysis, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. In Chapter 4, I introduce each of the participants’ backgrounds and then present their testimonios followed by a discussion of the findings related to the research literature. In chapter 5, I provide
a recapitulation of the findings organized around the most preponderant themes I encountered, along with limitations of the study and recommendations for future practice and policy; and I conclude with some final thoughts.

**Definition of Terms**

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

*Intersectionality*: “The mutually constitutive relations among social identities that has become a central tenet of feminist thinking, one that McCall (2005) and others have suggested is the most important contribution of feminist theory to our present understanding of gender” (Shields, 2008, p. 301). This dissertation conceptualizes intersectionality as the ways in which the various social identities of an individual, such as gender, ethnicity, race, and the oppressive systems that are connected to those identities interrelate and interact at the same time within an individual’s experience (Crenshaw, 1991; Shields, 2008, as cited in Mullings 1997 & Nakano Glenn 1999).

*Women of Color (WOC)*: This term refers to women who self-identify as Latina or Hispanic, Black or African American, Native American or American Indian, Asian or Asian American, or Mixed Heritage, Biracial, or Multiracial (Turner, 2002).

*Ethnicity*: Although there are various definitions for ethnicity, for the purpose of this study, I used the following: a) ethnicity can be seen as a social construct that is usually internally claimed contrary to race, which is often externally dictated (Johnston- Guerrero, 2016), including (b) an identity that is constructed on an individual’s nationality or tribal group. Each racial group may as well contain many different ethnicities (Museus et al., 2011).

*Latina/o/x*: This term refers to people who are from a country where the official language derives from Latin (or romance language), including people born in the United States; also, referring to an individual of Mexican, Cuban, South or Central American, Puerto Rican, or any
other Spanish culture, origin, or heritage regardless of race (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014). Latino has the connotation of racial difference, whereas ‘Hispanic’ is considered as race neutral. The use of this term is dependent on the preference of how one prefers to be identified. Furthermore, Latinx is a term used to be inclusive of those who do not identify within the male/female gender binary. **Chicana/o:** This term refers to people of Mexican descent who self-identify as such, partially or primarily raised in the United States and who share similar sociocultural, political, and geographic identities (González, 2002).

**Hispanic:** The U.S. Census Bureau defined this term as those individuals who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish categories. Those people who identify as Latinx and/or Chicano/a can also fall into this categorization depending on preference.

**Micro-aggressions:** Intentional or unintentional verbal and or non-verbal hostile or derogatory behavior or racial insults toward People of Color (Sue et al., 2007).

**Racism/Racialization:** A racial domination ideology in which the presumed cultural or biological superiority of one or more racial groups is used to prescribe or justify the inferior treatment or social position(s) of other racial groups. Racialization is the perception of patterns of physical difference (e.g., skin color) used to differentiate groups of people, thus, constituting them as ‘races’; Racialization becomes racism when it includes the social and hierarchical valuation of racial groups (Clair & Denise, 2015; Wilson, 1999).

**Socialization:** “The process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization” (Gardner, 2008, p. 329).
Socialization in Graduate School: Socialization in graduate school refers to the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills (Weidman et al., 2001).

Identity: Identity is the personal meaning associated with the social categories in which an individual claims membership (Shields, 2008). In psychology, identity relates to awareness of self, self-reflection, self-esteem and self-image; and, in the American society, identity is explained as a quality that enables the expression of an individual’s authentic sense of self (Shields, 2008).
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Sin claridad no hay voz de sabiduría.”  Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of a doctoral degree has been characterized by attrition rates that range from 33% to 70% (Gardner et al., 2012). Furthermore, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the percentage of the White students pursuing a doctoral degree from 2009 to 2010 was 74.3%; Latino students were 5.8% from which percent were women; 7.4% were African American from which 4.8% were women. Indeed, higher education scholars have introduced the study of gender within the past decade, by examining the differing outcomes for male and female graduate students emphasizing that gender has not received significant attention in the doctoral student socialization literature, including the fact that most research still utilize the male/female gender binary. They have concurred that further research is needed in this area, as well (Gardner, 2010; Sallee, 2011; Turner & Thompson, 1993).

Some scholars recognize that there is a direct link between socialization in graduate school and doctoral persistence (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1997); however, other scholars (Tierney 1997; Tierney & Rhoades, 1994) have argued that the models of socialization widely accepted in the literature support an assimilation/congruency model that presupposes a monolithic view in graduate education. Therefore, alternative models need to consider the role that ethnicity, race, and gender play in the socialization experiences of underrepresented groups in doctoral education, particularly Latina doctoral students and Students of Color, including disciplinary and departmental contexts, and institutional dynamics (Gardner, 2008). Antony (2002) argues for greater clarity for the definition and meaning of successful socialization since doctoral students
can experience cognitive and emotional dissonance due to the monolithic assumptions of doctoral education. Antony’s (2002) perspective offers a less linear approach to socialization where differences of new doctoral students are indeed welcomed by the institution, encouraging, “a modified framework for graduate student socialization [that] distinguishes between developing an awareness of, versus developing a personal acceptance of a field’s content, values, and norms” (p. 373). Hence, the main objective of this chapter is to review the important literatures and to discuss the salience of the various social identities during academic socialization, considering that, “the attempt to understand intersectionality is, in fact, an effort to see things from the worldview of others and not simply from our own unique standpoints” (Walker, 2003, p. 991).

Weidman, Twale, & Stein’s (2001) socialization framework is one of the foundational works for graduate student academic socialization. Despite the controversy between the traditional modernist and culturally-oriented post-modern approaches, scholars recognize that the model developed by Weidman et al. (2001) as one of the “most comprehensive framework for understanding graduate and professional student socialization” (Austin & McDaniels, 2006, p. 411).

**Tenets of Socialization**

According to Switzer (2009) the socialization framework remains the most frequently used orientation, and some scholars suggest that attrition from doctoral programs is directly related to the effects (or lack thereof) of socialization (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1997). Merton, Reader, and Kendall (1957) defined socialization as “the processes through which [a person] develops [a sense of] professional self, with its characteristic values, attitudes, knowledge and skills…which govern [his or her] behavior in a wide variety of professional situations” (p. 287).
In doctoral education it is important to establish membership with a specific group and consider how the group includes distinctive attitudes, values, and knowledge. Several scholars have engaged with socialization and greatly contributed to its development. For instance, Bragg (1976) affirmed that “the socialization process is a learning process through which the individual acquires the knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits and modes of thought of the society to which he/she belongs” (p. 3). Antony (2002), Antony and Taylor, (2004), and Tierney (1997) questioned this modernist definition due to its rationality and constancy of culture as they believed that this rational orientation to socialization implies a linear progression that leads to homogeneity and assimilation (Tierney & Rhoades, 1994). According to Thornton and Nardi (1975), four stages of socialization have been identified where novices move toward the goal of role acquisition: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. The anticipatory stage involves the development of an awareness of the characteristics of the desired group. For doctoral students, this awareness entails application to and entry into the doctoral program, observations, and social and academic interactions with faculty members and peers. The formal stage of socialization includes those entering the organization as veteran newcomers still need to learn the academic standards and expectations of the institution (Weidman et al., 2001). The informal stage entails individuals who learn about the established informal expectations and the degrees of flexibility associated with the academic role. Finally, at the personal stage, individuals internalize the parameters of the specific roles, and start a new professional identity.

Van Maanen and Schein (1977) emphasized six polar dimensions within the socialization process. Both Tierney and Rhoads (1994) and Weidman et al. (2001) recognized the significance of such dimensions to the socialization of graduate and professional students. These six dimensions of socialization include: collective versus individual; formal versus informal; random
versus sequential; fixed versus variable; serial versus disjunctive; investiture versus divestiture.

The collective versus individual dimension explains the degree to which common opportunities are experienced equally by new doctoral students. Weidman et al., (2001) emphasize that “collective socialization refers to the common set of experiences encountered by all graduate students in an academic program” (p. 27) and other scholars claim that individual socialization refers to “processing new members in an isolated and singular manner” (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994, p. 27). Doctoral students usually experience different socialization related to the timeframe in which to complete the stages of the doctoral program (Weidman et al., 2001). Clark & Corcoran (1986) suggested a three-stage model to emphasize the socialization of doctoral students to the professoriate and argued that part one was entry to doctoral study; part two included experience and competence with aspects of academic work and the final stage was the acquisition of a faculty position. Braxton and Baird (2001) articulated a similar three-stage process for graduate student socialization; however, they included slightly different parameters for each stage.

The socialization literature positions faculty and student as a significant frame to organize the doctoral education practices and processes. The role of the faculty member to the socialization of doctoral students has been found crucial and has a well-documented research literature (Austin, 2002; Bragg, 1976; Golde, 2000). Senior students who are in their candidacy/writing phases tend to have more frequent interaction with faculty members and more opportunities for presenting in conferences and presenting publications than students in their coursework stage. Golde (2000, 2005) considered important the disciplinary differences when researching doctoral education. In relation to the socialization context, Austin (2002) further emphasized the critical role of the graduate school for future faculty members and suggested that
while working with faculty members is crucial for socialization, students were “very reliant on peers, family, and friends (usually external to academe) to make sense of their experiences” (p. 104).

Despite the controversy between the traditional modernist and culturally-oriented postmodern approaches, scholars recognize that the model developed by Weidman et al. (2001) as the “most comprehensive framework for understanding graduate and professional student socialization” (Austin & McDaniels, 2006, p. 411). According to some scholars, socialization is the process through which students or individuals learn to adapt to specific attitudes, values, norms, skills, and knowledge that is required to become part of society, an ethnic group, or an organization (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Tierney, 1997; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Sallee (2011) defines graduate student socialization as “the process through which individuals learn the necessary behaviors and skills to fulfill new roles; by interacting with others, they learn about cultural norms and what behaviors are expected of them to become part of the new organization” (Sallee, 2011, pp. 188-189).

Positive socialization experiences have been a determining factor in doctoral student success and retention (Turner & Thompson, 1993). Nevertheless, several researchers have recognized that a limited body of literature has examined the minoritized students’ perspectives on their socialization experiences regarding their personal and academic support systems despite the vital role they play during their doctoral program journeys (Austin, 2002; Egan, 1989; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gardner, 2010; González, 2006, 2007). The challenges to improve graduate education and socialization have been executed through the Preparing Future Faculty Project (Adams, 2002), which aimed at educating the incoming cadre of professors regarding the range of options at the institutional level, the diversity of the faculty role, and advice for a
demanding professional career where teaching and applied research are paramount aspects, and
distance learning along with technology are widely used sources for teaching, and community
service is a major commitment in academia. Some efforts have been aimed at minority graduate
students and women to help prepare them for fields in academia where they are
underrepresented.

In an effort to better understand how the socialization experience works in graduate
school, two main classical theories are the pillars of the socialization framework for graduate
students: Tinto’s (1997) and Weidman, Twale, and Stein’s (2001). The socialization experiences
of doctoral students relate to an outcome both student persistence or student attrition and a lack
of positive socialization experiences can ultimately influence attrition (Council of Graduate
Schools, 2003).

**TINTO’S MODEL OF DOCTORAL PERSISTENCE**

Tinto’s (1997) framework called Model of Doctoral Persistence examined the
socialization experiences of Hispanic female doctoral students. Tinto’s Model of Doctoral
Persistence offers the possibility to examine factors that lead to attrition and integrates contextual
factors to interpret student persistence. In this framework, Tinto (1997) highlighted the
importance of the discipline to provide structure, normative expectations, and financial support
to doctoral study. Furthermore, Tinto (1997) emphasized the role of academic and social
integration as integral parts of persistence, specifically, the relationships between faculty
members and students; and, like Weidman at al.’s (2001) views of communities, Tinto
emphasized the role of local communities, and of faculty members, as crucial contexts for the
students’ academic and intellectual development. Tinto (1997) affirmed that “the local
community becomes the primary educational community for one’s graduate career” (p. 324).
This model does not specify local communities per se, but this literature review explicitly incorporates Tinto’s (1997) work as an example of utilizing traditional socialization theory to explore Hispanic female students’ experiences with the emphasis on local communities, which encompasses departmental or disciplinary contexts as well as extra-curricular social contexts (e.g., community or religious groups, doctoral student organizations, study groups, etc.) that are central to the students’ doctoral degree completion and success. In addition, Tinto’s (1997) model permits the in-depth exploration of socialization, since this model includes the following aspects: 1) students’ attributes: educational experience, the students’ background, and the financial resources; 2) the entry orientations: educational and occupational goals; educational, occupational, and institutional commitments, and the financial assistance and the external commitments, which serve as forms of participation; 3) institutional experience: academic system, classroom relations, faculty relations and graduate positions that are interrelated with the social system, peer, and faculty; 4) integration: academic and social integrations that relate to candidacy; 5) research experience: research opportunities, faculty-advisor relationships, financial support for research; 6) outcome: doctoral completion.
WEIDMAN, TWALE AND STEIN’S SOCIALIZATION FRAMEWORK

The conceptualization of Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) is a graduate socialization framework that demonstrates the interrelationships between the various aspects of the graduate students’ experiences that contribute to their socialization processes, their success, and retention. This framework draws from the work of Tierney & Rhoads (1994) and Bragg (1976) as well as on research on socialization of adult individuals (Arnett, 2000; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Bragg published a monograph on the socialization of graduate and professional students which became the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report series until Tierney & Rhodes also published an ASHE-ERIC Higher Education report that included the same classic literature. However, they took a cultural approach but did not concentrate on the socialization of graduate and professional students as Weidman et al., (2001) did. Furthermore, socialization as a theoretical framework has been used by several researchers to better
understand the complexity of the doctoral students’ social, academic, and institutional trajectories (Gardner, 2010, as cited in Austin, 2002; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Egan, 1989; Ellis, 2001; Gardner, 2007; González, 2006; Gottlieb, 1960; Kirk & Todd-Mancillas, 1991; Antony, 2002; Weidman et al., 2001). Weidman et al., (2001) describe socialization as the process through which individuals gain the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career, which requires an advanced level of specialized skills and knowledge.

Several researchers and scholars have been interested in the socialization framework as it has been widely used to study the determining factors in doctoral student success and retention (Austin, 2002; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Weidman et al., 2001). Clark and Corcoran (1986) agreed that the socialization framework has been very useful to analyze the successful an unsuccessful graduate students’ experience. Certainly, most scholars who have utilized the socialization framework have focused their research literature in trying to understand the impact of socialization among the White student population in the U.S. even though the extremely low percentages in regards to minority doctoral students pursuing a doctoral degree indicate that more research is needed about minority women and men pursuing a doctoral degree, their socialization processes, and academic and personal support systems (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; González, 2006; Weidman et al., 2001).

Weidman, Twale, and Stein’s (2001) framework for Graduate and Professional Student Socialization evolved with the purpose of helping understand the graduate student socialization process, an educational process that, according to the authors, has not received the necessary attention for the successful and full development of graduate students, faculty members, advisors, and administrators. This model was created so that graduate education departments and programs in different fields can use it to evaluate and assess their own efforts at socialization.
The authors stated that “in an era of assessment, this model will surely be a much-used resource” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. x). Weidman, Twale, and Stein’s (2001) framework demonstrates the interrelationships between the various spheres and aspects of the graduate students’ experiences that contribute to their socialization process. This framework articulates four developmental stages that the students go through, and three core elements that enable and are crucial to successful socialization:

1) The anticipatory stage, where the new doctoral students must seek out information about the values and norms of the institution.

2) The formal stage, which is rooted in interactions and communications with faculty members and students who are advanced in the program.

3) The informal stage, the entry point into transitions for the study (student-ness to emerging professional).

4) The personal stage, which deals with students’ “individual and social roles, personalities, and social structures becoming fused, and the role internalized” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 14). This is where students adopt the norms and values of their discipline and are in search of relationships and experiences that can aid them to solidify their new academic identity. The four stages reflect the levels of commitment and understanding that the graduate students are being prepared for and an engagement process through the core elements of socialization. This framework also articulates three core elements that are central to this socialization framework: knowledge acquisition (student’s ability to understand the academic culture and meet faculty expectations); investment (time allocated to in meeting program requirements), and involvement (student participation). The institutional culture of the university community is at the core of this framework, which includes two categories: Academic programs and peer climate, and three
socialization processes: 1) interaction with others; 2) integration into or sense of fit with the expectations of the faculty and peers; and 3) learning of knowledge and skills necessary for professional practice.


**Revisiting the Socialization Framework for Students of Color**

As discussed in the previously, the Weidman-Twale-Stein (2001) model of graduate student socialization was developed to frame student socialization in a general way. The authors made modifications to the 2001 framework and model based on the results of many published research studies on graduate students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, based on the seminal and most recent work on socialization, it was suggested that socialization should also consider specific individual and institutional characteristics and constructs that involve race and ethnicity. As a result, this revised socialization framework has mostly the same components as the previous one but pays particular attention to the socialization needs of African American graduate
students, although it’s not exclusive for this student population as it can also be utilized to examine the graduate student socialization of other minority groups.

For the revised framework, the authors specifically focus their attention on the existing inequity of resource distribution and its consequences, a greater need for inclusiveness and diversity, building paths to bridge isolation and social distance between faculty, peers, and students, and the critical necessity to offer more academic support to the African American student population and other minority groups. The authors became aware of the need of institutional change in order to implement better support systems for the academic development of African American graduate students by expanding student development and the programs’ sociocultural climate and context. The new model acknowledges the importance of race in graduate student development and success, as higher learning pursuits promote social status and cognitive abilities. Twale et al., (2016) elucidate that “socialization can be described through cultural and social capital acquisition where successful internalization of knowledge, norms, and skills results in the rewards of cultural and social attainment, mobility, and status in academia” (Twale et al., 2016, as cited in Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu et al., 1977; Gopaul, 2012; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). The most significant addition to the framework is the notion of Academic Resources, including inputs (I), environment (E), and outcomes (O). The center section reflects key dimensions of the environment that doctoral students encounter. As this framework acknowledges the importance of socialization of Student of Color, faculty climate was included as a pivotal element of institutional culture and engagement as an “interpersonal mechanism for learning about, and over time, deciding whether or not to embrace, the norms of academic programs” (Twale et al., 2016, p. 86). The core elements of socialization that were drawn from literature on undergraduates remained intact in this revised version as they are
important elements to consider for graduate students (knowledge acquisition, investment, involvement and engagement). Knowledge acquisition happens via both formal instruction and informal interaction with faculty and peers and the processes are reflected by involvement in both the informal and formal structures of institutional environments. Engagement happens as students develop attachments to environments and people within higher education institutions. The socialization outcomes that are critical to the model are: knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as they are attributes that are required for successful entry to the careers that require high level of academic preparation. Finally, in the stages of socialization (anticipatory, formal, informal and personal) on African American graduate students and professional students, Twale et al. (2016) suggest some manifestations of socialization processes and outcomes at different stages of the graduate student experience; moreover, they focus on African American doctoral students as the authors realized the imminent need to increase awareness on diversity and equity issues for Student of Color.

**Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

CRT emerged after the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1970s. Despite some advancements in the area of social justice and civil rights had occurred in the 1960s, legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freedman, and Richard Delgado found that such social progress came to a halt and covert forms of racism were on the rise (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). They were joined by legal scholars and education scholars who wanted to expand upon critical legal studies as well as advance research on the effects of race and racism in other institutional contexts (Brayboy, 2005; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Lynn et al., 2002; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT draws from and builds on the perspectives of a variety of disciplines: history, sociology, law, ethnic studies, and women studies (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper et al.,
Critical race theory is a theoretical perspective and analytical instrument that evaluates the “unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial and gendered lines” (Taylor et al., 2009, p.1). CRT and its tenets have been defined and presented in different ways for deeper discussion of each (e.g., Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The six basic tenets of CRT are the following:

1. In American society, racism is an ordinary, permanent fixture. Racism, both at the individual and institutional level is pervasive in American culture. “A CRT lens unveils the various forms in which racism continually manifests itself, despite espoused institutional values regarding equity and social justice” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 390).

2. CRT rejects liberalism and meritocracy. Colorblindness and race-neutral policies operate under the guise of equal treatment for all and mask subtle forms of racism. CRT views meritocracy as a means of maintaining White supremacy (Bergerson, 2003) by recognizing stories from those who have benefitted from privilege, be it wealth or color of their skin, and applying them to marginalized groups (i.e., those who work hard can achieve wealth and power) all the while ignoring systemic injustices and inequalities that prevent those who are disenfranchised from achieving the same type of status).

3. CRT acknowledges the intersectionality of oppression claiming that disempowerment can be the result of one’s race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, or the intersection of such identities (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1998).
4. CRT acknowledges lived experiences and views narratives, or counterstories as a way to allow people of color to voice their concerns. Indeed, the sharing of personal narratives has been a survival tool for generations of oppressed groups (Delgado, 1989).

5. CRT recognizes “interest convergence” or “material determinism” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8), which states that racial advancements for Blacks are accepted when they promote the personal interests of White individuals. Racism benefits privileged and working-class Whites; therefore, there is very little motivation to eliminate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

6. CRT is highly committed to social justice. CRT challenges the discourse on race and seeks to empower oppressed groups by supporting and expanding the cause for racial reform (Yosso et al., 2001).

Villalpando (2004) elucidated that “while legally sanctioned racial discrimination may no longer exist overtly in American higher education, CRT and LatCrit helps us recognize patterns, practices, and policies of racial inequality that continue to exist in more insidious and covert ways” (p. 42). Hence, understanding that racism and other forms of discrimination are usually veiled and systemic in nature is crucial when analyzing the educational experiences of Latinas and other marginalized populations. The basic tenets of CRT initiated change and motivated scholars to develop scholarship on social justice and equity among a variety of minoritized groups (e.g., Asian Crit, Disability Crit, Tribal Crit, etc.), and I employ LatCrit, which focuses on the Latinx community and challenges the discourses and practices of White dominant society.

**LATINO CRITICAL RACE THEORY (LATCITR)**

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

**Origins of LatCrit**

LatCrit originated from a colloquium on Latinos/as and CRT as part of the Hispanic National Bar Association Law Professors’ meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1995 and it has evolved from annual meetings to a series of initiatives. Both, CRT and LatCrit recognize the intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination (Solórzano et al., 2000) such as sexism and classism. However, LatCrit also recognizes the complexity of intersectional identities within the Latinx community which include issues with language, immigration, ethnicity, and phenotype among others (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and how these experiences are not always acknowledged within the Black-White racial discourse. In regard to the Black-White paradigm, Latinxs often do not identify with racial categories stemming from such paradigm (Ramirez, 1994; Trucios-Haynes, 2001). Results of the 2010 Census elucidated the issue of racial identity among Latinos in the United States with Latinxs accounting for more than 18.5 million of the 19 million people who selected “some other race” when asked about their race or origin (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014). LatCrit recognizes that for many Latinxs, their racial identity is entwined with their ethnic and cultural identity (Rodriguez, 1994; Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

LatCrit has been utilized as a framework in studies ranging in topics from Latinx undergraduates at predominantly White institutions (Von Robertson et al., 2016), undocumented
students (Pérez Huber, 2010), Chicana/o graduate students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), as well as Latinx faculty and staff experiences (Flores & García, 2009; Oliva et al., 2013). The variety of topics illustrate how LatCrit can serve as useful tool in analyzing the experiences of Latinxs with differing identities and at various points in time in their educational journey. Furthermore, LatCrit also recognizes the complexity of intersectional identities within the Latinx community, which include issues with language, immigration, ethnicity, sexuality, and phenotype with the purpose of providing a more complete understanding of the academic socialization experiences within Latina/Chicana feminist epistemology. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework originated from CRT feminists; and this is the reason why this literature review incorporates the tenets of CRT and the significance of the participants’ intersectional identities.

**LatCrit in Educational Research**

As a theoretical framework, LatCrit has been helpful when exploring the experiences of graduate students. For instance, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) utilized a LatCrit framework for their study on Chicana/o graduate students. The authors provided a story of two composite characters using counterstorytelling – one being a Latina graduate student and the other a Latina professor. The authors utilized their “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as a tool for constructing their composite characters by using the data from the research interviews, the literature on the topic, and their own personal and professional experience. As such, a counterstory was developed through the composite characters that narrated the various concerns in the Chicana/o graduate students’ life, including imposter syndrome. Employing a composite story allows researchers to use countless data to create composite characters “…who can discuss concepts and ideas within the context of their own experiences” (p. 476). Solórzano and Yosso
posited that a LatCrit framework and its methodologies do validate the experiential knowledge of People of Color.

Exploring the experiences of undocumented students can also be analyzed through a LatCrit framework, as it not only focuses on race and ethnicity, but also the intersectionality of other identities that are distinctive to undocumented students, such as immigration status and language. Pérez Huber’s (2010) study on 10 undocumented Chicana students utilized a racist nativism framework with LatCrit and employed testimonios for the women in the study. The author found that many of the participants experienced racism and argued that it was due to the racist nativist perspective of undocumented people who are perceived as a threat to the United States. Pérez Huber (2010) argued that many of the discriminatory occurrences described by these women were not just due to ethnic and racial biases, but also to their immigration status. Therefore, LatCrit can also provide a more accurate analysis of the experiences of Latinx students as a result of its emphasis on the intersections of various statuses and identities.

LatCrit framework has also been used to explore the experiences of faculty. Scholars such as Oliva et al. (2013) have utilized both CRT and LatCrit theoretical perspectives to examine the identities of Latina faculty members in a historically White space, such as academia. They utilized a significant aspect of LatCrit, such as experiential knowledge, in order to share their own experiences. Similarly, Flores and García (2009) drew inspiration from LatCrit to create a safe space for Latinas at their predominantly White campus. Through the use of testimonios and stressing the importance of experiential knowledge, Latina students, staff, faculty, and individuals from the community were able to share the issues that affected their lives. Therefore, employing LatCrit as a framework in educational research gives value and
legitimacy to the knowledge of Latinxs, including gaining ownership of how their lived experiences and stories are presented.

**MINORITY AND WHITE DOCTORAL SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES**

Previous studies have informed scholars about doctoral students’ persistence, attrition, and time investment, but little is known about the disengagement and withdrawal of doctoral students (Whites and minority groups), which are both part of their socialization experiences (Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Barnes 2007). Indeed, most scholars have focused their attention in trying to understand the impact of socialization among the White student population in the United States, even though there has been a remarkable need in conducting research related to the minority female and male doctoral student socialization experiences and support systems, specifically among Latinx doctoral students (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; González, 2006). In addition, several research studies results have highlighted a disparate experience for White and minority doctoral women, Students of Color, students with families, part-time students, and older students (Bess, 1978; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Egan, 1989; Gardner, 2007; Gardner 2008).

Furthermore, a limited number of studies have focused on the socialization experiences of Black and Latinx doctoral students and how race/ethnicity and gender play a crucial role in their academic development. According to Harrell (2000) racism is “a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial-group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable” (p. 43). Indeed, several ethnographic studies have shown that Students of Color have been affected by such historical oppression by White members in their doctoral program. For instance, Gildersleeve et al., (2011) conducted an ethnographic study examining the doctoral experiences
of 22 Black and Latinx students enrolled in three major public research universities and found that doctoral Students of Color experienced racism. The participants experienced belittling their race/ethnic-related research interests by the faculty and did not receive the same research assistantship opportunities, respect and support, as other doctoral students. The student narratives included overt and covert forms of racism were asserting the existence of blatant and ambiguous forms of racism within institutions commonly known as racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al, 2007). According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions are “brief and commonplace verbal and behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 278). Some scholars recognize that doctoral students of color are constantly faced with racial microaggressions through faculty advisement as well as challenging subtle forms of racism, little to no support for race/ethnic-based research or experiences of tokenism in the classroom (García, 2005; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; González et. al, 2002; Haley et al., 2014; Solórzano et al., 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012; Turner, 2002).

Ellis’ (2001) study examined the experiences of 67 Black and White doctoral students and found that race is a salient factor in doctoral experiences in the following areas: (a) mentoring and advisement, (b) departmental climate, and (c) peer interactions. White males were more satisfied with their advisors than White females, Black males, and Black females. A mismatch relationship was often experienced by doctoral students of color with faculty advisors. Advisor and advisee encountered miscommunication due to a lack of common cultural values and research interests, and racist and/or sexist behaviors from advisors. Black females had more concerns about departmental and classroom climate than Black and White males. To White male and female doctoral students, peer interactions were less important than to Black doctoral
students; thus, peer support networks were racially divided due to the cultural differences which made it challenging to connect with White doctoral students.

In their study, Maton et al. (2011) compared the academic experiences and career aspirations of over 1,200 ethnic minority doctoral students to White doctoral students and found that each minority group surveyed (Latinx, African American, and Asian American) reported greater nonrepresentation of minorities in their doctoral programs than did White doctoral students as well as stereotypical representations of their culture in the curriculum. In addition, White doctoral students perceived that there was more cultural diversity in their academic environment than did doctoral Students of Color. Maton et al.’s large portion of their research exploring minority doctoral experiences was methodologically qualitative in order to explain the discrepancy based on why White doctoral students had different perceptions of cultural diversity in the same academic environment. Narratives provided by the participants explained such discrepancy in self-perceived diversity between minority doctoral students and White doctoral students which was dependent on distinct racial experiences and challenges (Ellis, 2001). On one hand, White doctoral students defined diversity based on the number of minority students that were enrolled in the program; on the other hand, the perspective provided by the minority doctoral student narratives was based on intergroup relations and the “psychological and behavioral climate” of the institution (Hurtado et al., 1998).

In Gardner and Holley’s (2011) qualitative study of 20 first-generation doctoral Students of Color, the researchers found that feelings of otherness were predominant in terms of social class and social capital. They also experienced isolation and lack of belonging because most of the other students had educated parents who could provide them with support throughout their doctoral program. Several participants struggled with otherness when they went home and
experienced different interactions with family members or dissolved ties with former acquaintances that they believed may jeopardize their academic success. Furthermore, in a qualitative study, Gardner et al. (2012) conducted an interdisciplinary research study with the purpose of understanding the socialization process of 18 full-time doctoral students from three different disciplines involved in a large scale, five-year interdisciplinary research project that was federally funded ($20 million) at one mid-sized, land-grant, public institution. The researchers utilized the Weidman, Twale, and Stein’s (2001) framework of graduate student socialization, which is divided into four developmental stages: the anticipatory, the formal, the informal, and the personal. The data in this empirical study came from open-ended interviews with the 18 students admitted during the second and third year of the study who were interviewed twice over a two-year period of the study. The participants were 14 White females and four White males. The findings show that the major themes that the 18 doctoral students discussed were the following: 1) the distinctive characteristics and culture that required navigating; 2) the learning process; 3) learning to balance their multiple roles and expectations; 4) uncertainty for their current and future situations; 5) support they received during the socialization process mainly from their peers, faculty, and advisors. One of the students mentioned that his two main advisors and faculty were his best support systems. Interestingly, the three main support systems found in the study were: 1) peer interactions; 2) interactions with faculty and mentors; and 3) family and friends outside the academic setting. Based on the findings, the researchers suggest that new structures and time should be created to encourage formal and informal structures in the doctoral program that can enhance academic environments of connection and collaboration among doctoral students and to consider the formation of interdisciplinary graduate programs in the “professional preparation and mentoring required for
successful socialization” (p. 390). They also recommended examining the contexts related to interdisciplinary graduate student socialization. For instance, to investigate how students experience the co-advising process or the cohort experience in interdisciplinary doctoral programs and how the different institutional contexts influence student socialization.

In a qualitative study, Gardner and Barnes (2007) explored the socialization experiences of 10 doctoral students in the fields of higher education utilizing the socialization framework in order to explore and better understand their involvement and their motivation to become involved, an integral part of their socialization process for their future professional role. The selection of the participants was through a snowball sampling technique, and they were interviewed once 60 to 90 minutes. The sample had an equal gender and racial representation: five women, five men, four Caucasian and six African American doctoral students from five different research-oriented institutions throughout the United States. The findings indicate that four themes emerged in relation to the involvement of the doctoral students: 1) qualities of graduate involvement; 2) continuum of involvement: 3) influences upon involvement; and 4) outcomes of involvement. In relation to involvement, Gardner and Barnes (2007) found that the gradual degree of involvement reflects the students’ experiences as they learned by first observing through attendance to conferences and then through increased participation as “they gradually gained confidence and understanding of the conferences and the protocols to follow” (p. 377). In this study, findings were examined through Tinto’s (1997) theoretical lens of graduate communities and doctoral persistence since “Tinto and others have stressed the importance of social and academic integration to graduate student success and completion” (Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

Although this empirical qualitative study focused on one disciplinary field, it may open new interests to explore the socialization experiences of doctoral students in other disciplines of
study due to the fact that more research must be conducted to explore how different disciplinary cultures encourage the involvement of doctoral students as well as the benefits this involvement can have for their current and future success, and how their socialization experiences influence such involvement. The findings of this study showed that inconsistencies from the faculty among the different academic institutions in relation to encouraging students to participate in local and national conferences, claims a disparity that has been discussed in the literature as a kind of “Matthew effect”, which was coined in the 1960s by sociologist Robert Merton to describe how prominent scientists get more recognition for their academic work than less renowned researchers. Unfortunately, this effect can have detrimental effects on doctoral students’ success in their future job opportunities and throughout their future career (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). According to Gardner and Barnes, (2007) more research must be conducted in order to “better understand the phenomenon of graduate student involvement in all of its manifestations” (p. 385).

Doctoral student socialization experiences are indeed different for White and minority students due to the historical oppression of minority groups by the dominant group (Harrell, 2000). Also, Students of Color have experienced racial microaggressions and tokenism in the classroom as well as in the institution (Sue et al., 2007). Race has been a salient factor in doctoral socialization as diverse cultural values influence the relationship between advisee and advisor (Ellis, 2001). The cultural misrepresentation poses a problem for minority doctoral students since White doctoral students sustain different perceptions about cultural diversity in the academic environment (Maton et al., 2011); this includes first generation Students of Color who experience racism and feelings of otherness due to their social class in a classroom setting with White students whose parents are educated and middle or upper social class (Gardner & Holley, 2011) Gardner et al., (2012) recommend the implementation of support systems such as peer, mentor, and faculty interactions
as well as involving family and friends to increase the participation of other ethnic groups in doctoral programs to improve their socialization experiences as well as the academic environment in general.

**Women in Doctoral Programs**

In relation to the challenges that female doctoral students and recent graduates face, Moyer et al. (1999) conducted a qualitative approach study that identified the factors that contributed to the attrition levels in 224 White and non-White women in the fields of life sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Participants were chosen from the 1993-94 Minority and Women Doctoral Directory (a national listing of female doctoral candidates and recent PhDs.) where 70% were White, 8% were Latina, 32% were Asian American, 7% were African American, and 6% were of mixed race or another ethnicity. They were given an open-ended questionnaire where they asked to describe their most pressing personal and professional concerns and to share what would they change about academia or their field in general. Responses were examined by thematic content and two raters coded a random set of 20% of the responses and refined the coding categories.

The results of the study showed a great concern about employment (mentioned by 54% of the sample) due to the need of being qualified prospects in the highly competitive job market; 2) financial concerns; 3) academic and professional development concerns; 4) concerns about stress and time pressure; 5) problems with administrators or faculty; 6) concerns specific to race and ethnicity; 7) concerns about a lack of a supportive environment; 8) concerns about emotional and psychological health; 9) concerns specific to woman (due to the lack of female role models or colleagues); 10) concern related to academic or scientific system; 11) concerns about securing grant money; and 12) group differences - differences in frequencies of concerns cited by field,
ethnicity -minority or nonminority status, and educational status –pre-doctorate or post-doctorate. Interestingly, 26% of the participants suggested changes in the professional conduct or issues and criticized the ideology that good researchers are one that “devotes all energy and time to work in a frantic and competitive atmosphere that squelches curiosity and balance” (Moyer et al., 1999, p. 618). Moreover, the findings also revealed that the doctoral students’ attitudes may need to be positively changed if improvements want to be seen in academic institutions of higher education besides conducting further research. The participants mentioned the following aspects: a) modifying the job or pay structure; b) improving or modifying the training process; c) reducing tension between research and teaching; d) changes in psychological or social climate of academia; e) increasing opportunities or conditions for women; f) improving or modifying the training process; g) improving mentoring; h) increasing ethnic or gender diversity; i) increasing the family friendliness of academia; j) modifying the structure of the academic system; k) modifying the tenure process; l) reduce politics; and m) group differences.

The participants’ responses revealed issues of relevancy for White women and other female minorities in academia, but also reflected the existence of broader and complex concerns that affect new PhD students and PhD candidates due to the challenging and stressful academic environment in general. In fact, other studies have revealed that female faculty had higher stress than their male colleagues and that the female graduate students suffer more from work-related stress and distress and have less support from their family and academic departments (Moyer et al., 1999). Therefore, it is critical to understand the Latina socialization experiences during their doctoral study as they construct and deconstruct the new epistemologies that may influence them to resist by creating their own ethnic and academic identities that may not always resonate with the mainstream culture of the institution.
LATINA EXPERIENCES IN DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

A limited number of studies have focused on the socialization experiences of Black and Latinx doctoral students and how race/ethnicity plays a crucial role in their academic development. In 2007, there were 5% Hispanic doctoral recipients from which only 2.8% were women (Gardner, 2008). A review of doctoral demographic characteristics for all disciplinary fields between the years of 1975 and 1999 illustrate that minority doctoral recipients represented less than 10% of all doctoral degrees awarded in the U.S. (National Science Foundation, 2012). Also, from 1999-2000 to 2009-10 there was a scarce increase of Latina women who were conferred a doctoral degree. This increase represents 1.1% distribution and 6.6% of doctoral degrees conferred to Latina women within a decade. The purpose of including statistics is to acknowledge the increase of Latinxs presence in the educational pipeline, but also to recognize the persistent gap in their doctoral degree attainment in comparison to other populations, especially their White female counterparts. Indeed, there is a clear need for further exploration of the doctoral experiences for Latina students to gain further insight on such statistics that unfortunately continue to remain steady.

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

Certainly, scholars have originated a robust amount of literature about doctoral student socialization over the past three decades, but few have paid attention to the role gender may play in the socialization process, and the challenges that women in general face during their doctoral journeys since “gender has not received significant attention in the doctoral student socialization literature” (Sallee, 2011, p.187). In fact, popular stereotyping dictates that some disciplines are best suited for male students and some others for female students according to the characteristics that are required for each field of study. Some models of socialization suggest that new doctoral
students look for clues on how to behave and conduct themselves in order to learn the skills needed to succeed in their field of study; and it is through their social interactions that they learn the norms and the values that guide the discipline including those related to gender (Sallee, 2011). Over the past several decades women have entered some male-oriented professions (such as engineering, biology, and mathematics) and several studies have been conducted in order to explore if the socialization differs based on the discipline’s history of gender desegregation (Sallee, 2011). For instance, in Sallee’s (2011) qualitative study, the experiences of the female students proved that the science remains a male oriented discipline to a higher extent, but that the influx of women is already changing the disciplinary culture, thus, the students’ socialization experiences regarding gender calls for the need of further research to explore more in-depth which commonalities exist, despite the clear gender differences across disciplines. In relation to her research study on socialization and gender Sallee (2011) affirms the following:

> Although stage models of socialization are helpful as they provide an outline of students’ tasks as they progress through their doctoral programs, they can account neither for culture of disciplines nor for the identities of students who populate them. I have suggested that students in engineering are prepared to embrace competition and hierarchy, norms that point to a gendered disciplinary culture. Although certain particular interests will students to pursue different majors, the discipline serves to reinforce culture. One wonders what happens to students who do not embrace the hierarchies of engineering. Such values are reflections of a gendered socialization process -one that privileges masculine values, much to the detriment of men and women alike (p. 213). In relation to the minority and majority experiences, Turner and Thompson (1993) were concerned with the barriers that are presented to both women and minorities in institutions of
higher education where race and gender are sources of marginalization according to several researchers (Turner & Thompson, 1993). Turner & Thompson (1993) affirmed that the professional environment fails to fully support and give access to successful socialization experiences for women in general and increase the number of minority women who wish to become faculty in the future. They conducted a qualitative study in a Midwestern university that had students from 900 different countries; institutional data on self-identifies minority and majority doctoral students was part of the data from 1981 to 1990. The minority women doctoral students comprised 1.5% (67) of the total doctoral degrees granted (4,593) whereas majority women comprised a 26.9% (1,234). The interviewees completed a questionnaire of demographic data and were given a semi-structured questionnaire (45 minutes to an hour) and the data was coded by two researchers to ensure trustworthiness.

The findings of the study (Turner & Thompson, 1993) revealed that minority students had fewer opportunities for professional socialization experiences than majority women and more majority women had a much richer social environment such as apprenticeship and mentoring experiences. Interestingly, both racial groups reported that they had experienced gender discrimination. Only six of the thirty-four minority women students were recruited by their department. These minority women shared the lack of sponsorship. One of the participants said the following:

I guess I don’t feel mentored. He (graduate advisor) doesn’t seem as actively a mentor as my undergraduate advisor. So far, I don’t see the possibility of coauthoring articles with professors. I’ve only seen it with male students. I’m not participating in research projects… So far for me none of that has happened (p. 361).
In relation to the socialization experiences with faculty, one student commented that faculty don’t care about graduate students with just a few exceptions, “and if you work for someone, then they are more helpful to you” (p. 362). The policy implications that this study revealed are clear and call for better ways to approach the socialization experiences in graduate school, which are critical for success (Turner & Thompson, 1993). The authors also reported that there is narrative evidence that tenured women faculty had enriching socialization experiences with advisors and colleagues and believe that “a way must be found to implement current official policies to actively recruit minority female students and an effort must be increased to recruit and retain minority women faculty” (p. 367). Stereotyping plays a critical role in women’s socialization experiences; therefore, it is important to consider the female experience to better understand the socialization and gendered difficulties that both White women and Women of Color face, as the influx of women in doctoral study is already changing the disciplinary, departmental, and institutional culture in higher education.

**Gender Roles and Doctoral Identity**

In a case study, Byers et al., (2014) investigated selected doctoral student participants to examine their perceptions about the challenges they face in their doctoral program and the coping strategies that they utilize to overcome these challenges. Participants were 10 doctoral students enrolled in a Tier-II university in Texas. Seven participants were White, two were African American, and one was Asian; eight out of the 10 participants were women who were given semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions which were co-constructed by the students and co-instructors in order to obtain a unique perspective from each participant and unit of analysis. The critical dialectical pluralistic (CDP) philosophical lens was implemented, and which major goal is to empower research participants by allowing them to function as
participant-researchers, who aided to reveal the following five themes through qualitative analysis (constant comparison analysis, classical content analysis): 1) compartmentalization of life; 2) outside support systems; 3) justification for participation in the program; 4) emotional status; and 5) structure of program. The findings of this study indicated that most of the doctoral students were challenged with the various roles that were imposed in each one of the students such as family obligations, work responsibilities, and social relationships in general as well as rigorous doctoral program standards that required high levels of academic abilities (Byers et al., 2014).

The findings of this study are consistent with Moyer et al.’s (1999) who reported that the students’ socialization process, their multiple roles, and responsibilities negatively affected their psychological and emotional well-being. In this collective case-study, women were found to be more inclined to be distracted with their maternal responsibilities and maintained negative emotions during their doctoral program, such as worry, guilt, emotional crisis, and rejection. Interestingly, the participants expressed feelings of frustration for their lack of time to dedicate to their children and being full-time employees. However, despite the difficulties, besides the family support, the cohort system in the doctoral program was an important factor that helped them increase their positive socialization experiences, “their connectivity and collectivity and to enhance their learning experiences” (p. 126).

The findings of this study prove that the multiple challenges, the coping mechanisms, and the accomplishments that these doctoral students experienced as integral part of the socialization process can be an insightful source for faculty members in an effort to increase the doctoral students’ confidence level so that they can indeed take “ownership” of their own learning and enhance further their learning abilities and outcomes, including helping them reach the stage of
“conscious competence,” which allows them to be aware of what they know based on the accumulated knowledge that they have gained (Byers et al., 2012).

**PEER AND FACULTY MENTORING**

Pursuing a PhD is an inspiring yet challenging journey. Many students have rewarding socialization experiences, but many others face many challenges, such as personal and family sacrifices, academic rigor and departmental problems, lack of family and institutional support, difficulty in completing the dissertation and/or lack of financial support among several others. In a qualitative study, Boud and Lee (2009) interviewed 11 female and five male behavioral sciences doctoral students (educational sciences, psychology, cognitive science, and speech sciences; mean age: 45). The findings revealed that doctoral students in nursing encountered multiple responsibilities, financial issues, difficult relationships with advisors or faculty members, lack of academic self-discipline and negative academic self-image as detrimental factors in their doctoral studies.

In research related to doctoral student attrition, the role in doctoral student education has rarely been investigated by scholars even though the social support networks are consistently found to be an important factor influencing doctoral student persistence (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Jairam & Kahl, 2012). One reason for this gap in the literature may be the prevailing assumption that doctoral education is an “apprenticeship” in which much of the knowledge and experiences in the process of becoming an independent scholar are gained from working closely with an advisor or mentor (Golde & Dore, 2001; Kwiram, 2006). However, this perspective tends to overlook the larger environmental context of doctoral education and the role that “different learning communities, including peers, can play in student development as independent researchers” (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012, p. 73).
Indeed, engaging in peer support networks, whether formal or informal, allows doctoral students opportunities to advise each other about courses and professional development, share knowledge gained through coursework or via faculty interactions and provide emotional support during challenging experiences throughout the doctoral process (Austin, 2002; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Gardner, 2007; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Weidman et al., 2001). Indeed, strong and positive connections to peers influence doctoral student resiliency during ambiguous and strenuous situations in the doctoral process (West et al., 2011), while lack of peer connection may be predictive of program departure (Terrell et al., 2009). While doctoral Students of Color share various experiences and methods of responding to challenges associated with their minority status, the existing literature indicates that being a female doctoral Student of Color may add another layer of complexity when navigating the historically male-dominated institutions of higher education (e.g., González, 2006, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010; Solórzano, 1998).

Moreover, student socialization is shaped by the type of relationship established between the advisor and the doctoral student. Indeed, doctoral students who have positive relationships with their advisors would tend to have more enriching experiences through their graduate programs but having conflicting relationships with advisors is also a key factor for White or minority students to leave their doctoral program (Golde 2000; Sallee, 2011). Also, that more frequent interaction with faculty members makes students feel a sense of belonging in academe (Sallee, 2011). However, the socialization experiences are not the same for all graduate students even though higher education scholars have applied generic socialization models to describe the specific actors that play a crucial role in the socialization process. It is important to consider that
socialization is particularly influenced by the past experiences of individuals, their gender, social class, race, and other salient characteristics (Golde, 2000; Sallee, 2011).

Faculty members have been found to play a crucial role in the socialization process of doctoral students (Byers et al., 2014, as cited in Gardner, 2007, 2008, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Jones 2013; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman et al., 2001). Therefore, these findings are significant in order to understand the how some doctoral student participants managed their challenges, coping mechanisms and accomplishment in their efforts to achieve success and completion of their doctoral program and be able to maintain a balance among all the other obligations, especially those of female students. Byers et al. (2012) stressed in relation to further research needed in this area:

Consistent with our assertions, Haynes et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of female doctoral students developing “realistic social, economic, and personal expectations associated with their studies in order to determine the best personal balance of the multiple roles they play. Our next step in the process of examining these select students’ challenges and coping methods is to document each other’s experiences and perceptions for the remainder of their doctoral programs- yielding a longitudinal qualitative study to address the question such as “What are the short- and long-term challenges faced by select doctoral students and what coping methods, if any, do they use to address each of them? (p. 128).

Due to the high demands of academia, doctoral students, particularly, Latina doctoral students, create social networks where they rely on their peers, faculty, and mentors to achieve their academic success thus enhancing their sense of belonging and strengthening their relationships despite the academic rigor, financial issues, lack of family or institutional support. Even though
the socialization experiences are distinct for each doctoral student, it is crucial that underrepresented students, such as Latinas, create and maintain positive relationship with faculty advisors or mentors in order to achieve their educational goals.

**Origins of Intersectionality**

The evolution of intersectionality as a theoretical framework is traced to Black feminist responses to the limitations of the accumulated disadvantage model (Crenshaw, 1991; Shields, 2008). Scholars of Critical Race Theory, particularly within legal studies, have argued that intersectionality has its roots in social justice research and Black women struggle to participate in the workforce. In 1976, *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* was a legal case in which five black women sued General Motors for its seniority policy that they argued targeted Black women exclusively, as the company did not hire black women before 1964, meaning that when seniority-based layoffs arrived during an early 1970s recession, all the Black women hired after 1964 were subsequently laid off. They argued that women had been hired since then, but they were only White women; and Blacks had been hired, but only Black men. Therefore, because women had been hired (Whites) and men had been hired (Blacks), the court decided that there was no discrimination. As a result, rather than sue separately on the basis of racial discrimination and sex discrimination claims, they decided that efforts to bind together both claims would be more feasible. This is how Crenshaw and others came up with the idea of intersectionality (McElligott, 2019).

In the early 1970s, there was a second wave of academic feminism that focused on women’s experience including the question, “Which women’s experience?” Therefore, the origins of the intersectionality as a theoretical lens originated from feminist and womanist Scholars of Color arguing that most feminist scholarship was about educated, middle-class White
women and that an inclusive view of women’s position in society should substantively recognize
the intersections of gender with other salient social identities, most specifically race (Shields,
2008, as cited in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). And such critiques were strong voices in a widely
expressed concern that feminist scholarship should more explicitly acknowledge how group
membership and social positions overlap and change the social identity experience for
individuals.

Additionally, as a theoretical perspective, intersectionality has had more impact in
academic environments that question power relations between groups especially in the field of
education, where Eurocentric ideologies have dominated scholarship on people and Students of
Color in regards to individuality, objectivity, and meritocracy, as “mainstream scholarship uses
culturally deficit models to blame the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of Latinx, African
American, and Native American students for low educational outcomes” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p.
642). Critical race scholars and People of Color in the academy have developed ways to counter
traditional research paradigms that can lead to a more complete understanding of the People of
Color in educational institutions (Pérez Huber, 2009). This is how CRT became a powerful tool
to condemn the Eurocentricity that controls educational scholarship, giving light on the ways
sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and other structures of oppression function within
educational institutions (Pérez Huber, 2009).

According to McCall (2005), many scholars have suggested that intersectionality has
become a central tenet of feminist thinking as well as the most important contribution of feminist
theory to the present understanding of gender and how it is discussed from a theoretical
standpoint. Shields’ (2008) intersectionality perspective “further reveals that the individual’s
social identities profoundly influence one’s beliefs” (p. 301). Thus, the individual’s social
location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the center when investigating gender, which must also be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities (Collins 1990; 2000). It is also widely known that intersections create situations of both opportunity and oppression (Shields, 2008). Also, being on the advantaged side offers access to rewards, status, and opportunities unavailable to other intersections. Furthermore, an intersectional position may be disadvantaged relative to one group but advantaged relative to another. Moreover, identities originate social stratification since identity, such as gender or social class, may be experienced as a form of individual selves, as well as reflect power relations among diverse groups that comprise that identity category.

The evolution of intersectionality has been traced to Black feminists who voiced their concern about the limitations of the accumulated disadvantage model (Mullings 1997; Glenn 1999) and the recognition that the intersections of gender with other social identity categories were the starting point of theory (Crenshaw, 1994, 2005). Indeed, Knapp (2005) asserted that the rapid spread of ideas of intersectionality were because of the moral and political need for feminism to be inclusive in order to maintain its original premises. Butler’s (1990) *Gender Trouble*, for example, posed a challenge to “theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness” which “invariably close with an embarrassed ‘etc.’, at the end of the list” (p. 143). Furthermore, Butler and other feminist theorists critique the very notion of considering a “woman” as a stable category.

In sum, intersectionality is a theoretical lens that grew from the study of the production and reproduction of inequalities, dominance, and oppression; its evolution as a theoretical framework is traced to Black feminist responses to the limitations of the accumulated disadvantage model (Crenshaw, 1991; Shields, 2008) and the recognition that the intersections of
gender with other dimensions of social identity are the starting point of theory. It focuses on social inequality to expose how privilege or social exclusion differs in various social positions by focusing on the interactions of multiple systems of oppression. Furthermore, intersectionality as a feminist epistemology, also aids in understanding privilege and access to higher education, as it focuses on social inequality and social justice issues.

EXPERIENCES OF LATINA DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Literature exploring the experiences of Latina doctoral students is sparse. Several studies illuminate the challenges that students confront include Latino males in the study samples not giving exclusivity to the Latina doctoral experience (Cuádraz, 1993; González et al., 2002; Solórzano, 1993; 1998). Cuádraz’s (1993) study of 40 Chicano/a doctoral graduates and Solórzano’s (1998) study of 66 Chicano/a Ford Foundation doctoral fellows who participated stated that due to their class, race/ethnicity, and gender they experienced isolation, racism, and microaggressions. Thus, this intersectionality calls for an in-depth exploration at Latino and Latina doctoral student socialization experiences separately to investigate how the confluence of racial/ethnic minority status and gender shapes their experiences distinctly.

FAMILIAL SUPPORT

In a mixed-methods study, Achor and Morales (1990) discussed social reproduction and the cultural ecological approaches. The sample consisted of 100 Latinas (82% native-born) who earned a doctorate from American institutions of higher education. Most came from low-income households where Spanish was favored over English and where Roman Catholicism was the predominant religion. Part I consisted of a 12-page questionnaire asking descriptive background information (date and place of birth, date of graduation, parents’ birth places, etc.). Part II emphasized open-ended questions and focused on their perceptions of school experience. Achor
and Morales (1990) highlighted that the socialization, reproduction, and resistance in the schools is rooted in the socio-historical foundations which have portrayed Latinxs as less capable and females as a mere child-bearers whose place is in the home. Nevertheless, such internalized values were described by many of the participants who shared their personal experiences with the researchers which contradict such paradigms. The results indicated that 41.9% of the sample was influenced by their families to pursue a doctoral degree; and, few middle class participants’ backgrounds had family role models who had achieved an advanced degree. Furthermore, a great majority of those who came from poverty backgrounds shared that their family valued education (Anchor & Morales, 1990). The following excerpt demonstrates such family support system:

After my father died when I was 13, my mother had a very hard time surviving since she really had no education. She always encouraged me to go to school and have a career so I would not have as a hard time as she had (p. 275).

In regard to the fomenting the value of education, another participant stated:

My family provided the stimulation and support to achieve. My mother facilitated the academic goals by teaching me to read in Spanish… She shared with me her love of books and reading. My father loved to tell stories. He transformed historical information (p. 275).

Indeed, the families of these low-income and middle-class Latinas played a vital role in their academic success as they went against all odds resisting the racial stereotypes that permeate the higher education system. The intersection of race, gender, and social class status were prevalent elements in their socialization experiences, which were marked by relentless struggle resistance, and persistence, thus, shaping their social and academic identities in unique ways.
INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES

Even though being a Latina with a doctoral degree may sound atypical to some academic institutions, scholars, and administrators, as the paradigms of both social reproduction and cultural ecology have influenced the way in which success and failure is seen for minority students, which, according to Anchor and Morales (1990), it can be misleading since social reproduction theory implies that a massive transformation of society itself can hope to remedy the prevailing educational status of minority students. The findings prove that generational mobility has improved for Latina women for the last four decades. And this is indeed crucial to reconsider for future policy and praxis as Latinas will be the largest minority group in the U.S. by the year 2060 (Gándara, 2015).

Scholarly interest in doctoral education has increased substantially over the last two decades, no known studies or articles attempt to explore the influence of major social theorists on the theorizing of doctoral education, such as those of Bakhtin, Butler, Fanon, Foucault, Derrida, Gramsci, Arendt, Said, and several other scholars have contributed to our understanding of doctoral education (Gopaul, 2012). The work of Pierre Bourdieu in 1977, 1986, and 1990 has been explored during four decades with a focus in social space, agency, education, immigration, art, culture, and social mobility. His focus was to understand the historical saliency of privilege and power within social interactions and the subtle forms of domination that prevail, thus, maintaining social inequality. In the 1990’s the resistance theories advocated by Bourdieu and Passeron in 1977 were an eye opening for those who advocated the individual social agency to contest structures that fomented the social reproduction of inequality. Other scholars (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Lehmann, 2007; Naidoo, 2004; Walpole, 2003) have explored higher education
with various Bourdieusian lens to elucidate how systems of privilege are constituted by and for institutions of higher education (Gopaul, 2012).

Gardner and Holley (2011) conducted research on first generation doctoral students with Bourdieu’s notion of capital, also drawing from other researchers who wrote about “capital”. They focused specifically on how first-generation doctoral students navigated access to college and then pursuit of a doctoral degree. Gardner and Holley (2011) demonstrated that significant barriers existed for first generation students, barriers related to economic, cultural, and social capitals. Bourdieu conducted research on matters of higher education: The Inheritors (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) and Homo Academicus (Bourdieu, 1988) were thorough accounts of the existence of symbolic violence and of the powerful forces of reproduction that operate in educational fields. In The Inheritors, Bourdieu & Passeron (1979) explored the transition from secondary to post-secondary school for French adolescents and found that the notion of social mobility as an outcome of educational attainment was normative and troublesome. In Homo Academicus, interestingly, Bourdieu (1988) described the university as a site of struggle in which different disciplines compete for legitimacy and domination in the academic and intellectual field.

In a qualitative study with a phenomenological analytic approach of Latina doctoral experiences, González (2006) examined the socialization experiences of 13 Latina doctoral students who were in their third and fourth year in the program focusing on the possible opportunities and challenges that are presented in the academic culture, and Latina culture in order to understand the views that Latinas maintain in relation to their underrepresentation in doctoral degrees across the nation. The question that guided the research was: How are the educational experiences of Latina doctoral students at a predominantly White institutions, and
how have they responded to academic socialization? The theoretical framework was production theory to provide a comprehensive theoretical paradigm that social scientists have developed to compensate for reproduction theories since they did not fully describe social phenomena (González, 2006). A total of 13 semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions related to their interpretations and experiences. The institutions where the participants were pursuing their doctoral degrees included Arizona State University, Harvard University, University of California’s Berkeley, Stanford University, and Los Angeles campuses, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Texas-Austin, and University of New Mexico. The parents of 11 participants were of Mexican descent, one had mixed parents and one had parents from Central America.

The findings elucidated that most of the support systems and challenges were similar to the doctoral student population in general, but some were specific to the Hispanics. Positive experiences and support systems were related to academic preparation prior to graduate school, especially during the K-12 years. The students commented that being awarded financial opportunities (fellowships and scholarships) by the institution-wide support systems and diversity had a positive effect in their socialization experiences. Also, the department-wide support systems with diverse peers, students, and faculty had a positive effect since they were also exposed to culturally diverse curriculum (González, 2006). The participants’ negative experiences and challenges were related to poor preparation in K-12, unwanted cultural assimilation, and issues with overt and covert racism including the fact of leaving their home and feeling isolated. Also, having a Eurocentric dominated curriculum, a hostile classroom environment, negative experiences with research and assistantship added to their detrimental socialization experiences. However, González (2006) asserted that not a single voice can
represent the complexity of challenges that Latina doctoral students experience in their departments. The following excerpt was told by a student who maintained negative experiences:

But when I took a step back and I understood—she felt very alone. She was the only Chicana in the department, and I’m the only Chicana in the department right now… So, I can understand why she split. I’m getting ready to split, too (p. 359).

González (2006) also found that not all women resisted academic socialization but found some purposes in the socialization process and new ways to cope with the exigencies of becoming an academic. In relation to successful resistance, some students found their voice and rejected the subordinate status by endorsing their equality among their classmates in relation to their intellectual abilities and academic qualifications. On the other hand, his findings revealed that Latinas unsuccessful resistance led them to more isolation and marginalization. A few participants talked about their disengagement or switch of academic program to survive when the hostility and racist behavior became intolerable. Others mentioned that they had given up to the pervasive academic socialization; some declared that they were victims of academic exploitation as research assistants; and some reported that they ended up doing all the work without recognition.

In the same study, González (2006) found that the most negative form of resistance the participants reported was developing sentiments of hatred for the academic environment due to their continuous struggles as Latina doctoral students. In relation to finding or losing their voice through their academic socialization experiences, the participants who were able to find their academic voice remained in academia and wished to make change and serve their community and Hispanic people; they also used Spanish as a resource to claim their own space and a sense of belonging and gained intellectual and social confidence; they navigated the support systems
that allowed them to survive and challenge the hegemonic Eurocentric views they encountered. Unfortunately, those who lost their voice felt helpless against racism, sexism, and classism led to what González (2006) called “do not go against the grain” type of mindset. The few participants who completely lost their voice lost academic confidence due to not articulating their concerns or confronting criticism because of fear.

The two major implications of this study are: 1) the findings provided an insightful look into the complex socialization experiences for Latina doctoral students and should be in the best interest of policymakers to improve financial aid, recruitment, and retention effort at the institutional, state, and national levels.; and 2) the institutional environment needs to be addressed through state and national funding available to provide successful models of institutional change. In fact, Hispanic-Serving institutions can indeed be good examples of academic work to improve the education of male and female Latinx/Hispanic communities in the United States. González (2006) also concluded that policy makers would also need to disregard the idea that the Latinx or Hispanic culture would need to be modified to be able to address the cultural clashes they have with higher education institutions before a large systemic institutional change is implemented across the nation and he vehemently declared the following statement:

If this cultural dissonance is not addressed, the long-term impact can be devastating because academic preparation at the highest levels is the foundation for a bulk of the economic, educational, social, and cultural development of the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (p. 361).

According to González (2006), there are just a few empirical studies that focus on the socialization of doctoral Latina students, such as their experiences, their experiences of success and failure, and their reactions to doctoral socialization. Therefore, González (2006) focused on
research oriented to the socialization of Latinas in graduate school. Certainly, and for the benefit of further research, this study has greatly contributed to the limited research literature that exists on the doctoral socialization experiences of Latinas, thus, opening new possibilities of improvement and change in this area.

**Resistance and Resiliency in Higher Education**

In the article, “Chicanas and Higher Education: Three Decades of Literature and Thought”, the feminist scholar, Gloria Holguín Cuádraz (2005) chronicled and synthesized the evolution and key academic studies of the Chicana’s development in higher education. Cuádraz (2005) contribution to the knowledge base is indeed essential for a broader understanding of the role that female Hispanics/Chicanas have played in academia. Cuádraz (2005) fervently recognized the urgent necessity for further research in this field of study, as she affirms that:

One pattern remains abundantly clear: Chicanas are severely underrepresented in institutions of higher education at the undergraduate, Master’s, and doctoral levels. Despite three decades of research on barriers to success, retention and graduation, the progress is minimal at best. The question is this: Are researchers destined to find themselves in another three decades reiterating what is already known and lamenting once again the underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education? Or has the time arrived to reflect on the status of the field to advance an agenda suitable for the 21st century? (pp. 215-216).

Cuádraz mentions several key Mexican American women who succeeded against the harsh race and gender discrimination that reduced the participation of women in academic institutions as almost non-existent. The 1960’s was the beginning of change for them through contestations against the stigma that the Mexican-American community was the “Mexican problem” (Cuádraz,
Pioneers such as Corinne Sánchez (1973), Lazarín and Gómez (1973), among several others changed the status quo of female Hispanic women in higher education, “Chicanas in institutions of higher education both formed their own organizations and demanded inclusion and visibility in the National Association for Chicano Studies (NACS)” (p. 223); Also, Chicana graduate students at UC Berkeley founded *Mujeres en Marcha* in 1982 and presented one of the first panels on sexism and Chicanas at the NACS the same year. The first published book, *The Broken Web: The Educational Experience of Hispanic American Women*, addressed the issues of the participation of Chicana women in education (Cuádraz, 2005).

Moreover, Cuádraz (2005) critically questions the future of the theoretical advancements that have been achieved over time by compromised ethnographers and feminist theorists, and critical race theorists in order to address the existing underrepresentation of Latinas and higher education in the 21st century. According to Cuádraz (2005), the National Center of Education Statistics (2003) predicted that Hispanics would reach the 98 million by 2050, thus, representing a 25% of the total population in the United States. Women of Mexican origin will be an estimated 32 million, an 8% of the total U.S. population in 2050. Therefore, increasing the level of educational attainment, especially a doctoral degree, will be an important factor in shaping the educational attainment of future Mexican American women and other Latina generations in this country (Cuádraz, 2005). Latinxs are becoming the fastest growing minority and the low number of Latinxs at every educational level has long preoccupied several scholars who have questioned and contested the status quo of Latina women participation in higher education compared to White or Black women (Achor & Morales, 1990; Cuádraz, 2005; Escobedo, 1980; Gardner, 2008; González, 2007; González, 2006; Vásquez, 1982).
Escobedo (1980) wrote an article analyzing her interest particularly at two critical stages of Latinas – education and professional advancement. She considered that Latinas as a group should be of great importance to mainstream scholars and administrators at academic institutions of higher education and to professional organizations because it will aid them in understanding Latina’s socialization experiences and problems and find ways in which these problems can be solved. Escobedo (1980) declared that Latinxs were excluded from higher education and public-school systems prior to the 1960’s, but unlike Black people, they did not receive any type of support for developing their own institutions (Escobedo, 1980). In addition, the individual and group differences have been considered as the cause of the low academic achievement of Latinxs in general and it is also utilized as a means of explaining their participation in higher education. However, this deficit model has not been used to examine the environmental impact on individuals that limits the educational opportunities, such as available resources, appropriate academic preparation, and societal attitudes and values that have perpetuated the deficit ideologies. Escobedo (1980) declared the following in relation to the deficit model:

Stereotypes about abilities and performance pose barriers to educational opportunities as well as to professional advancement. While women seek to change these stereotypes and to release and encourage developed potential, Hispanics and other minorities face greater socioeconomic barriers and prejudice (p. 8).

The scarcity of Latina academicians in the United States poses several problems that hinder professional advancement in higher education, particularly for the future generations of Latina women (Gándara, 2010). Thus, active recruitment of Latinas will be necessary at the graduate school level with careful guidance to provide support systems that focus on enrichment approach through the socialization experiences of other students and faculty members whose knowledge
may extend more than the traditional coursework. Moreover, building strong support systems at the doctoral level will aid in meeting the academic demands of different disciplines (Escobedo, 1980; Fuerth, 2008; Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Almost three decades ago, Escobedo (1980) openly recognized the imminent need of acknowledging Latina women’s unique status as an underrepresented minority and as future academicians who will have to find new venues and opportunities of growth in the academic world, not only for their personal and professional benefit, but also for the improvement of the academic environment in general.

Vasquez (1982) recognizes that the motivation mediates the socioeconomic barriers that Latinas face especially when they have personal commitment to finish college and persistence to pursue a college degree. Also, Vazquez-Nuttall et al. (1987) asserted that it is the responsibility of all individuals in positions of power to offer support systems to Latinas in order to diminish the corrosive barriers that impede their academic success, so that higher education can be more accessible to them. In fact, social science research has indicated that inequities have prevailed in higher education institutions, as it has focused on the experiences of college and university students and indicates that Latinx, African American, and Native American students have the lowest enrollment and retention rates than White students, adding that “far from being above the fray, faculty at institutions of higher education are immersed in the daunting inequities and painful struggles taking place throughout an increasing multicultural America (Reyes et al., 2014).

González (2007) indicated that Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States and Latinas are not only underrepresented in all levels of formal education from high school to doctoral degrees, but they are also underrepresented in faculty positions comprising a low three percent of all U.S. female faculty members. González (2007) conducted an extensive qualitative
study with Latina faculty who reflected on their doctoral socialization experiences throughout the west and southwest United States. A total of 8,015 Latinas participated in 12 semi-structured interviews that included questions that generated more dialogue. They used snowball and quota sampling to identify cases of interest from people who knew people. The general question that guided the research was: “What were the educational experiences of Latina faculty during their doctoral studies and how did they survive and thrive in the face of institutional challenges?” (p. 292). The theoretical framework was based on the resiliency theory, which focuses on problem solving that concentrates on the assets of people rather than on the deficits (González, 2007).

Many participants shared some of the negative experiences with their dissertation advisors. One student explicated:

There weren’t enough opportunities to cultivate relationships with people at the professional level (at this institution) that was really disappointing… I had some negative experiences… I felt I was exploited by the faculty because I was Mexicana… but I stood up for myself… I’m proud of the fact that I defended myself (p. 294).

González (2007) used the resiliency theory to restructure his findings through the lenses of the following theory concepts: 1) social competence; 2) problem-solving; 3) autonomy; and 4) sense of purpose. González (2007) reiterated the need for academic leaders and agents of institutional change to understand the drastic demographic changes that the universities are already witnessing in order to serve the female students in a future where different types of culture could sustain the higher education systems, and allow a more democratic student participation and treatment. Interestingly, the Latinas in Gonzalez’s study showed a way to cope with their struggles and challenges that required them to be extremely resilient and persistent order to complete their doctoral degrees. The resilient experiences aided these Latina doctoral students to
deal with racist and sexist professors and dissertations advisors since many academicians criticized their research on Latinas claiming that “it was going somehow to ‘ghettoize’ them, or that it was bias because they were too close to the research participants” (p. 298). González (2007) concluded that it is the responsibility of institutions and their leaders to include and give Latinas their own voice in the academic arena since Latinas have been involved in U.S. higher education for almost four decades and many institutions have been oppressive toward them (Cuádraz, 2005; González 2007). González’s (2007) exhortation is realistic and necessary: “If American higher education does not take deliberate action to become more inclusive and receptive to the educational needs of Latinxs, its ability to strive and thrive through the twenty-first century will be severely limited” (p. 298). Feminist theorists and scholars have questioned the advancement of Latinxs in higher education for the past three decades as changes in the academic gap when compared to other minority groups and Whites have not been too promising. Latinxs have been an underrepresented ethnic group whose cultural and ethnic values conflict with those of the mainstream American higher education values, thus, causing high percentages of doctoral attrition across the country and globally. Therefore, higher education institutions must act to become more aware of the educational needs of Students of Color, particularly Latinas.
CHAPTER II SUMMARY

Previous studies have informed scholars about doctoral students’ persistence, attrition, and time investment, but little is known about the disengagement and withdrawal of doctoral students (White and minority student populations), which are both an important component of their socialization experiences (Castellanos, 1996; Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Barnes 2007). Indeed, most scholars have focused their attention in trying to understand the impact of socialization among the White student population in the United States even though there has been a remarkable need in conducting research related to the minority female (and male) doctoral student socialization experiences and support systems, specifically among Latina doctoral students (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; González, 2006). In addition, several research studies results have highlighted a disparate experience for doctoral women and Women of Color, students with families, part-time students, and older students (Bess, 1978; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Egan, 1989; Gardner, 2007; Gardner 2008).

This literature review shows that further research is needed on Latina doctoral student socialization processes, which has indeed been deterred by mainstream scholars, administrators, and professional organizations. The scarcity of female academicians in the United States poses several problems that hinder professional advancement in higher education, especially for the future generations of Latina women who may wish to pursue a doctoral degree. Interestingly, most participants in the research literature revealed that faculty mentoring, and peer and family support were critical to promoting their socialization, research, scholarship, degree completion, and career development. More three decades ago, Escobedo (1980) and several other scholars have acknowledged the essential role that Latinas play in society even though they continue to be an underrepresented minority group in higher education in the United States. Escobedo (1980)
analyzed two critical stages of Latina women—education and professional advancement forecasting that an active recruitment of Latina women will be necessary, especially at the doctoral level. The *Model of Doctoral Persistence* (Tinto, 1997) focuses on an enrichment approach through support systems that can enhance positive socialization experiences for Latina doctoral students where other students and faculty members are also key factors in establishing positive relationships that may indeed contribute to the success and the completion of a doctoral degree in spite of the potential academic, financial, and personal challenges Latinas may encounter during their doctoral journey (Escobedo, 1980; Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

Drastic demographic changes are expected by the year 2050 where the Hispanic population will be the largest minority group due to its accelerated population growth (Murdock et al., 2015). There is limited literature dealing the socialization processes of Latina doctoral students in general that can inform about the academic, sociocultural, and linguistic challenges that they encounter in graduate education (Gardner, 2008; González, 2006). And, to better navigate the academic world politically, socially, and culturally, Latina doctoral students will have to find new venues and stronger support systems. Institutions of higher education need to consider intersectionality as a valuable theoretical concept when examining and analyzing the socialization processes that take place during the doctoral experience for better opportunities of growth and academic success. Latinas need to be better prepared to meet the future challenges in higher education and institutions of higher education need to find better ways in which effective and affective support systems can be implemented for the completion of their doctoral degrees and professional advancement (Castellano, 2009; Cuádraz, 2005; 2009; Gardner, 2010; González, 2006). Therefore, it is important that further research is conducted to explore more in-
depth the role that intersectionality plays in the socialization of Latina doctoral students in an epoch where cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is a common trait in the United States (Mendoza, 2007). In sum, academic as well as private institutions need to reconsider the low percentage of Latina doctoral recipients as well as the alarming attrition rates in order to generate more efficient support systems that can contribute to the improvement of the academic gap among Latina doctoral students in higher education for the betterment of society at large.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

“The object of education is to teach us to love what is beautiful.” Plato

This chapter discusses the methodology I used to better understand the socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students at a Hispanic-Serving institution. I begin by introducing the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the epistemological lens that guided this study. I then provide my own positionality statement and how that influenced my selection of this topic. Next, I provide a description of the site, the overall research design of the study, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Finally, I provide an overview of the trustworthiness of the study and its limitations.

This research project was conducted during the Trump administration, which made a significant impact in the lives of the participants, particularly in the testimonios of Emilia and Verónica, due to the dehumanizing and anti-immigrant rhetoric that was disseminated during the duration of his presidency. Unfortunately, the 2016 presidential election campaign delivered derogatory narratives and established stricter legal penalties against undocumented Mexican immigrants and greater border control along the U.S.-Mexico border. Unfortunately, the pattern of the temporary seasonal worker who entered the United States for employment purposes with the condition to return back home was broken and many Mexican and other Latino families in the agricultural sector had to relocate to towns and cities they had never inhabited before. Moreover, the declaration of “Build That Wall” during the Trump administration meant that America was being invaded by “Mexican rapists” and “bad hombres” and other criminals who were trying to dismantle the core values of what makes “America Great” again. Trump’s extreme vetting ideology and nativist lens are demonstrative of historical amnesia and ignorance about the U.S.-Mexican history. Indeed, Trump alluded and made sure that, “the mythology of being
invaded and taken over felt real as many White Americans scrambled to restructure educational, medical, and other systems to accommodate these foreigners, albeit reluctantly” (Santamaria Graff, 2017, p. 1003).

Also, the toxic rhetoric and incessant arrests, rounds ups, and high levels of deportation of undocumented hard-working immigrants across the nation were detrimental to the Latinx communities; nevertheless many people across the country, such as in Austin Texas, shared their dream of becoming a positive force for change through community-based and social justice work to promote culture and language revitalization for Austin’s east side children attending four elementary schools situated in a low-income Mexican American community, a “winding path to social justice that positions us well for the virulent anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant hatred, politics, and policies of a Trump presidency” (Valenzuela, 2017, p 907 ). Nevertheless, as White supremacy ideologies were widespread, which negatively affected the lives of foreigners and immigrants as well as their families (Stewart, 2017), there was a strong wave of individual and collective resistance, which was the main focus for several scholars and intellectuals through coursework, reflective dialogues, and anti-racist and social justice agenda in education across the Trump administration (Scheurich, 2017).

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I seek to understand, through the use of Latino Critical Theory as the conceptual framework (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), the experiences of Latina doctoral students during the completion of their doctoral programs at a Hispanic-Serving institution.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I framed the research questions from a critical perspective to better understand the participants’ academic socialization experiences. Hence, I wanted to understand not only how Latina doctoral students navigate their doctoral journey, but also how the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and race, amongst other salient identities, affect this experience, and ultimately, how they cope with challenges or conflicts. I explored how testimonios counter the master narratives of Latina women. Master narratives are those created and perpetuated by the dominant group, which frequently portray the lived experiences of People of Color in a negative way (Yosso, 2005). Thus, countering the master narratives of People of Color is important for their experiences to be effectively represented through their own testimonios (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I also explored departmental and/or institutional norms that may contribute to the academic success or lack of it through the participants’ testimonios (Pérez Hubert, 2009). The three research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1) In what ways do the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender, amongst other salient identities, shape Latina students’ doctoral socialization experiences?

2) What are the support systems, if any, that Latina doctoral students utilize during the completion of the doctoral degree?

3) How do Latina doctoral students cope with academic challenges or conflicts, if any, in their doctoral programs?
The figure below provides a graphic representation of the paradigm, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods working in unity with the examination of this topic. Each of these concepts will be discussed in the following sections.

![Figure 6. Graphic illustrating epistemologies, theories, and methodology in relation to Latina doctoral socialization experiences.](image)

**PARADIGM AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

To situate a study means to “anchor it” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 463), which involves selecting a compelling topic, an epistemological grounding, a purpose, a relationship with the topic and the participants, and a theoretical framework and perspective. As such, in the process of knowledge construction, situating a research topic that is congruent with the researcher’s beliefs and worldview is essential as well as a clear understanding about how knowledge is generated and the nature of reality (Jones et al., 2013). As knowledge shapes the topics we research and how we conduct and interpret our research, I reflected on my own beliefs and worldview when thinking about this project. As I situated my research questions and research design, having a clear understanding of my epistemological assumptions and connecting my research paradigm was crucial.
CRITICAL RACE EPISTEMOLOGY

In education research, the traditional or mainstream epistemologies have been created from a dominant ideology, that of a White, heterosexual, middle class man who dictates whose knowledge counts and what counts as knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Epistemology fundamentally focuses on what is considered “legitimate” knowledge and how knowledge is viewed (Pecero, 2016; Yosso et al., 2006). However, many of the traditional research epistemologies question the validity and legitimacy of the knowledge that People of Color and other marginalized people bring to research. As a result, educational researchers have utilized CRT and LatCrit as theoretical frameworks to analyze the role of race and racism and its intersections with other kinds of oppression in the communities of People of Color.

CRT focuses on challenging dominant ideologies that are imbedded in theory and practice in order to bring social and racial justice. CRT is a framework that “works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 119). Ladson-Billings and Tate’s work, Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education (1995), was the catalyst to use CRT as a theoretical perspective in educational research. Therefore, as inequities have remained in the educational system, especially in regards to issues of White dominant ideologies of knowledge, racism, and race (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), the use of CRT in educational research is indispensable, particularly when examining the experiences of Latinxs as “one of the benefits to study racism as a social process is attention to the fluidity of racial categorizations and their embeddedness in power relations” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 860). Regarding the persistent institutional racism and inequality, Clair and Denis (2015) affirmed the following:
Another explanation for the persistent racial discrimination and inequality despite the
decline in obvert racist attitudes can be found in the growing literature on implicit bias.
An implicit bias is an unconsciously triggered belief in the inferiority of, or negative
attitude toward, a group(s). As such, unconscious negative beliefs and feelings about
racial groups may not appear on a survey but may be revealed on everyday interpersonal
interactions at work, at school, or on the street (p. 859).

When studying People of Color in relation to their educational attainment, “mainstream”
epistemologies often utilize a deficit perspective (Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 2005), thus,
minimizing the historical and cultural contributions of these people, a perspective that continues
to permeate academic and institutional spaces (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, epistemological
racism is rooted in the culture and history of the dominant race and has influenced the current
traditional research epistemologies, from positivism to poststructuralism (Scheurich & Young,
1997). Due to the positivistic views in “mainstream” epistemologies, which place high value in
“objectivity” and statistical data, some researchers and scholars often disregard the structural and
systemic barriers that Latinxs face, placing blame on the students and/or the collective culture
instead of looking at the root cause of their issues, and sometimes leaving out the work of other
scholars whose epistemologies differ from the “norm” (Pérez-Huber, 2010; Yosso, 2005). The
exclusion of the scholarship on and by People of Color, their backgrounds, cultural knowledge,
and experiences due to the imposed value on traditional epistemologies in research is of utmost
importance, particularly for Latinxs. Within the realm of CRT research and scholarship, graduate
students who are in the process of becoming researchers and/or professional scholars need to be
fully aware of their epistemological stance, as well as what they know and consider to be
knowledge to avoid conflict when presented with mainstream epistemologies in educational research.

Several researchers have emphasized the value in non-traditional epistemologies used in the humanities and the social sciences, when compared to the highly valued positivistic disciplines (i.e., STEM). Moreover, due to these positivist views about what epistemologies are considered legitimate or not, academia has neglected the experiential knowledge and cultural backgrounds of underrepresented groups, including the way they conduct and disseminate their research and knowledge (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Scheurich & Young, 1997). However, qualitative research permits the use of non-traditional epistemologies and theoretical perspectives that can provide a more nuanced understanding, particularly when examining underrepresented populations.

Critical race epistemologies recognize the value and diverse knowledges that People of Color bring to academia by focusing on the historicity of the intersections of race, gender, class, and sex, amongst other intersections. Indeed, these non-Eurocentric epistemologies challenge the status quo of traditional forms of producing knowledge and bring new possibilities of what knowledge can be, thus, giving value and legitimacy to the knowledge of People of Color. In order to advance knowledge, critical race epistemologies utilize a variety of legitimate methods and approaches, including life experience(s). One such critical race epistemology that is related to the experiences of Latinas and Chicanas is intersectionality.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality focuses on social inequality to expose how privilege or social exclusion differs in various social positions by focusing on the interactions of multiple systems of oppression. However, intersectionality as a conceptual framework, also aids in understanding
privilege and access to higher education. It centers on social inequality, and it provides analytical tools for re-framing social justice issues. In the early 1980s, the concepts of gender, race, and class were referred to as the holy trinity as increasing research in the sociology of race and gender emphasized the illuminating power gained by analyzing interactions among these three systems of oppression and privilege (Romero, 2017). Black feminists developed this new approach which challenged the status quo of former research that examined only one social category; for example, gender, without acknowledging that the experience of gender for a Black woman or a Woman of Color is not the same as it is for a White woman. As sociology became a leader in developing the concept of intersectionality in theory and in research methods, sociologists recognized the limitations of one-dimensional approaches to social inequality. Romero (2017) explains:

Class alone does not explain all aspects of poverty or housing segregation. Gender alone cannot account for wage disparities and occupation segregation. Race by itself does not provide a complete understanding of health disparities or college retention rates. Intersectionality, as an intellectual project, delves deeper into the nuances of social inequality by pushing researchers to analyze the various manifestations of inequality (p. 4).

Critical race theorists have contributed to the understandings of systems of class oppression by documenting the ways in which race had always been the primary division in economics, law, and education in the United States, as well as in many other countries with histories of immigration, colonialism, and conquest. Moreover, intersectionality is concerned with power relationships, particularly the ways in which racism and sexism embed oppression and domination into institutions (Romero, 2017). For instance, the privileges of people classified as
able-bodied, White, male, heterosexual, and U.S. citizen are not personal but institutional arrangements that provide greater access to resources and power. This access is not equally available to women, People of Color, LGBTQ individuals, and people without legal status in the United States.

Therefore, the intersection of gender, race, and ethnicity amongst other social identities, during their academic socialization need to be explored further as it may be an important contributing factor to the historically significant academic underrepresentation of Latina women when compared to White and other minority women who have completed doctoral degrees in the United States. Additionally, crossing from their culture to mainstream U.S. culture during the doctoral process may cause cultural incongruity; that is, the values and behaviors that are deemed necessary to achieve an academic identity may conflict with the racial and/or ethnic identities that women and People of Color bring with them to the scholarly world in the United States (Espino et al., 2010; Torres, 2006). Also, empirical research has found that Latinas who strive to maintain their ethnic identities when they establish their academic identities often experience frustration and guilt during their doctoral journey, as they need to maneuver these two different identities (Castellanos, 1996; González et al., 2002).

Furthermore, the role of gender and how it intersects with ethnicity and race during their academic socialization among Latina doctoral students is of particular importance in relation the successful completion of their program. Some Latina doctoral students are successful in actively challenging racist micro- and macroaggressions, and sometimes, they resist assimilative institutional expectations through various support systems. But other times, Latinas may experience adverse socialization experiences due to the White male-dominated ideologies and practices in higher education institutions. Feminist critique of essentialist assumptions regarding
gender increasingly has utilized an intersectionality perspective in order to understand gender in relation to other social identities, such as class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Risman (2004) summarizes intersectionality in relation to feminist work illuminating that “there is now considerable consensus growing that one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color, and the heterosexuality of everyone” (p. 442). Therefore, when examining the experiences of Latina doctoral students, it is important to consider the intersection of racial, gender, and social class identities and how these various dimensions may further influence their socialization experiences. Intersectionality stresses that the power relation between race and gender are instrumental in understanding the dynamics of privilege and class oppression.

Mansfield et al.’s (2010) study explored how female doctoral students’ gender-related social identities, highly influenced by their socialization experiences, intersected with their racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and immigration status; indeed, the complexity of such intersecting identities caused stress, feelings of self-doubt and isolation for many female doctoral participants. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) found that the tendency to define others by one particular identity may cause individuals with intersecting identities to feel alienated in any group, thus, experiencing intersectional invisibility or multiple subordinate identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), which doctoral students have to experience under female, minority, or underrepresented minority (URM) and such categories can underestimate or negate their existing intersecting identities and nuanced experiences. In the United States, Latina doctoral students are the ethnic group that is generally overlooked due to a more generalized minority status classification of Latino, which refers to men.
Some scholars have found that most research on Latina graduate student success and persistence showcases findings in terms of institutional recommendations in general rather than focusing on the doctoral experiences and identities of specific student populations (Espino 2016; González, 2006; González et al., 2002). Therefore, the production of research that focuses on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race, and class, amongst other social identities, is crucial to better understand the experiences of Latina doctoral students for the advancement of society as well as the nation.

**ANZALDUÁ’S BORDERRLANDS AND THE NEW MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS**

The work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) in *Borderlands* has influenced many scholars as she examined power, identity, culture, and ideologies to better understand the ideological and sociopolitical forces that shaped the educational attainment of Latinas. Anzaldúa’s definition of Borderlands states that “Borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary where the prohibited, the forbidden, and los atravesados reside in a place of discomfort as they negotiate between the conflicting forces in such margins” (Aigner-Varoz, 2000, p. 49). Anzaldúa’s goal was to reverse the colonization that has been passed on to her and many others for many generations through cultural practices and the construction of stereotypes and myths that operate in everyday discourses (Anzaldúa, 1987). Moreover, Anzaldúa considered the theory of Borderlands from the point of view of the transgressor, the unwanted, the disempowered, the one that feels as an alien in the place and culture where she/he was born or grew up. In Anzaldúa and Keating’s (2013) work, they declare:

*The dominant culture has created its version of reality and my work counters that version with another version. The version of coming from this place of in-betweenness, nepantla, the Borderlands. There is another way of looking at reality. There are other ways of*
writing. There are other ways of thinking. There are other sexualities, other philosophies (p. 229).

The Borderland is produced by feelings of alienation and distress with the White dominant culture that sees “others” as foreigners and unequal. However, for Anzaldúa, the Borderlands is not only a space created by people’s discomfort or lack of a sense of belonging. Anzaldúa declared in an interview with AnaLouise Keating that “Borderlands is a metaphor for processes of many things, psychological, physical, and mental. A metaphor that does not apply specifically to one thing but can be applied to many things” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2013, p. 176).

Anzaldúa utilized myths to offer a counterargument to the practice of stereotyping the Mexican culture or other cultures, as something negative or deficient. By re-writing the content of myths, she resists against the epistemic world of Anglos that is entirely based on Eurocentric notions and values; additionally, Anzaldúa argues that the world consists of many ways of knowing, for instance, that of the indigenous cultures in America (e.g., Mayas, Aztecs, Incas, etc.) (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). As such, Anzaldúa uses myths and writing to explain the Borderlands theory, as they are both powerful tools in the process of creating social hierarchies; however, the Borderlands theory is not to be regarded as Anzaldúa’s myth, instead, it is a powerful project of resistance, also considered as “border thinking” or conocimiento fronterizo (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Furthermore, the Borderlands as a theory of identity is significant since self-awareness makes people interrogate the social order of things, which often lead to challenging authority by confronting and resisting against the traditional structures of power that are imposed on those who have often been marginalized, principally women (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2013).
Anzaldúa created the *Borderlands* in order to re-appropriate her body, mind, and soul to voice her own epistemologies as a Chicana feminist poet and writer. Anzaldúa emphasized that the stories about us must be told by ourselves, always paying attention with critical lens to the content of the stories and histories that dominant groups convey in order to question the true purposes behind dominant narratives; overall, one must be critical about who says what and why (David-Saldívar, 2007). In this sense, to Anzaldúa, Borderlands is the right that any person has of self-representation, or *autohistoria* that allows anyone to portray the soul of the artist as well as the soul of the pueblo since “it deals with who tells the story, and what stories and histories are told” (David-Saldívar, 2007, p. 364). Most importantly, Anzaldúa emphasized that the *autohistoria* needs to be defended due to the dominant narratives that depict “foreign others” are not necessarily based on racism but have specific goals, such as capitalist expansion, political control, exploitation of resources, land appropriation, and transferring of wealth among others (David-Saldívar, 2007).

Furthermore, Anzaldúa emphasized the detriment in mystifying woman as inferior, particularly in the Mexican culture as it was an attempt to deprive them not only of their basic rights as human beings but also of their ability to exercise any social influence or use their own agency to make decisions that affect them (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). Unfortunately, the dominant culture (males in particular) seeks to confine women as weak, dependent, or individuals who need to have the support of men to accomplish anything. Moreover, the myth embedded on all these social constructs is that women are “naturally” inferior to men, condition that according to the myth cannot be contested, altered, or reversed (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). However, for Anzaldúa, the so-called inferiority of women is just a myth that can definitely be contested and changed to liberate themselves; and the way women can resist domination is
through attaining self-recognition and self-awareness daring to transgress the social boundaries when entering into the process of Borderlands (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008).

Borderlands may also be considered a state of mind that can be interrogated through language. This does not mean the creation of mental or imaginary spaces where difference is suddenly accepted; rather, Borderlands is being in a state of consciousness which can be utilized to re-appropriate the right to define self-identities since identity is enacted and performed (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2013). In sum, “Borderlands theory speaks about overlapping border spaces and the cultural representations that people in these spaces have to negotiate in order to exercise agency” (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008, p. 44); nevertheless, it is not just a matter of accepting one’s differences; it happens the moment individuals attain self-awareness, which encourages them to dare to enact multiple identities simultaneously when transgressing the boundaries that have been imposed on them by dominant groups (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008).

**DELGADO BERNAL’S CULTURAL INTUITION**

Delgado Bernal’s (1998) article examining the use and benefits of utilizing Chicana Feminist epistemology within educational research noted that this epistemology was mainly concerned about who generates knowledge about the experiences of Chicanas and how this knowledge is legitimized. Additionally, Delgado Bernal (1998) posited that Chicana women had different experiences than other women and men. Therefore, a Chicana Feminist epistemology gives justice to the experiences of People of Color since all their knowledge and ways of knowing are considered in the research process. Although there are other critical feminist epistemologies that address the experiences of women, such as critical race feminist theory (i.e., intersectionality), these still do not adequately address the unique experiences of Chicana and Latina women (Pecero, 2016). However, Chicana Feminist epistemology allows the researcher to
explore and share significant aspects of the unique experiences of Latinx and the intersections that influence their educational trajectory, such as race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, language, sexuality, family dynamics, and geographic location amongst others (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Focusing at one aspect of their identity, such as gender, is essentially ignoring the marginalization that Women of Color experience due to the intersection of all their other identities, thus, limiting our understanding of how and why discrimination happens and the knowledge we obtain about these women. For instance, being an immigrant and bilingual may deeply shape the way a Latina can experience her academic journey (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Delgado Bernal’s (1998) contribution within Chicana Feminist epistemology is the concept of a Chicana researcher’s cultural intuition. Interestingly, a previous term was coined by Strauss & Corbin (1998) as “theoretical sensitivity,” which was defined as a personal quality of the researchers consisting in an awareness of the intricacies of meaning of data. The authors suggested that theoretical sensitivity comes from the following sources: a) one’s own personal experience; b) the existing literature; c) one’s own professional experience; and d) the analytical research process. Interestingly, Delgado Bernal adopts theoretical sensitivity claiming that these four elements are the foundation of Chicana Feminist epistemology and contribute to the Chicana researcher’s cultural intuition in educational research. However, the author argues that the main difference is that Chicana Feminist epistemology includes one’s personal experience, the collective experience, and community memory, thus, emphasizing the importance of engaging the participant in the data analysis process (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

a) One's own personal experience consists in researchers including their own life experiences to help situate the context and research. This may include how to interpret and analyze data and knowing the types of interview questions to ask (or not to ask). It can also help the researcher to
better understand the ways in which a participant shares information or reacts in specific situations. Pecero (2016) asserts that “the cultural intuition within research therefore can help to explain these nuances and better analyze the data by picking up on those details that may be missed by someone who does not have that specific cultural intuition” (p. 74). Additionally, Delgado Bernal (1998) indicates that these personal experiences can also be a culmination of the collective experience, such as those seen from their family, cultural heritage, and history. Hence, cultural, and historical elements (i.e., legends and traditions) can also be included in the research process as they can help to shape an individual’s identity and values.

b) The existing literature is the literature that is related to the topic, which allows the researchers to have an idea of how to better approach the data.

c) One's professional experience allows researchers to utilize what they have seen in the workplace or field (e.g., the classroom, or for graduate students, their assistantship experiences).

d) The analytical research process includes using one’s own experiences and knowledge in the analytical process is the most important component for cultural intuition since employing all of a researcher’s ways of knowing can generate a more nuanced interpretation of the data.

In Calderón et al., (2012), Pérez Huber asserted that a form of cultural intuition can also be a shared vulnerability that happens in the research process when the participant and the researcher enter each other's lives and “become motivated to overcome pain, trauma, or grief; it engenders a solidarity that moves toward a collective effort of healing, empowerment, and resistance” (p. 529). Moreover, cultural intuition “can be a powerful tool for connecting with the participants and not just for the sake of building rapport, but to genuinely provide relief and support in that instance …[it] has the ability to yield change” (Pecero, 2016, p.76). Most importantly, the researcher’s cultural intuition enables collective healing through the sharing of
the participant’s stories and vulnerabilities, thus, empowering the participants and serving as a tool to advance knowledge, promote change, and make a difference in the lives of the population researched (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Pecero, 2016).

**POSITIONALITY**

The researcher is considered the central instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Thus, for this study, it was essential that I be cognizant of my own positionality and the effect I may have on the data collection and analysis in order to effectively communicate rich, unbiased data from my participant narratives (LeCompte, 1987). In relation to the researcher positionality, Jones et al. (2013) stresses the following:

- There often is, and should be, a relationship between the researcher and the researched. This reflects the passion that later becomes the research question.
- Critics of qualitative research often refer to this relationship as bias; however, this is a strength of qualitative inquiry (p. 11).

Therefore, I wrote a journal reflecting on introspections and reactions after each testimonio. To qualify my ability to conduct this research, it was important for me to be transparent and describe relevant experiences that may have influenced how the topic emerged for me and how the data was interpreted (Creswell, 2009; Greenbank, 2003). I approached the topic of the intersection of the social identities and socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students as a Latina currently enrolled in a doctoral program, which allowed me to employ my “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1986) considering that a narrative inquiry approach recognizes the strength of the relationship between the participant and the researcher when employing storytelling (Clandinin et al., 2007).
My experiences growing up as one of six children in a middle-class neighborhood in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico contributed to my sense of ethnic identity, shared cultural values, and traditions with my family and community members, as well as my mother’s clear belief that education is strongly connected with better opportunities and social mobility. My father and mother did not complete middle school because they had to support themselves during their adolescence years. They opened their first business at a well-known market in Ciudad Juárez called, Mercado Juárez. This is probably the reason why I really enjoy going to open markets because they make me feel a sense of comfort and belonging, as they always remind me of my parents’ hard work and determination when they open their first business in the Mercado Juárez when my siblings and I were little. My parents were able to provide a decent life for my siblings and I thanks to their strong will and determination. Since I was in elementary school, my mami [mommy] worked relentlessly as an owner of a supermarket that she administered by herself for 10 years.

My parents were able to provide private education to the six of their children up to middle school. My mother never allowed herself to quit despite the many challenges and struggles she had because she had a clear vision of what she wanted for her children, thus, always protected, and nurtured su familia [her family] the best way she could. Both of my parents accomplished their goals as business owners and always emphasized the importance of humility, hard-work, and education. They taught me that our cultural traditions and values regarding family were an essential part of who we are as Mexican individuals and human beings. They communicated their Mexican pride by acknowledging our rich history, language, and cultural traditions and values. In fact, I grew up thinking that education was important because
my parents instilled in me a profound appreciation for it, as they knew that having an education would facilitate having better opportunities in the future.

My first memorable encounters with issues of race and ethnicity began in my first year of college when I entered the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at the university. My ESL teacher mentioned to me that I should reconsider pursuing a major in journalism because it required a high level of English proficiency, which I didn’t have at the time; nevertheless, her comment did not stop me from pursuing a bachelor’s in journalism. I enjoyed going to college, which sometimes I took for granted since my parents always supported me financially during my undergraduate years. Indeed, I really enjoyed learning, so it was a smooth but difficult transition for me to study in English; however, I was a responsible student and found great support and encouragement among my peers since most of us were *transfronterizos* [bordercrossers]. I also befriended several students from various racial and social groups when I was the treasurer of the International Student Organization (ISO) at the university. This experience enhanced my limited experiences on race, gender, and ethnicity in the United States. I really enjoyed my five years of undergraduate study learning English as a second language and pursuing a triple major in Spanish, French, and Journalism; however, sometimes I felt like an outsider due to my feelings of self-doubt or imposter syndrome, especially in my journalism classes because most of my classmates were native English speakers. Additionally, I did a two-year study abroad program in France as an undergraduate student, which was a life-changing experience, as I strongly believed that becoming trilingual would benefit my career path in the future.

I began my teaching career in the spring of 1997 when I started my master’s degree. I worked as a teaching assistant (TA) during my masters and this experience made me realize that teaching was a vocation not a profession. Fortunately, attending predominantly middle-class
schools from kindergarten through middle school in Ciudad Juárez solidified my career goals to continue with a college education in the United States. Luckily, some mentors and professors inspired me to become an educator during my master’s, especially when I worked as a TA at the university. As a teacher, I always instilled in my Mexican American students the importance of not losing their language and cultural identity through assimilation. Moreover, I developed love and compassion for my Latinx students and many times I saw myself in them. I loved being a language teacher in different places. I have lived in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, France, Texas (El Paso, Houston, and New Braunfels), Minnesota, and Michigan. Indeed, living in these places has deeply enriched my personal and academic life in many positive ways.

In addition, teaching for 22 years as a Spanish and French instructor for public, charter, and private schools as well as the private sector (teaching Spanish and English to Japanese engineers), has been extremely valuable and rewarding. Teaching languages has contributed to my genuine interest and appreciation for diversity and inclusion, as they have constantly reminded me how interconnected we are as human beings regardless of our cultural, ethnic, and racial variances. Moreover, I always reminded my students and beloved son, the importance of embracing and respecting people from other cultures, religions, social class, race, sexes, and genders. Also, during my career as a foreign language teacher, I realized that my Latinx middle and high school students required extensive academic guidance and that the best way to instill in the importance of education was by showing them my love for teaching and learning in order to inspire and empower them. Certainly, I have never forgotten my own struggles when I started at the university with a basic command of English and the many challenges that I had to endure during my bachelor’s and master’s, and doctoral study as a first-generation international student. As I write this dissertation, I recall my own struggles and challenges in academia.
Interestingly, when I started the doctoral degree, I became more aware of the underrepresentation of Latina (less than Latino) faculty in my doctoral program and academia in general even though I was attending a Hispanic-Serving institution. Also, the more I read about the discrimination against Latinxs in the United States, I became more interested in this topic and started my quest for gender equity and social justice, particularly for Women of Color in academia. In fact, in one of my doctoral courses, Qualitative I, I conducted a pilot study in which I discovered the importance of the socialization experiences of Latinas during their doctoral journey. I started reading literatures that informed me about the persistent academic gap between Latinxs and other minority groups across the educational pipeline. Indeed, the knowledge that I have gained from my personal and academic socialization experiences provides me with a deeper understanding of the topic and will lend validity to the study’s results (Maxwell, 2012). The fact that I am also a Latina doctoral student, the criteria to participate in this study provided me with unique access to this group because “the sex, the age, and the ethnic origins of the interviewer have a bearing on the amount of information people are willing to divulge and their honesty about what they reveal” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 184). Supporting other Latina doctoral students gave me the experiential knowledge needed to create and facilitate a welcoming space for my participants when they shared their testimonios, hence, minimizing the possibility of victimizing them.

Additionally, analyzing the testimonios of these 14 women required not only a critical lens and deep reflection, but also an intense emotional labor, as the lived experiences of these Latina doctoral students are a reminder of the many struggles and challenges that women and Women of Color have to endure to complete a doctoral degree. The participants shared their experiences with passion, disillusion, distress, anger, laughter, and hope, they openly talked
about the many sacrifices that they undertook to pursue a PhD. For instance, one of the participants in this current study, Margarita, a woman who I highly admired due to her academic accomplishments and genuine kindness, passed away a few months after she shared her testimonio with me. I really felt that Margarita accompanied me during the process of transcribing, coding, and analyzing her testimonio; nevertheless, it was not an easy task choosing the excerpts that could best represent Margarita’s voice, but I did the best I could to transmit the love and commitment that she willingly bestowed to her students.

Moreover, the writing of this dissertation also involved the transformation of self. I started to notice that writing the life stories of my participants, allowed me to grow not only intellectually but also spiritually. It was an extremely intimate experience that involved what Anzaldúa calls, “a healing image, one that transforms consciousness, bridges our mind, body, and spirit, and reconnects us with others” (Delgado Bernal, 2009, p. 4). I was able to reconnect with my participants in a very deep way as some of them were willing to divulge intimate feelings and painful experiences, such as going through heartbreak and having difficulties with their advisors/mentors. Thus, as I entered the path of a more profound conocimiento of each of my participants, I also discovered some truths about myself; I became self-aware of my own healing process as I wrote and analyzed the participants’ testimonios, as they constantly reminded me of my own challenges as a Latina doctoral student and why my study was significant for higher education institutions. Indeed, for some of the participants, sharing their testimonio was a personal and collective form of catharsis and healing, what I dare to describe as the cleansing of the soul. Certainly, these 14 Latina women embody the possibility of social transformative change, as they are already disrupting the status quo of Women of Color in academia through their language, culture, and a firm belief in what they can accomplish for
themselves academically, socially, and spiritually. These women are *guerreras* (warriors) who openly recognize, enact, and embrace their multiple identities all at once when being in “*nepantla*” or the “third space” (Anzaldúa, 1987). In sum, these 14 doctoral Latina students are indeed creating new possibilities and realities not only for themselves but also for other Women of Color in academia (including me) and, most probably, will never settle for less.

**SITUATING THE UNIVERSITY**

The university where I conducted the study has provided access and excellence to the students in its region and has become one of several research doctoral universities with a majority of Mexican American student population. It has become a national model for creating and executing highly competitive academic and research programs while being deeply committed to serving a 21st century student demographic. It is located in an urban site enrolling 24,879,000 students in fall 2020; In February 2019, it was designated an R1 university (very high research activity) by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education; it is one of only 130 (4.5%) among the 2,883 four-year higher education institutions across the United States. Southwest University serves its primary constituency -residents of far west Texas, southern New Mexico, and northern Mexico. It is a member of The University of Texas System (www.utsystem.edu), offering 73 undergraduate programs, 71 master’s programs, 22 doctoral degree programs, and an increasing number of online degrees. 83 percent of the students are Hispanic, 49% are first in their families to attend college, and an additional 4% are Mexican residents who cross the bridge each day to study in the United States. The university reflects the binational demographic composition of the region from which it draws 90% of its students. The university employs approximately 1,334 full-and part-time faculty members and 95% of the tenured and tenure-track faculty have doctoral degrees or the equivalent in their fields. It has
36% Hispanic faculty composition; thus, Southwest University contains the highest proportion of minority faculty among research universities in the United States. Due to the geographic, ethnic, and cultural composition of Southwest University, where 83% of students are Hispanic and 36% are Hispanic faculty, this study tried to examine in what ways the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender amongst other salient identities shape Latina doctoral students’ academic socialization experiences, what supports systems they utilize for the completion of the doctoral degree, and how they cope with conflicts or challenges in their doctoral programs. For this study, it was important to be cognizant that each participant’s experience may greatly differ from the other Latina doctoral students even though they were all enrolled in the same Hispanic-Serving institution.

**RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN**

I selected a qualitative research design for this project, as I reflected on the purpose of this study and the types of answers I was seeking (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth often through open-ended questions, “permitting one to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories” (Butina, 2015, p. 190). These methods also provide a wealth of detailed data about a small number of participants which increases the depth of understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. As such, this qualitative design allowed me to explore more in-depth the individual socialization experiences and identities of 14 Latina doctoral students, as this emergent design acknowledges the inherent complexity of the human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and honors the notion that there is no single reality or truth when researchers follow an inductive process from data collection to the extraction of themes, to a creating a generalized theory or conceptual model (Creswell, 2009).
As researchers, it is appropriate to conduct qualitative research and approaches when (a) there is an issue or problem to explore; (b) when we need a better and/or detailed understanding of an issue or phenomenon; (c) when we want to empower individuals; or (d) when we want to develop a theory (Butina, 2015). In this project, I utilized a general qualitative research approach and data analysis approaches, which are best suited to inductively address the goals of the project since qualitative research “enables researchers to observe social life in its natural habitat” (Babbie, 2014, p. 302). One testimonio was given by each participant to gather data as well as observations during department professionalization events (EL3 Lab Coloquios) or the Doctoral Women Organization (DWO). I testimonios were audio-recorded by the researcher.

I employed a qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009) and used thematic analysis (Riessman, 2005). After interviewing 14 participants, I reached saturation, a sampling term used when the collection of new data does not shed any further insight on the issue under investigation due to reaching saturation, a sampling term used when the collection of new data does not shed any further insight on the issue under investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); saturation claims that different participants can or will have diverse opinions in any research area, thus, samples must be large enough to assure that all of the important data are uncovered; however, at the same time, if the sample is large, data may become repetitive and, eventually, unneeded for the research study. Therefore, this emergent qualitative approach to inquiry was appropriate for my study, as I wanted to understand the experiences of these Latinas while they were pursuing their doctoral degrees, what meanings they attributed to their experiences, and their intersecting identities, which aligned with a critical race paradigm including Latino critical theory, intersectionality theory, and the method of testimonio.
LatCrit

As mentioned in Chapter 2, LatCrit was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The use of feminist epistemologies combine well with LatCrit as it emphasizes the multiple identities that Latinas embody. In addition, one main aspect of LatCrit is that it is a way to explore beyond just race and ethnicity in the Latinx experience, as it looks at other cultural aspects and identities, such as gender, class, sexual orientation, legal status, and language, among others. Therefore, this influenced my first research question, which explores how Latina doctoral students’ identities shape their doctoral experiences.

Also, LatCrit focuses on the ways in which Latinxs utilize their support systems to overcome barriers. This also influenced my second research question, which addresses the forms of support used by the Latina doctoral students in the study. Lastly, LatCrit emphasizes eradicating the master narratives of marginalized populations through the use of counter stories that promote, “a coalitional pan-ethnic identity and community memory to create a sense of empowerment” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 643). This influenced my third research question, which examined the ways in which they coped with the challenges, thus, contesting the master narratives in order to achieve success and to empower themselves. In sum, as LatCrit advocates for the necessity of enacting change for the benefit of society, this framework works in unity with the paradigm, methodology, and methods that I chose for this study.

Narrative Inquiry

I utilized a narrative inquiry approach for this study due to its emphasis on storytelling as it would fit well with the theoretical perspective LatCrit, Chicana Feminist epistemology, and intersectionality, all of which focus on enacting change and empowering People of Color through the sharing of their stories or narratives. Many disciplines have used this qualitative approach to
learn more about historical and cultural experiences, identities, and lifestyles of people as it involves inquiry focused on narratives of human experience or inquiry that creates data in narrative form (Butina, 2015; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Although the narrative inquiry approach originated from the social sciences of sociology and anthropology (Lightfoot, 2004), it is now cross-disciplinary; it has expanded into education, humanities, and healthcare over the last few decades. This approach was also appropriate for the purpose and the research questions of this study, as I wanted to better understand the intersecting identities of these Latina women since “narratives provide us with access to people’s identity and personality” (Butina, 2015, p. 191). Interviews that solicit stories or oral stories, biographies, written autobiographies, ethnography, or life history are forms of narrative inquiry, all of which can promote new epistemologies by revealing the complexities of the human experience and social world (Butina, 2015; Jones et al., 2014).

Moreover, researchers have utilized narrative inquiry to promote awareness and social change by uncovering and sharing people’s stories. Thus, narrative inquiry is a good combination with a theoretical perspective, such as LatCrit, which main focus is on bringing to light the stories and experiences of marginalized and racialized people (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In narrative inquiry there are three key aspects to consider: temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality recognizes that experiences are “situated in time” (Jones et al., p. 82) and that future experiences can be affected by past and present experiences. Sociality centers on the relationship between the researcher and the participant as well as the participant and society. Finally, place focuses on the actual site where the events and investigation take place (Jones et al., 2014). Therefore, to get a more nuanced understanding of the participants’ experiences, these three aspects need to be considered when analyzing narratives. Furthermore, narrative inquiry
centers on the significance of critical events in the lives of the participants that remain in their memory, which imply challenges that can change the storyteller’s worldview (Jones at al., 2014). Hence, narrative inquiry can further the understanding of the human experience by taking a critical events approach to the analysis. There are several approaches to narrative inquiry based on the purpose of the study and the theoretical perspective employed by the researcher. I used an experienced-centered approach (Jones at al., 2014), as I wanted to focus more on the content of the story, the sequence of events that happened in my participants’ doctoral journey.

In narrative inquiry another aspect is the ability for the researcher to engage in the narrative process with the participants where the researcher should always question their experiences and the experiences that happen between themselves and the participants (Butina, 2015; Pecero, 2016). Based on my positionality section, I am close to this topic because of my own lived experiences as a Latina doctoral student. It was important for me to choose a methodology where I could embrace my positionality and use it in the research process in order to create a shared space of vulnerability where emancipation and communal healing can happen (Pérez Huber, 2012). In sum, narrative inquiry approach fit well within the critical race paradigm used for this study, including intersectionality, Chicana Feminist epistemology, Latino critical theory, and the method of testimonio. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to give authenticity, reciprocity and respect to the multiple voices involved in the study; as such, their stories must be presented as truthfully, authentically, and ethically as possible to avoid misinterpreting a story, and as consequence, misinterpret the participant (Pecero, 2016). Based on these possible risks, I engaged in multiple steps with the data by interviewing my participants face-to-face to listen to their testimonios for approximately two to three hours consecutively to gain a deep understanding of their stories as they shared them and by clarifying the details of
their stories as they were sharing them with me, asking clarifying questions and allowing them to
fully elaborate on their answers. These steps allowed me to make sure that their stories were
presented as authentically as possible, as I wanted my participants to feel that we were also
constructing knowledge during the process.

There is criticism about this approach, most of which is rooted in the positivistic
perspectives and norms that promote objectivity for data to be considered valid or reliable;
nevertheless, scholars who recommend this approach claim that it maintains a separation
between the participant and the researcher so that the findings can be unbiased and systematic
(Pecero, 2016). As narrative inquiry focuses on the human experience and the unique truth of the
participant(s), it is not meant to be generalizable. In order to capture the narratives of my
participants, I selected to analyze them through a LatCrit perspective as will be seen in the
following two chapters. Before the analysis, using critical race methods was also a key
component in the theoretical framework and the research design of this study.

CRITICAL RACE METHODS

Research and theory that addresses issues of race and racism are created to better
understand the experiences of marginalized populations in society. In regards to CRT, Solórzano
and Yosso (2002) stated the following:

Critical race theory advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and
racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of
opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual
orientation, language, and national origin (p. 25).

Several scholars have reported that critical race theory and methodology in education has at least
five elements that form their basic perspectives, insights, methodology, and pedagogy. They are
(1) the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Furthermore, critical race methods require a clear understanding of the definition of race and racism since “Eurocentric versions of U.S. history reveal race to be socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). CRT and LatCrit use counternarratives or counterstories as a method to validate and empower the experiences of People of Color by challenging the master or dominant narratives. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) affirm that “counterstories are a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). Unfortunately, People of Color and other marginalized groups are viewed through a deficit perspective lens and typical stereotypes that misinterpret a community (Yosso, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that researchers employ these counterstories or counternarratives to challenge the master narratives or majoritarian story and the views of what should be considered normative or normal in society.

Master narratives posited by the dominant culture often portray marginalized groups in a negative way, blaming their cultures, family, or backgrounds for their educational attainment (Yosso, 2005). The term master narratives can be problematic as it continues to propagate the term “master” in the narrative. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, I used master narratives to explain the significance of counterstories in educational research. Counterstories see the experiences of People of Color as an asset, to “counter” the deficit perspective that explains their lived experiences; in addition, counterstories can provide agency to marginalized communities. They can be in the form of composite stories, personal narratives, or narratives of
others. Composite stories can include stories from various sources, such as from literature on the topic and personal, and other’s stories to present the experiences of People of Color; personal narratives may be autobiographies that describe oppressive or marginalizing situations. With the narratives of others, the person shares the story of someone who has experienced oppression or racism (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Pecero, 2016). In order to be congruent with these epistemological and theoretical perspectives, I used critical race methods along with a narrative inquiry guided by a critical lens to challenge the master narratives by relying on my participants’ own narratives or testimonios.

Critical race methodology is a theoretically grounded approach to research regarding the experiences of People of Color as it constitutes the following: (1) it foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process and how various intersections affect them; (2) it challenges the traditional research paradigms, theories, and texts used to describe their experiences; (3) it offers a transformative solution to gender, race, and class subordination; (4) it focuses on their racialized, gendered, and classed experiences, viewing these experiences as strengths; and (5) it utilizes an interdisciplinary knowledge base of history, ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of Students of Color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of these methods is to give power and validation to the experiences of People of Color and other marginalized populations in society.

Interestingly, transformational resistance framed within the tenets of CRT and LatCrit framework allow us “to look at resistance among Students of Color that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that the individual and social change is possible” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 320). Solórzano and Bernal (2001) defined human agency, an aspect of resistance, as “the confidence and the skills to act on one’s behalf” (p. 316). They described
transformational resistance as one where the students have some awareness and critique the pervading oppression and domination, driven by an interest in social justice. As consequence, these students tend to have a high potential for social change, as they are driven by the negative stereotypes or forms of oppression to achieve their goals and help other individuals from marginalized communities. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) categorized various types of resistance: (1) self-defeating resistance; (2) conformist resistance; and (3) transformational resistance. Furthermore, as cited in Solórzano and Bernal (2001), Yosso’s (2000) work on critical media literacy, contributed to the model of “resilient” resistance when examining the Chicana/o students’ transformational resistance, which included attempting to “prove others wrong” (p. 319) by utilizing subtle strategies during the process of resistance. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) defined resistance as:

Surviving and/or succeeding through the educational pipeline as a strategic response to visual micro-aggressions. Resilient resistance is at the intersection between conformist and transformational resistance where the strategies students use leave the structure of domination intact, yet help the students survive and/or succeed (p. 320).

Therefore, agency and resistance pair well within the LatCrit theoretical perspective as counter stories can serve as one method of resistance for historically racialized and marginalized populations. Moreover, narrative inquiry approach with a critical lens is an overarching approach that can be used to challenge the dominant Eurocentric epistemologies in academia, as it showcases the significance of experiential knowledge and the commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Delgado, 2002), and can also include the use CRT methods, such as testimonios and counterstories.
**Testimonios**

*Testimonio* is a method that originated from the field of Latin American Studies and has been used to document the experiences and/or injustices towards oppressed or disadvantaged groups (Pérez Huber, 2009). It has moved to other fields such as ethnic studies, women’s studies, anthropology, education, psychology, and humanities and women of color have used *testimonio* to register and/or theorize their own experiences of struggle (Pérez Huber, 2009). Pérez Huber (2009) defined *testimonio* as “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future… the process of *testimoniando* is to denounce racial and social injustice and allows for the repositioning of power in the traditional academic roles of researcher-subject relationships (p. 644).

Moreover, Latinx scholars have used *testimonio* as a methodology to transgress against the educational inequities and systemic oppressions as well as a way to demonstrate through the use of *testimonios* the transformation of self and the possibility of social change, as they seek what Anzaldúa calls, “a healing image, one that transforms consciousness, bridges our mind, body, and spirit, and reconnects us with others” (Delgado Bernal, 2009, p. 4). Therefore, *testimonios* serve to tell the experiences and stories of People of Color in order to empower their voices. For Latinas *testimonios* honor the subjectivities related to their intersecting identities (e.g., sexual, phenotype, language, religion, immigration status) and allow for counterstories that advocate for the voices that have been marginalized or silenced, particularly in education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) postulated that *testimonios* are critical reflections of the experiences of individuals in particular sociopolitical realities. Thus,
using *testimonio* as a methodological tool highlights the sociopolitical need to address educational inequities as it has been used as an approach to understand the individual’s experience in connection with a collective Latina experience that has been historically marked by marginalization, resistance, and survival (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Pérez Huber (2009) saw five areas of alignment among the elements used in LatCrit framework and those in *testimonio*: “1) revealing injustices caused by oppression; 2) challenging dominant Eurocentric ideologies; 3) validating experiential knowledge; 4) acknowledging the power of human collectivity; and 5) commitment to racial and social justice” (p. 645). Pérez Huber explained how *testimonio* can help address each of these five areas. First, individuals can share their stories related to injustices, which implies the need for social justice (addressing areas 1 and 5). In addition, this method acknowledges the experiential knowledge of people and their communities to uncover their marginalization (addressing areas 3 and 4). Lastly, the use of *testimonio* and LatCrit challenges the traditional Eurocentric ideologies by focusing on the stories of People of Color with an asset-based lens and by countering the dominant or master narratives (addressing area 2).

As I undertook this study, I was very cautious in using *testimonio* because my concern was first to utilize a methodology that can tell the stories of Latina doctoral students but without romanticizing their lived experiences or victimizing them. Second, traditional methodological approaches may produce findings that may not accurately capture the reality, power, and complexity of each participant’s experience considering my own positionality as an outsider and insider Latina doctoral student. Hence, utilizing the LatCrit framework was critical to the process of *testimonio* for the purpose of this study, as I explored the lived experiences of 14 Latina
participants. Therefore, the elements of LatCrit and testimonio aligned well in this study since I was interested in bringing legitimate value and justice to their voices.

**SELECTION CRITERIA**

I used purposeful sampling (Jones et al., 2014) to select the participants for the study; this type of sampling aids the researcher in identifying information-rich cases and reflects the purpose of the study. I recruited fourteen Latina doctoral students that met the following criteria in order to be eligible to participate in the study:

A) Be a Latina doctoral student.

B) Be enrolled in a doctoral program in the institution where the study will be conducted.

C) Have completed at least one academic year of doctoral study.

D) Be 25 to 65 years old.

I was able to recruit a total of 14 participants for the study. Two participants from psychology, three participants from education, three participants from rhetoric and composition, one participant from biology, two from health sciences, and three from the field of engineering. A total of 11 participants were U.S. citizens and three were international students from Latin American countries. Two participants were in their fifth year of doctoral study, three were in their fourth year; two were in their third year; two were in their second year; and five had just completed their first year of doctoral study. All the participants, including the three international students, self-identified their race as White and their ethnicity as Latina on the demographic survey that I provided before they shared their testimonio, as shown in the participant’s background information table below:
### Table 2

Participants’ Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-identified Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years in PhD</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Migratory Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julieta</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socorro</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the educational attainment of the parents, the following table showcases their educational attainment. For instance, the parents of four participants, Ana, Mari, Andrea, and Sunshine earned a bachelor’s degree in Mexico. Veronica’s mother earned an associate degree, and her father earned a bachelor’s degree in Mexico, as well. One participant, Sally, had a father who also earned his bachelor’s degree in Peru and her mother completed high school. Both parents of Margarita finished high school. For Julieta, her mother earned a bachelor’s degree and her father completed middle school. Bella and Socorro’s mother completed high school and their father attained elementary school only. Eva’s mother attended elementary school until third grade and her father completed high school. Emilia’s parents completed elementary school only. Maya’s parents attended elementary school until third grade.
Table 3

Parents’ Educational Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julieta</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verónica</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socorro</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment of Participants

After this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Southwest University, I was able to recruit 14 women through purposeful sampling who self-identified as Latina and had completed the first year of doctoral study. Jones et al. (2014) explained that purposeful sampling is guided by the research design, and this sampling leads to “information-rich” cases (p. 107). I sent out invitations to participate via email to nine doctoral program directors in different disciplines whose emails were available at the university directory: engineering, chemistry, geology, computer science, health sciences, biology, psychology, mathematics. Two participants from the health sciences and three participants from rhetoric and composition contacted me via email to express their willingness to participate in my study, as they were sent the invitation to participate by the program directors that I had emailed. Participants were able to contact me, the principal researcher, to receive more information,
including the informed consent document, and to schedule an interview since they were interested in participating. I recruited seven participants through convenience sampling (also known as accidental sampling or haphazard sampling), a nonrandom sampling where individuals of the target population that meet specific criteria for the study or are simply accessible to the researcher (but also meet the criteria), such as geographical proximity, easy accessibility, availability, or willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). I also recruited two participants through snowball sampling (Thompson, 2002) where individuals in the sample are asked to identify other individuals who are part of their social networks. The participants were informed via email and telephone. Study participants were provided with a letter of informed consent to review prior to selection and a questionnaire about their social and academic experiences in the doctoral program that aided in determining full eligibility to participate in the study and provide important background information before the sharing of their testimonio, which took approximately 15 minutes. The informed consent documents were provided to participants who met the selection criteria and were interested in participating in the research. Contributors were asked to sign the informed consent document written in English prior to their testimonio; each participant was provided with a copy of the informed consent document to keep. The researcher kept the signed informed consent documents in a locked file cabinet at home. The total amount of time for each interview was approximately two to three consecutive hours.

**DATA COLLECTION**

For this study, the data collection consisted of a demographic survey and the participants’ oral testimonios. The participants were given a comprehensive description of the research study including eligibility, time commitment, and information that would be gathered. I sent out an email to the participants that express their interest in participating in the study. When we
allocated the time and place, I gave them the consent form [Appendix A] and the demographic survey to be reviewed and signed prior to beginning their testimonio. The demographic survey consisted of information on their background characteristics, such as age, race, ethnicity, language(s) spoken, siblings, children, marital status, parental education, part-time/full-time job, the year they began the doctoral program and type of doctoral program [Appendix B]. Additionally, I included an open-ended question at the end of the demographic survey so the participants could disclose other aspects of their academic identity and goals that were meaningful to them. I also provided a participant recruitment letter to introduce myself and explain the purpose and the benefits of the study as well as my email for the participants to contact me, if they were interested in participating [Appendix C].

The participants were asked to complete this portion before giving their testimonio. The purpose of the demographic survey was to gain more insight about their backgrounds and the unique identities that they would bring to the study. After the survey was completed and the consent form signed, I asked the participants to testimoni or "to give testimony" of their papelitos guardados (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012), as they are "previous experiences otherwise silenced or untold" (p. 364). My intention was to have participants reflect on their doctoral journey, a process that they may never been asked about or may never have had the opportunity to do. As I was aware that not all my participants may have experienced marginalization, my hope was that through their testimonios, I would unveil the stories that were kept concealed or silenced as well as any incidents of inequality during their doctoral study. Moreover, I tried to be mindful of not portraying testimonio as simply a narrative of adversity or struggle, but also include positive moments in their life that influenced their academic success, which is addressed in the second research question regarding support systems during their doctoral studies. Indeed,
such positive moments allowed me to better understand what types of strategies and systems of support were indeed most helpful for Latina doctoral students, thus, permitting me to address in Chapter 5 several recommendations that would be most beneficial for them and for future Latinas in graduate school.

I briefly shared my own testimonio with each participant before they shared their testimonio, which allowed them to get to know who I was and build rapport between us (Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, to provide additional guidance and information on what to speak about during their testimonio, I encouraged them to reflect on their experiences prior to beginning their doctoral program, their perceptions, and feelings about entering a doctoral program, and their experiences during their doctoral program, emphasizing any challenges, obstacles, and successes during this time. The questions can be found in the appendix section [Appendix D]. I provided the questions only to help them get started but the participants were not required to answer all of them or to follow a prescribed order to make them feel comfortable and in charge when sharing their stories. All the participants gave an oral testimonio; we set up a time and place chosen by each participant to conduct the testimonio. All the testimonios took approximately between two to three consecutive hours and were recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. The data obtained from the testimonios were complemented with observations in which I took field notes (Emerson et al., 2011). These observations took place in doctoral presentations offered by the Ethnography of Languages, Literacies, and Learning Lab in the College of Education (EL3 Lab) and during several meetings of the Doctoral Women Organization (DWO). I had the intention to obtain data through focus groups; however, only two women showed interest in participating, so I decided not to conduct focus groups for this study. In order to ensure privacy and confidentiality, the participants’ names and the name of the institution were not used in this study; instead, a
pseudonym was chosen by each participant and the institution was described in terms of institution type (HSI) and regional location (Southwest) rather than state.

**Data Analysis**

The overall approach that I employed to analyze the data centered on a narrative analysis process. One model of narrative analysis is the thematic analysis, which focuses on the content of the story with the specific intention of finding common patterns or themes among various participants (Riessman, 2005). As I chose to examine the experiences of Latina doctoral students at a Hispanic-Serving institution, I employed a thematic analysis of the data from data that I collected through their *testimonios* (Pérez Huber, 2009). Thematic analysis uses stories as units of analysis in order to examine and gain a better understanding of how people make meaning in their lives based on their experiences. This design is extremely suitable for inquiries exploring cultural values and meanings as well as the development of identity (Riessman, 2005; Merriam, 2009). In the preliminary data analysis stage, I used the *testimonios* of my participants and, through the lens of LatCrit, began to create categories and themes from the data that centered on issues such as race, racism, and other biased behavior (Pérez Huber, 2012).

I wrote reflective memos after each participant shared their *testimonio* with me, including my own perceptions, emerging themes, and possible patterns. I transcribed and analyzed the data using a variety of approaches and software tailored towards qualitative thematic analysis (e.g., open-coding, NVivo). I identified specific themes and other important findings relevant to the research goals of the study. Data analysis consisted of three stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data display; and 3) conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved rereading the interview data along with the audio-recordings and conducting open, line by line coding to identify what patterns or themes emerged throughout each *testimonio*. After coding the data for a second time, the data
was chosen for display, which allowed me to have a more accurate interpretation of data. After assigning codes to the entire transcript of each participant’s *testimonio*, I reviewed codes and grouped certain codes into sub-codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to generate categories and then themes. Conclusions were drawn after interpretations of analyzed data were carefully revised and their implications for the research questions posed.

**Trustworthiness**

In order to maintain the trustworthiness as a researcher, I made sure that my own experiences and knowledge as Latina doctoral student did not interfere on the analysis of the *testimonios* of my 14 participants, which also aided in not marginalizing my participants’ lived experiences. In addition, trustworthiness, and validity of the findings were verified by triangulating different sources of information: the *testimonios* or thick descriptions of the narratives, the reflective memos, and the marginal notes. In order to be as accurate as possible, I asked each participant to clarify any information that I did not understand during the sharing of their *testimonio*. In addition, I contacted some participants to verify some aspects of the *testimonio* that needed further explanation, and then, I carefully reviewed and corrected any discrepant evidence (Creswell, et al., 2011; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I created a list of unique questions/topics to start the conversation, but I did not limit the scope of that list with the sole intention of allowing the participants to guide the conversation throughout the delivery of the *testimonio* (Wengraf, 2001). Therefore, each participant had a set of questions/topics that explicitly related to their narrative or *testimonio* [Appendix D]. As my ultimate goal was to maintain the integrity of the story they shared with me, in my reflective memos, I acknowledged the possible personal bias that might have influenced the findings. Deeply reflecting on the memos I wrote was critical in order to separate my personal experiences from the participants’
experiences. In addition, a constructivist worldview was incorporated in the research study, in which claims are based on multiple realities, closeness, discussion of the researcher’s biases and interpretations, inductiveness, and informal literary style (Creswell et al., 2007; 2011).

**Benefits of the Study**

There are five potential benefits of this study, and they include:

1) This dissertation adds to the literature regarding Latinas in graduate education and the use of critical race methods and epistemologies in higher education research.

2) It can inform various stakeholders and progressive policy makers on the experiences of Latina doctoral students so that they can create innovative programs, initiatives, and policies with the intention of recruiting and retaining Latina graduate students, especially at the doctoral level.

3) Administrators can use these findings to create effective workshops, programs, and initiatives regarding the needs of Students of Color, particularly Latina women, to provide support and an inclusive environment across campus.

3) For faculty, the results of this study can provide substantial insight into the unique experiences of these women and how they can best support other Latinas in graduate school through teaching, advising, and mentoring, regardless of their various identities, which have been found to be critical to promoting positive socialization experiences as well as research, scholarship, degree completion, and career development.

5) This study can be an opportunity for Latina doctoral students to reflect on their own beliefs, worldview, practices, support systems, personal and academic goals, aspects of their experiences that may positively influence their future academic endeavors and socialization.

**Limitations**

Limitations for this study included the following:
1) The participants’ *testimonios* cannot be generalized beyond Southwest University, as they will not represent the stories of all Latina doctoral students’ personal and academic socialization experiences.

2) There is a chance that I may be unintentionally biased in the interpretation of my participants’ responses, as we share some personal experiences, thoughts, and sentiments. However, I was extremely aware of my own positionality and potential biases, using reflective memos to separate my own feelings and ideas from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
CHAPTER III SUMMARY

The current research study sought to explore the socialization experiences of Latina students during the completion of their doctoral program at a Hispanic-Serving institution. The research questions mainly focused on how the intersection of their various identities influences their doctoral experience as well as the support systems they used. I utilized *testimonios* in order to provide the participants the opportunity to share their personal story. Based on the focus of the study, I chose the methodology of narrative inquiry, and the theoretical perspective of Latino Critical Theory, and my feminist epistemological stance on intersectionality and Chicana Feminist epistemology, which were well-suited for this current study. As intersectionality promotes social justice and validates the intersection of the various identities of People of Color and Chicana Feminist epistemology validates all the researcher’s ways of knowing and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998). As such, a narrative inquiry approach with a critical lens is another method that can be used to challenge the dominant knowledge of academia.

LatCrit as a critical framework can assist the researcher in the unveiling of the inequalities that still are present through the educational pipeline, paying particular attention to issues related to the Latinx community, such as ethnicity, immigration status, gender, and sexuality. Espino et al. (2012) explain that by sharing their own *testimonios* in an academic space, they were also engaging in an act of resistance by revealing their own experiences. Therefore, a LatCrit narrative inquiry approach can function as a form of resistance for these doctoral women that question the status quo of academia, which still privileges Eurocentric ideologies and research models. Through a narrative inquiry methodology with a critical lens, using *testimonio* to produce the narratives of the participants serves several purposes. First, as *testimonio* is the first step of social change, as it has the ability of raising critical consciousness.
or conscientização (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Also, the narratives showcased the lived experiences of a student population that may be overlooked in academia (González, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, testimonio privileges the participant’s voice through all phases of the research study, which aids in eliciting a safe space where a collective process can take place between the participant and the researcher. Finally, narrative inquiry with a critical lens approach showcases the commitment to social justice and the significance of experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Delgado, 2002).

In sum, the use of a critical race epistemology, Latino Critical Theory, feminist epistemologies, such as intersectionality and Chicana Feminist epistemology, and narrative inquiry provides the possibility to explore how gender, ethnicity, race, language, sexuality, and other salient identities that impact the doctoral experiences of Latina students at a Hispanic-Serving institution. With these collective efforts, I hope that this research study will not only contribute to the existing literature, but also to the needed critical dialogue concerning the unique experiences of these 14 women, their multiple marginalized identities, their difficulties and challenges within an educational system that has historically undermined the experiential knowledge and contributions of People of Color, and the steps that higher education institutions can all take to create a more welcoming and inclusive academic environment for the benefit of academia and society in general.
CHAPTER IV: LATINA SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES IN DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

“This absurdo y fugaz es nuestro paso por el mundo, que sólo me deja tranquila el saber que he sido auténtica, que he logrado ser lo más parecido a mí misma que he podido.” Frida Kahlo

This chapter presents the findings from the participants’ testimonios to address the three research questions that guided this study, which are the following: (1) In what ways do the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender, amongst other salient identities, shape Latina students’ doctoral socialization experiences?; (2) What are the support systems, if any, that Latina doctoral students utilize during the completion of the doctoral degree?; (3) How do Latina doctoral students cope with academic challenges or conflicts, if any, in their doctoral programs?

In order to present these findings, I divided into five sections: (1) an explanation of the generational categorization for each participant based on the ages they immigrated to the United States (see Table 3); (2) a detailed background for each participant; (3) findings presented that focus on the first research question; (4) findings presented that focus on the second research question; and (5) findings presented that focus on the third research question. The specific participants emphasized in each section were selected due to the relevance to the theme and the significant impact that particular socialization experiences had during their doctoral journey.

GENERATIONAL CATEGORIZATION

As indicated above, this chapter begins with a brief explanation of the generational categorizations based on each of the participants’ immigration to the United States. As illustrated in Table 2 in the previous chapter, most of the participants are U.S. citizens except for three participants who self-identified as international students. However, some of the participants immigrated at different ages to the United States, as did their parents; therefore, providing an
explanation of their generational categorization was necessary in order to better understand their socialized experiences and adaptive outcomes as some of them came during their childhood, others during adolescence, and a few during adulthood. Based on extensive research regarding the classifications of generations in the United States, Rumbaud (2004) reported the following information depending on whether migration occurred during early childhood (ages 0-5), middle childhood (6-12), adolescence (in their teens), or adulthood (18 or older), as “foreign-born adolescents, elementary-school-age children, and pre-school children are at starkly different life stages at the point of migration,” and they “begin their adaptation processes in very different social contexts, and can be classified accordingly” (p. 1167). According to Rumbaud (2004), the classifications are as follows: (1) generation 1.75 are those individuals who arrive in early childhood (ages 0-5) as their adaptation and socialization are closer to that of the U.S.-born second generation youth (they have vague or no memory of their country of origin and they learned to read and write in English (and usually speak like “native speakers” of English); (2) generation 1.5 are those people who arrive in middle childhood (ages 6-12) and whose education is largely completed in the United States. They began to learn or have learned to read and write in their mother tongue at schools abroad; (3) generation 1.25 are those who immigrate in their adolescent years (ages 13-17), attend secondary schools or if older, they may go directly into the workforce. They may or may not come with their parents/family. Their adaptive outcomes and experiences are closer to the first generation of immigrant adults than to the U.S. born second generation (Rumbaut, 2004, as cited in Rumbaut, 1997a); (4) first generation refers to those individuals born and socialized in other country who immigrated to the United States as adults - 18 years or older; and (5) second generation are U.S. born and U.S. socialized children who have one foreign-born parent or both foreign-born parents who immigrated as children or adults to the
United States. The following table shows the participants’ migration experiences that fit into this generational structure.

### Table 4 Participants’ Generational Categorization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Generational Categorization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Second generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>Second generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>Second generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Second generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>1.5 generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine</td>
<td>1.5 generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julieta</td>
<td>1.25 generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>First generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>First generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>First generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>First generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>International Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>International Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socorro</td>
<td>International Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LATINA DOCTORAL STUDENTS’ BACKGROUNDS**

The following section provides the background information of the 14 of the Latina doctoral students who participated in the study to provide a better understanding of their personal and academic socialization experiences prior to pursuing a doctoral degree and the reasons that led each participant to continue their education. Moreover, their testimonios, will demonstrate that many of their previous experiences influenced or shaped the ways in which they approached their doctoral experience. To protect the identities of all the participants in this study, I used a pseudonym for the institution [Southwest University] even though some of the demographic information will be shared to further understand the space. Furthermore, the participants’ names are all pseudonyms chosen by the participants and any other names that the participants mentioned are pseudonyms in order to safeguard the identity of the individual. To protect the participants’ confidentiality, some specific details may have been slightly changed when I
deemed it necessary for further protection. Nonetheless, the integrity of their testimonios about their doctoral experiences remained intact. Lastly, the general discipline in which each participant is enrolled will be revealed as well as the specific doctoral degree program.

**Bella**

Bella is a 27-year-old, first generation, third year doctoral student in the field of psychology. She self-identifies as Latina. Bella’s parents and family emigrated from Mexico to settle in a large metropolitan city in the United States. Her parents supported her education and did their best in providing better opportunities for Bella. She speaks Spanish with her husband sometimes but speaks English most of the time at home and at the university. Bella attended a community college in her hometown for a couple of years before she transferred to the university to pursue a master’s degree. Her undergraduate years went well academically, due to a mentor and professor who played a significant role in her academic success and hired her to do research for a couple of years. He encouraged Bella to apply to a master’s program in psychology and provided fine letters of recommendation, which led her to having more possibilities in terms of being accepted into a good program.

Bella completed her undergraduate degree successfully and moved to a different city to pursue her master’s degree in psychology. During her master’s program, Bella was the only Latina in her cohort, which often made her feel that she did not belong. She felt very isolated, but she worked and studied intensively to obtain good grades and be well-prepared academically. Unfortunately, she did not pass the comprehensive qualifying exams because, according to a couple of her master’s committee members, who were all White faculty, she had made too many errors in her comprehensive exams. Therefore, they recommended Bella to take one or two additional courses to solidify her knowledge. As a result, Bella felt that she did not belong in
higher education and was very disillusioned. In fact, her committee never provided any information about what she did wrong. Fortunately, her African American mentor and chair supported her throughout these difficult times. Bella explained: “He was my mentor when I had failed my qualifying exams. So, he just said, you're going to take the class again in fall to get it right the next time around in the exam, and just push through.”

Bella’s strong determination and persistence enabled her to continue her master’s degree; however, she was never complaisant about the institutional norms in her master’s program; she always expressed her own views and concerns, something that she considered indispensable as a Student of Color in a predominantly White student body and professoriate. “If I had a question,” she explained, “I would raise concerns or questions to the professor. I wouldn't back down and I'm sure they weren't used to having someone of color questioning them.” Interestingly, during her master’s study, Bella realized the nuances of being the only Latina among White peers and White professors, as she felt racially and socially isolated. Hence, her academic socialization experiences as a master’s student made her realize that there was a lot of work to be done for the Latino community due to the limited amount of research on Latinxs and the lack of Latinx academicians in predominantly White institutions (PWI) of higher education.

Bella always had in mind to apply to a doctoral program even while she still was pursuing her master’s degree. She transferred her credits to Southwest University to continue with her master’s with the aid of her mentor, who supported her throughout the transfer process. “I didn't tell anybody. He [mentor] was the only one that knew. I didn't tell the faculty members. They [White peers] weren't friendly with me, like, I would try to study with them for the pre-qualifying exams and they just didn't want me there, I don't know why.” Thus, Bella transitioned
out, transferred her credits to the new institution, and left the previous institution where she felt extremely alienated for being the only Latina in the cohort in her master’s program.

**JOURNEY TO THE PHD**

Bella started her doctoral program in the fall of 2015. She strongly believed that pursuing a doctoral degree would provide better career opportunities for her and, at the same time, the opportunity to support other Latinxs in higher education. She wanted to assist them in dealing with academic difficulties and to be a Latina role model who would support their academic growth. Bella’s major career goal when she earns her doctorate is to become a tenure-track professor and researcher, including being a good mentor to minoritized students.

**JULIETA**

Julieta is a 29-year-old, first generation, fourth-year doctoral student in the field of psychology. She self-identifies as Latina. She grew up in a metropolitan city in the East Coast characterized for being ethnically diverse, an opportunity that she was grateful for because it gave her a sense of belonging, due to being of Brazilian descent. Both of her parents came to the United States from Brazil when she was 13 years-old, in search of better opportunities. Julieta speaks Portuguese with her mother and English at the university and with her husband, a White man who speaks English only.

Julieta started as a pre-medicine undergraduate student along with some friends who were a strong support to her, both personally and academically. “Part of that experience,” she noted, “was my friends, because we were able to take all classes together and three of them were Latinas.” As Julieta progressed in her pre-medicine studies, she decided to switch majors, because she did not enjoy her chemistry courses at all, which were a requirement to graduate. Therefore, she decided to do her bachelors and then her master’s degree in psychology. During
her master’s program, she had some challenging times, such as passing her six-hour-long exit exam to graduate and having to deal with family and immigration issues. “It was a very stressful time! I had personal conflicts with my father who had serious health issues at the time. I was also dealing with immigration issues. Part of being a foreign-born Latina is dealing with immigration concerns.”

**JOURNEY TO THE PHD**

Julieta started her doctoral program in the fall of 2014. Moving to the Southwest to pursue her doctorate was a drastic change for Julieta and for her mother and husband, all of whom moved with her, to offer company and support. Julieta chose Southwest University for its location, nice weather, and affordability, “I was given the opportunity and for that I am thankful,” she noted. “I thought I knew everything, and then, I came into the program, and I realized I didn't know half of what I thought.” Julieta would like to apply for a post-doc position in her former city of residence after she completes her doctorate. Her career goal is to become a tenure-track faculty member, so that she can pursue her research interests. She explained: “It's making a difference with my research, and helping people out, and living in constant good and always trying to gain knowledge. So that's my aim, to make a difference.”

**MARGARITA**

Margarita is a 56-year-old, first generation, fourth-year doctoral student in the field of education. She was born and raised in a mid-sized city in the Southwest and self-identifies as Latina. Margarita speaks English at home and at the university. Her parents were Mexican immigrants who believed in giving their children better opportunities. Her grandmother and great-grandmother spoke Spanish only and her mother tried her best to keep Spanish in the household, but it was very limited. Margarita attended a Catholic school during her elementary
and middle school years due to her parents’ preference for strict and traditional Catholic values. Most of her classmates in the Catholic schools were White. Therefore, attending a public high school was a culture shock for her. “I grew up around a lot of White kids. It was a big culture shock because they were speaking Spanish. I never spoke Spanish, you know.” Fortunately, Margarita worked for a T-Shirt company in which all her co-workers spoke Spanish only, and this helped her to learn Spanish. “I owe a lot to those people there, because that's where I picked up a lot of it. I have people that come up to ask me questions in Spanish about the lecture. I know enough to get by.”

Margarita’s undergraduate years were a wake-up call to her because majoring in Chicano Studies was an eye-opening experience. She learned about all the perils that the Chicano people have had to and continue to overcome. After she finished her bachelor’s degree, Margarita continued with her master’s degree in education while she was working as a secretary and transitioned to a new position as an academic advisor. She enjoyed the program and maintained an excellent relationship with the faculty and her mentor. Moreover, Margarita was invited to teach in the Chicano Studies program, an opportunity that gave her the energy and inspiration to complete her master’s degree with enthusiasm and, as a result, her thesis was a success since her recommendations for policy and practice were implemented at the university.

**Journey to the PhD**

Margarita transitioned smoothly to her doctoral degree in the summer of 2014. After working at the same academic institution for so long and having to climb the ladder from a secretary, to an academic advisor, to a director position, she acknowledges the importance of earning a doctorate to accomplish her professional goals. Her main career goal was to work in higher education as assistant dean, dean, or provost.
Maya

Maya is a 46-year-old, first generation, fifth-year doctoral student in the field of education. She self-identifies as Latina. Maya was born and raised in a small, semi-urban town in a northern state in Mexico. There, she attended elementary and middle school. She was the seventh of nine children. Maya has had a genuine interest in school since she was five years old. She went to a nearby school where she asked the principal if she could attend kindergarten there. Later, Maya went back home with the list of materials that she needed for kindergarten and showed it to her mother. “No teníamos dinero. Tenía cinco años” [We didn’t have money. I was five years old],” she explained, “pero mi abuela recibía dinero cada mes por las tierras y le dio 10 pesos a mi mamá para que yo pudiera ir a la escuela; usé cuadernos usados” [Each month, my grand-mother received some money from her lands, and she gave ten pesos to my mom so that I could go to school; I took used notebooks].

Maya’s parents were born and raised in northern Mexico. They did not have the opportunity to finish elementary school, so her father worked in agriculture and construction as a *bracero* and he had done that since he was 15 years old. Maya’s mother raised the children and took care of the household. When Maya was a teenager, her family moved to a mid-sized border city in Mexico where she went to high school and finished her bachelor’s degree in mass communication. She worked full time as an undergraduate to pay for some of her living expenses and education. She originally wanted to pursue a doctorate in Spanish literature, but the university did not offer this program.

Years later, when Maya was 26, she decided to learn English and attended the English as a Second language (ESL) program at the community college in a nearby border city in the United States. After that, Maya entered a two-year alternative certification program at the university to
obtain her teaching certificate. There, she continued learning English in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program in the same institution. It was during her certification program that she was exposed to topics of gender and race. When she finished the program, she decided to pursue a master’s degree in education and took an additional year of coursework in order to graduate. In 2013, Maya got her first teaching job position in a high school in a low-income neighborhood. She loved the experience and learned more than she had ever imagined.

“Fue mi primer trabajo como maestra. Trabajé con ojos etnográficos. Nunca juzgué la calidad del Pachuco. Para mí, era una cosa bien digna de investigar. Fue como una luna de miel. ¡Me la pasé muy bien!” [It was my first teaching job. I worked with ethnographic lens. I never judged the quality of the Pachuco. For me, it was something worth to investigate. It was like a honeymoon. I had a great time!].

**JOURNEY TO THE PhD**

Maya made the decision to start her doctoral program in the fall of 2013. She was motivated by a female professor who also became her mentor, as she supported her throughout the application process and when she began the program. Maya’s future career goals are to be a professor and researcher and to continue writing and publishing her fiction.

**BLANCA**

Blanca is a 53-year-old, first generation, third year doctoral student in the field of education. She identifies as Latina. Blanca grew up in a small rural community located in a mid-size border city in Mexico. She always liked and enjoyed school even though her secondary school years posed some challenges due to having to commute an hour to attend school each day. “I had to travel 30 minutes to get to school,” she explained. “It was a different way of experiencing school. I had my own struggles.” Blanca comes from a typical traditional family.
where the male role is primordially that of a provider and where women are expected to raise their children and be housewives.

Blanca graduated from a four-year program called *La Normal* (Normal School), which prepares individuals for a teaching career in Mexico. It was during her second year that she entered the world of teaching children, and then the third year implied more responsibilities, “Over there, you work, and they don’t pay you. We had to do our practices called *prácticas docentes* (teaching practices). The third year it was more exposure and do more activities in a school.” Blanca graduated from the program and worked for a year as an elementary school teacher. In 1986, Blanca and her family moved to a mid-sized border city in the United States where she started her bilingual journey and teaching career. Blanca attended the community college where she obtained an associate degree in education in 1995. She was placed in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, which was not an easy transition for her due to the academic exigencies implied in writing essays in English. “I used to write in Spanish and then translate to English. It was difficult to take notes and to keep the pace with my classmates. I’m pretty sure that I missed a lot, but that’s how I made it.”

After completing two years in community college, Blanca transferred to the university to pursue a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies. She got a position as a teacher’s assistant for two years in an alternative school during the time she completed her bachelor’s degree. She worked there mostly with secondary students, an experience that was difficult due to the dysfunctionalities in the families her students had, such drug problems and criminal activities. Blanca graduated in 1997 and got a teaching job as a bilingual teacher in a large school district. And four years later, she was invited to apply to a master’s program that offered financial support to all the applicants who taught in rural areas, as it was her case.
**JOURNEY TO THE PHD**

Blanca continued working for several years before she embarked into the idea of getting into a PhD and entered the program in the fall of 2015. Her willingness to continue her education was born from her experiences as a teacher in the classroom and her continuous self-reflections regarding her students’ lack of success in the state-mandated examinations. “I saw all the struggles of the bilingual students,” she said, “that’s the reason why I’m in the doctorate… to know why our students are failing, why their gaps, why this inequality.” Blanca’s future career goals are to be a university professor who prepares student teachers because her doctoral journey has instilled in her to be a more proactive educator who can bring some positive change to the educational system. “The idea of making some change as a scholar,” she said, “it’s inspiring.”

**EMILIA**

Emilia is a 32-year-old, first generation, fourth-year doctoral student in the field of rhetoric and composition. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born and raised in the border city where Southwest University is located. She is a product of public school gifted and talented program in elementary, middle, and high school. Emilia’s upbringing was primarily in Spanish, since her mother only speaks Spanish. Emilia speaks English with her daughter, and she learned academic Spanish using the dictionary, speaking with Spanish speakers, and by watching educational programs on television.

Emilia had very good experiences in elementary, middle, and high school. She knew when she was in high school that she would attend the university in her hometown because she was the only child, and her mother was widowed when she was three years old. “I didn't have the luxury to move out of town. I'm very close with my mom. There's no way that I could have ever left her. Staying close to my mother was a good avenue for me to succeed.” Emilia loved
literature and reading in high school, which gave her the confidence to pursue a bachelor’s
degree in English with a focus on American Literature. However, in her sophomore year, she got
pregnant, and this situation slowed her down academically for about a year, as she had to drop
some classes in the middle of the semester when she gave birth. Emilia ended up retaking some
classes, and managed to graduate in 2009, despite her challenges as a student and single mother.
When Emilia was still working on her bachelor's degree, she wanted to become an English
teacher at the high school level. However, she needed at least eighteen hours of teaching
experience. Thus, after graduating, she went into the Alternative Certification Program (ACP) at
the university, where she took several classes in education that led to her becoming certified as a
teacher. In September 2010, she was hired at the university as a full-time staff member and her
dream of being a teacher was put on hold because she needed to have a steady income to support
her child. “I ended up going on several interviews, but I was having some difficulty being hired
as a teacher, so I decided to look elsewhere and that's when I got hired here.”

As a result, Emilia decided to continue with her master’s degree in education in order to
not waste the credit hours that she had accumulated through the alternative certification program.
She finished her master’s program in May 2012. Emilia keeps her options open, as she doesn’t
discard the possibility of teaching someday even though she is cognizant that teachers’ salaries
are low. “In my personal opinion,” she said, “they should be earning a lot more money.”
Fortunately, Emilia was hired by Southwest University as a full-time employee in 2010, a
position that has allowed her to work and dedicate time to her studies, “it has really enabled me
to flourish as a student and it [doctoral program] does relate to my job.”
JOURNEY TO THE PhD

Pursuing a doctorate was a dream that Emilia had envisioned since she was in her bachelor's program. However, she did not get into the doctoral program right away because she needed to fulfill some other courses and was classified as a master’s in English for two years prior to being admitted into the doctoral program. She finally transitioned into the PhD program in the fall of 2014. “I know that having a PhD will open a lot more doors, as far as jobs. I want to have better options.” Emilia’s future career goal is to search for new opportunities in her field of study, but she is not interested in applying for a tenure-track position, as doing this would probably require her leaving the university, her mother, and her hometown.

Ana

Ana is a 46-year-old, second-year doctoral student in the field of rhetoric and composition. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born in a small border city in Mexico. Ana comes from an educated family, in that her father is a lawyer and her mother a retired teacher in Mexico. Her father played a crucial role in instilling in her and her sisters the importance of having a college degree to become financially independent. At home, Ana speaks English with her husband who “understands Spanish but does not speak it well.” Ana likes to read novels written in their original language [Spanish or English].

Ana’s love for reading was born in elementary school, and she continued to enjoy reading throughout her college years. However, she did not have the same experiences in middle school and high school because she was very reserved. “They were challenging for my personality. But then, college was different. College was nice, a better experience for me! That's when I came out of my shell, and I got involved in a lot of things.” Ana finished her bachelor’s degree in business administration with a concentration in hotel and restaurant management. Then, several years
later, after moving to the United States, Ana earned her master’s in business administration (MBA) from a small private university. After she graduated, she worked at a cellphone company for almost 12 years. That was when Ana decided to change her career path. “That's when I had a change of heart and I decided to go back to school again for a masters in Spanish literature in New Mexico.” Ana had a very positive experience in her master’s program. She enjoyed the environment and the diversity in her program, and especially the support from her cohort and professors. “When I did my masters, I was taking Spanish and English literature courses. I didn't learn English until I moved over here as an adult.”

**JOURNEY TO THE PhD**

Ana always had in mind to pursue a doctorate, but she could not decide what area of specialization she wanted to pursue. She waited until her daughter had graduated from high school, and then she realized that “there was nothing in Spanish [a doctorate]; and since I already had a masters in Spanish literature, it was time to dedicate some time to English.” She entered the doctoral program in rhetoric and composition in the fall of 2017. As a doctoral student, Ana admits that she must be extremely dedicated in order to complete the degree, since her daughter started college, which means additional tuition expenses. “This is an investment! This is how I want to retire. I don’t want to see myself as an old lady teaching high school.” Ana’s career goal is to become a part-time faculty member at a university.

**VERÓNICA**

Verónica is a 58-year-old, second-year doctoral student in the field of rhetoric and composition. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born and raised in a mid-sized city in northern Mexico. However, her parents and her family moved to a border city in Mexico where she attended a private elementary school. Verónica comes from a very traditional family where it was taught
and expected that women were not supposed to pursue a university career but marry young. “I
know they wanted the best for me. What they thought is that I was going to marry young. So, I
was enrolled in a private school for females only to study [to become a] secretary.” Nevertheless,
Verónica always envisioned the idea that she had to at least complete a bachelor’s degree, because
her father was a physician, her mother a secretary, and her brothers and sisters had completed their
studies.

Verónica successfully completed her associate degree as a secretary at age 14, but was
unable to work, as she was still considered a minor. Therefore, her parents enrolled her into a small
private school to study English for two consecutive years, which enabled her to be hired as an
English teacher in a private school where she taught for several years. After some years of working
experience, Verónica got married and decided to quit her job when she had her first child to be at
home. Nevertheless, years later, she decided to continue her education. “I stopped working for
many years,” she noted. “I was just a full-time housewife and mother with no vacation, no pay,
nothing, until I decided to return to school, a community college, and then the university.”

Verónica has always spoken Spanish at home and English and Spanish at the university.
She attended a community college to pursue an associate degree in education in a border city in
the United States. While being at community college, she worked as a substitute teacher and this
experience made her realize that she did not want to be a teacher. Therefore, she changed her major
when she entered the university and completed her bachelor’s in Spanish with a minor in
translation. During her bachelor’s study, she discovered her passion for translation and became a
certified translator. Nevertheless, going back to school as a mother of two children, and a former
housewife was demanding. “It was very hard! And now I ask myself, how did I do it? I still don’t
know. It was a challenge! I cannot say that I really enjoyed it, as other single students that had time for everything.”

Verónica continued with her master’s degree in Spanish. She reminisced about leaving her two children at school when she was still working and studying part-time at the university. Her daily routine consisted of commuting every day to the university and then to going back to Mexico to pick up her children from school at two o’clock to have lunch with them. Then she would cross the bridge again, to go back to the university to attend her afternoon classes. “I left my children at the swimming pool while I was taking classes or sometimes my husband took care of them. That was my life during my master’s. It was hard!” She enjoyed all her master’s courses, even if they required intensive reading, doing a lot of homework and presentations. She has been working at Southwest University for 15 years. Moreover, when she was in her fifth year as a full-time employee, she was offered the opportunity to teach introductory and advanced courses in translation, something that she greatly enjoys.

**Journey to the PhD**

Verónica never conceived the idea of pursuing a doctorate, because her children were still young and needed her support. However, when they became adults, she envisioned the idea of pursuing a PhD. “Now that they are grown up, they left home and they are independent,” she recounted, “that’s the reason I decided!” Indeed, she was almost convinced of pursuing a doctoral degree after finishing a bilingual professional writer’s certification program in 2014, when one of the female professors told her that she was a good candidate for the PhD and that the program would credit some of the courses that she had already taken. She started her doctoral program in the fall of 2016. “We had a talk, and I liked the idea, so I started it! And I’m working on my PhD because it would be easier for me to get a job in a college.” Verónica’s career plan have not
changed since she started her doctoral program. She still wants to retire from her current full-time job within four or five years and teach part-time after completing her doctorate. She wants to teach part-time at Southwest University or at a university out of town where both of her children reside.

**Mari**

Mari is a 28-year-old, fifth-year doctoral student in the field of biology. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born in a small-sized borderland city in Mexico, where she attended private school until second grade. She continued her elementary and secondary school in the United States due to her parents’ decision to move. Mari’s father was a physician and her mother a nurse in Mexico. Fortunately, Mari has always had her parents’ unconditional support for her education. “My parents always encouraged us to go to school, to my sisters and me. One of them goes to medical school and the other one became a nurse; then I started doing my PhD because I really like science.” Mari speaks Spanish at home and English and Spanish at the university. “When I read for fun, I can read in both Spanish and English, but in English when I read a scientific paper.” She believes that being bilingual is an advantage in the science community when she looks for a job. Interestingly, Mari did not like writing in high school and regrets not working hard enough, especially on her writing skills, to have avoided the difficulties that she encountered as an undergraduate student. She acknowledges that she had to work harder to catch up with the rest of her classmates, and unfortunately, having more academic responsibilities made her experience some anxiety. “I was like, how come I can't understand this subject? How come it's so difficult for me and everyone is just fine? I was like...I don't understand!” Despite the many challenges she encountered, Mari enjoyed her undergraduate years and discovered a love for science.
Interestingly, the last semester before she completed bachelor’s degree, Mari was hired as a research assistant, which gave her the opportunity to consider pursuing a master’s degree in biology. In addition, her boss and mentor motivated her to continue her education. “A master's? And I was like, yeah, why not? That’s another two years...so I started it.” Mari pursued her master’s degree with a lot of enthusiasm. However, she was afraid of not being successful, due to the high demands involved in being a graduate student. “I felt like I was not a good student. If you put me in a classroom; I have a hard time, but if you put me in doing experiments, I’m very good.”

**Journey to the PhD**

Mari’s master’s degree thesis chair recommended that she apply to the doctoral program, and she entered the doctoral program in the fall of 2013. Her research is significant to her because she wants to help people with cancer. However, Mari is exhausted due to working long hours running experiments in the lab, therefore, Mari has changed her future career plans. She originally wanted to become a principal investigator, run her own lab, and teach at a university. Now she does not see herself working in academia because her professors work for long hours for their research projects. “A lot of professors, they're stuck there (lab) for super long hours, and I don't want that for myself. I want to get a life! And I do not want to have the burden of teaching, too.” Upon completion of her doctoral degree, Mari wants to work for a biotech company or for the government.

**Eva**

Eva is a 31-year-old, first generation, second-year doctoral student in the field of health sciences. She self-identifies as Latina. She was raised in a mid-sized U.S. border city. She grew up in the lower valley area of her hometown where she attended elementary, middle, and high
school. While in elementary school, Eva was placed in a bilingual program in which all the courses were taught in Spanish up until fourth grade, when the district implemented a bilingual program. “The lessons were in English,” she said, “so I was kind of forced to transition into English. I remember that in middle school I struggled a little bit with English.” Eva speaks Spanish at home with her parents and English and Spanish at the university.

Eva really enjoyed her high school years and she made valuable friendships, which were a strong support system that allowed her to make the best out of the scarce opportunities that her school offered at the time. “Our school was low income. They only offered technical training. It was a teen pregnancy school. So, I went to high school with teenagers who were pregnant and no opportunities to further expand my interest in science, technology, or physics.” During her senior year of high school, Eva got a job in a mariachi band where she played the violin and sang, which was a source of income to provide for the household.

Eva’s family is a traditional Mexican American family where the father is the provider. He is a U.S. Army veteran whom Eva describes as, “quiet, cold, and unaffectionate with his family.” Her mother was a housewife who administered the money the best she could to cover the basic needs of the family. Therefore, Eva’s family financial struggles played a crucial role in her decision to pursue a bachelor’s degree in health sciences, as well as the lack of good health practices in her neighborhood. “I felt motivated to change my community. We're all good people. We're all good- hearted. I wanted to learn what were the factors that impact health; why are we living in this condition? How can we change it?” Therefore, Eva applied to Southwest University and was accepted. She pursued a bachelor's in biomedical sciences with a triple minor in chemistry, psychology, and Spanish.
Additionally, Eva had originally planned to apply to medical school, but her grades were not as competitive and the preparation for the entrance exam MCAT, which was too expensive. During her bachelor’s, Eva had to work in two retail stores to pay for her tuition and living expenses and, when her mother started working, she somehow helped Eva financially. When Eva graduated, she moved away from her parents to live with her boyfriend, which implied confronting her possessive mother and authoritarian father. Moreover, Eva was the only one in her immediate family to earn a high school degree and the first one in her extended family to go to college. Eva continued working as a mariachi during her undergraduate years to support herself. Fortunately, she took a position at the university to do some research on fuel cells in the science department, where she did literature reviews and poster presentations. Thus, Eva was able to graduate thanks to the financial aid she received, her job as a researcher, and the support from her boyfriend. “I found good support from him, also financial support. We were compatible.”

Eva worked full time in a lab before she decided to apply to a master’s program. It was her supervisor who suggested that she continue a masters in the health sciences field. She had the full support of her professors and was able to finish all her course work successfully. Luckily, she was hired by the university the last year of her master’s program, when she had to work on her thesis. Eva decided to apply to a part-time job in the college of health sciences where she found a professor who offered that she could use some of his research data for her thesis. She also found a considerate mentor who played an important role in her academic success; the last year of her master’s degree, she was able to finish her academic work because he allowed her to work part-time and made her a full-time employee once she graduated.
JOURNEY TO THE PHD

Eva applied to the doctoral program in health sciences to have a stronger voice in her field and to continue advocating for the border community. She started in the fall of 2017. Her career goals are to continue gaining meaningful research experience and to teach and publish in a university. “I want to contribute at a higher level, and I knew that it [doctorate] would give me the validation and authority.”

SUNSHINE

Sunshine is a 24-year-old, second-year doctoral student in the field of environmental science and engineering. She self-identifies as Latina. She grew up and attended elementary school in a mid-sized border city in the United States. However, due to her parents’ immigration status, she and her family had to immigrate to Mexico where she completed middle school and high school. Once she graduated from high school, Sunshine started her bachelor's degree at Southwest University and graduated in 2016. Sunshine only speaks Spanish with her family at home and English and Spanish at the university. She only speaks English with English speakers and Spanish with her Spanish speaking peers, since most of them are bilingual. She reads mostly in English but tries to read books in Spanish to maintain her Spanish reading skills.

Sunshine lives in a border city in Mexico and commutes every day to attend college. Both of Sunshine’s parents obtained their bachelor’s degree in agronomy in Mexico. They have been extremely supportive and helpful during her undergraduate and graduate years. Interestingly, Sunshine originally wanted to become a painter or study marketing or mass communications, but after the first semester as an art major she decided to switch to environmental science. Sunshine’s mother played an important role in her decision to pursue a career in science, besides the fact that she has always been concerned with the benefits that science can bring to humanity,
particularly to the ecosystem. “Being in the field of science I discovered that it helps me communicate better, because they [professors] make me do a lot of presentations. They also teach me how to persuade people that my research is important.”

Before starting her PhD, Sunshine was missing one credit in order to graduate and enter the doctoral program. Unfortunately, she did not receive any support from her department. As a last resort, Sunshine decided to contact the president of Southwest University via email about her dilemma. The president responded her via email: “We're going to make it possible, and you will graduate.” As a result, the science department and graduate school agreed to assist Sunshine in completing her one credit hour two weeks before the deadline for applying for the doctoral program. “I was determined to get it! I don't know how it happened; the Lord helped me! So that's how I got into the PhD.”

**JOURNEY TO THE PHD**

After Sunshine earned her bachelors’ degree in environmental science, she applied to the doctoral program and was accepted in January 2017. She chose the same institution, because it was close to her hometown and family in Mexico. For Sunshine, pursuing a PhD has been one of the most exciting experiences and the best decisions that she has made in her life. “I'm learning new things and getting to know a lot of people and it’s very rewarding,” she shared. Sunshine’s future career plans have remained the same since she began the doctoral program. She wants to become a tenure-track professor who can support students as much as possible. “I could teach students how to understand the hardest topics, which many professors are not able to simplify for students. Most students are not going to progress if they don't understand the professor.” Sunshine also wants to continue doing research in water resources, as many nations are currently concerned about water production and sustainability.
Sally is a 40-year-old, second-year doctoral student in the field of environmental science and engineering. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born and grew up in Peru country where she lived with her parents and her brother. At home, Sally spoke Spanish with her family and learned Portuguese when she had the idea of traveling to Brazil to pursue a master’s degree in a Portuguese-speaking country. Sally studied fisheries in her hometown and traveled to a large metropolitan city in a southern state in the United States to learn English. “I had to work 28 hours standing up in a fishery. It was hard and they don’t pay well. That’s why I decided to study English. It was a difficult situation, because I started from zero.”

Two years later, she decided to apply to a program there when a friend informed her that a professor in a southwestern university was offering a research assistantship related to her field of interest. Sally was accepted in the master’s program and was given a research assistant position, which paid for her tuition. Sally’s parents always supported her education and allowed her to decide what to do or study, because they knew she was resilient and a hard worker. Her mother was supportive but at the beginning, she didn’t want her to leave, claiming that she would feel alone without her. Her father supported her to continue her studies in the United States but was not too happy with Sally’s decision to pursue a master’s degree in geology. He was an environmental engineer and he believed that Sally would have more career opportunities in the environmental science field.

Sally’s undergraduate years in her hometown were fun and stress free. She didn’t have to study much. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that during her masters, she didn’t have enough time to socialize, because she had to study a lot in order to understand the concepts in English. Living in a foreign country without her family or friends was indeed challenging for Sally. “It
was hard, because nobody was at home when I arrived and in Peru, I had my parents and brother to talk to.”

**JOURNEY TO THE PHD**

Sally was admitted to the doctoral program in the fall of 2017. It was something that she always wanted to do as a child. She knew that a doctorate would enable her to have a more solid career, and more job opportunities in the future. Sally has high expectations for herself, despite the many challenges she is facing as a doctoral student. She had always wanted to do research, and earning a doctoral degree is the foundation she needs. “I like doing research. I left my job in Peru because it was too monotonous. I was doing the same for two years. But for research, I don’t get bored!” Sally’s future goals are to earn her doctorate with a 4.0 GPA and to continue doing meaningful research. She also wants to publish as much as she can as a researcher. She also wants to establish networks with other researchers and learn what they are doing. “I want to go around the world and get ideas for my own research and how I can collaborate with them.”

**ANDREA**

Andrea is a 38-year-old, second-year doctoral student in the field of health sciences. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born and raised in a large metropolitan city in Mexico until she was 11 years old, when her family moved to a mid-sized capital city in northern Mexico. There, she completed middle school, high school, and earned a degree in medicine. Both of her parents are engineers, and her father earned a master’s degree at Stanford University. Andrea enjoyed the five years she spent in medical school in Mexico. She made good friends and studied very hard to obtain good grades and learn as much as she could. After she graduated, she spent a year doing her social service in a small rural community in the Sierra Tarahumara in Chihuahua, Mexico, an experience that she cherishes. She had valuable experiences with the people she met.
in the village where there were many scarcities. “Vivía en un pueblito donde había ocho baños y yo tenía uno de ellos. Todos usaban letrinas. Daba consultas, pláticas de salud, y tenía miedo a veces a lo desconocido porque te quedas sola en la clínica” [I lived in a small village where there were eight bathrooms and I had one of them. They all used latrines. I gave consultations and health talks, and sometimes I was afraid of the unknown because I stayed alone in the clinic].

After Andrea returned to her hometown, she worked in the medical field for about four years. Then, her husband and Andrea decided to move to a borderland city in the United States to continue their education. Interestingly, Andrea followed in her husband’s footsteps, as he was in his doctoral degree in science when she started her master’s at the same university. Andrea only speaks Spanish with her husband, child, and Latinx friends. She reads in English and Spanish. At the university, she speaks English to her English-speaking professors and peers and sometimes Spanish to some professors who speak Spanish.

While pursuing her masters, Andrea envisioned herself doing research for a Latino professor who was a physician and earned a PhD as well. She applied for an assistantship position and worked for different professors. However, when she was assigned to him, she had to overcome some challenges, because Andrea confronted him about his behavior. He got upset for things that he expected her to do without specifying exactly what it was he wanted. “Estaba en una junta con otro equipo de investigación y me empezó a gritar, me levantó la voz y yo también. La gente que me conoce, me dice, “¿Por qué haces eso?” Pues yo no me voy a dejar” [When I was in a meeting with other research team, he started to yell at me! He raised his voice and I did, too. People that know me said, “Why do you do that?” Well, I won’t allow that]. Fortunately, towards the end of the semester their relationship improved, as Andrea knew how to manage the situation based on her previous experiences in Mexico. “Me he enfrentado muchas veces a tantas
Andrea was undecided on which career path to take after she earned her master’s degree. She didn’t know if she wanted to work in a hospital or to pursue a PhD. She recalls what made her decide to stay at the same institution, “el buen ambiente y la persona para la que trabajo [mentora] y las personas que hicieron este doctorado fue lo que me llevó a seguir estudiando; y el saber que, para ciertas posiciones en academia, necesitas tener un doctorado”. [It was the good environment, the person for whom I worked [her mentor], and the people that pursued this doctorate inspired me to continue; and knowing that, for some positions in academia, you need a doctorate]. When Andrea successfully graduated from her masters, she informed her mentor and thesis chair that she was interested in applying to the doctoral program in the same field. Luckily, when Andrea was admitted into the doctoral program, she had an assistantship position with the same mentor who had supported her throughout her masters.

JOURNEY TO THE PhD

Andrea started her doctoral journey in the fall of 2016. She felt confident in her academic abilities, due to her background in medicine and the knowledge and experience that she gained as a researcher during her master’s program. Andrea’s career plan when she earns her doctorate is to obtain her U.S. residency and then to apply for a position as faculty in a university. “Me veo con mi esposo, pero no sé si en esta universidad” [I see myself with my husband, but I don't know if in this university]. Andrea would also like to continue doing research.
SOCORRO

Socorro is a 47-year-old, first-generation, second-year doctoral student in environmental science and engineering. She self-identifies as Latina. She was born and raised in a small, semi-rural city in a northern state in Mexico until she was five years old, due to the lack of higher education institutions in her hometown. Therefore, Socorro’s family decided to move to a larger city close by so that her older siblings could attend college. There, Socorro completed her K-12 education and her undergraduate degree in engineering. She enjoyed her undergraduate years and always had it in mind to continue her education in the future. Socorro’s parents had to endure many difficulties in order to raise their seven children. Her father worked as a car mechanic; her mother and grandmother worked incessantly to provide for the entire family and became two of her best role models.

Years later, she worked for a year and a half in a maquiladora and then she got married, she and her husband, who is also an engineer, decided to move to a borderland city where there were many job opportunities for engineers in the maquiladora industry where she worked for 10 years and had to overcome the machismo and gender bias from some of her male colleagues, since she was one of the few women in the engineering division. She made less money, even though she worked the same hours as her male counterparts. “Sentía que mis opiniones no, como que, no le hagas caso. Yo me tuve que imponer; tenían que escucharme porque mi opinión también era importante y era parte de mi trabajo” [I felt that my opinions did not, kind of like, don’t listen to her. I had to impose myself; they had to listen to me because my opinion was also important and related to my job].

Socorro decided to take some sabbatical years and be a full-time mother and housewife before she embarked into her master’s degree journey in engineering in Mexico. She had a
positive experience in her program, made some friends, and learned a lot from her professors whom she highly admired for their professionalism and support. Furthermore, Socorro’s husband also played a major role in her academic success during her master’s degree journey.

**JOURNEY TO THE PhD**

Socorro started her doctoral program in the fall of 2017. She lives in a border city in Mexico and commutes every day to work as a research assistant and to take classes. She decided to attend Southwest University due to its geographical proximity and for the good reputation of the doctoral program. Interestingly, what influenced her decision to enter the program in environmental science and engineering was because of the reckless contamination that some *maquiladoras* produced when she worked there. “Y yo decía, esto no me parece. Primero para poder compartir la información, uno tiene que aprenderla. Esa es la razón por la que estoy aquí. Hay que educarse uno primero si quiere uno educar a alguien más” [And I said, this doesn’t seem right to me. In order to share the information, one must learn it first. That is the reason why I’m here. You have to educate yourself first if you want to educate others].

Socorro is convinced that she needs to earn a doctorate to gain more knowledge and experience in her field in order to change the status quo of the environmental regulations in Mexico. Her future career goals are to find a job in Mexico related to environmental sustainability, perhaps with a government agency, and/or to become a professor to educate people about the significance of water recycling and sustainable resources around the world.

Regarding additional background information, the following table shows the marital status, the number of children (if any), and the job positions of the participants during their doctoral programs:
Table 5

Participants’ Personal Information during the PhD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Full/Part Time Job during PhD</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
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<td>none</td>
<td>Part time/TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julieta</td>
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<td>none</td>
<td>Part time/TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
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<td>one</td>
<td>Part time/Administrator &amp; Lecturer</td>
</tr>
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<td>Maya</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Full time/K-12 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>Full time/K-12 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>Full-time/Assist. Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>Full time/K-12 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verónica</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>Full-time/Lecturer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQ1: Salient Identities that Shaped the Doctoral Socialization Experience**

This section will address the first research question for this study, which is: In what ways do the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender, amongst other identities, shape Latina doctoral students’ socialization experiences? The fourteen Latina doctoral students in this study shared their experiences during their doctoral journeys and each was at a different stage in their degree process when they shared their testimonios. The themes that arose through their testimonios, showcased the ways the intersection of their identities, especially their gender and ethnic/racial backgrounds, profoundly affected how they were socialized and the ways in which they experienced specific events. Indeed, the intersection of their identities often produced various tensions during their doctoral programs due to the lack of cultural sensitivity and biased behavior within the program, department, institution, or community.

Even though the participants are in a Hispanic-Serving institution, some of them experienced lack of diversity in their programs or in previous academic institutions. Their
previous experiences deeply influenced the participants to have selected their field of study and/or their research interests to support Latinxs and other marginalized populations, as well. Moreover, for some of the participants, pursuing a doctoral degree implied a rigorous academic exigency, which made them feel incongruent and disconnected from their own cultural backgrounds, as they felt compelled to balance the two different environments. The findings for this question are centered on the intersection between being a woman and being Latina, which coincided with the themes that emerged. This section includes four themes that emerged from the participants’ testimonios, which are presented in order of relevance. The main four themes are: (a) Lack of cultural sensitivity leading to microaggressions, sexism, racism, and other biases; (b) decolonizing personal and academic spaces through language and culture; (c) stress between academia and their home culture; and (d) grappling with imposter syndrome and self-doubt.

**Theme 1.1: Lack of Cultural Sensitivity Leading to Microaggressions, Sexism, Racism, and Other Biases**

Some of the participants talked about their experiences in the classroom and the lack of cultural sensitivity in either their classroom discussions or jobs as an indicator of the saliency of the intersections between their gender and ethnic/racial identity. The following section presents five of the participants who shared testimonios about the lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of either faculty or peers. Some of them felt lack of diversity within their specific programs. The women mentioned here shared detailed descriptions of having to deal with this type of biases, which greatly affected their socialization and doctoral student experiences.

Bella, a third-year doctoral student in psychology, exhibited resilience throughout her doctoral academic journey and kept strong and committed to finish her degree. Bella mentioned that she had experienced some racist and biased situations in her master’s degree in a
Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and was aware of the demographics and atmosphere she would encounter at Southwest University; in fact, she had the idea that being a student in a Hispanic-Serving institution was going to be less conflictual, but she soon realized that it was not the case. Unfortunately, Bella explained that she experienced bias from her program director and former mentor, neither of whom were sensitive to her needs as a first-generation college student. Their lack of cultural sensitivity deeply affected not only her academic progress but also her trust in the program. For instance, Bella shared in her testimonio that her departmental climate promoted a negative competitiveness among the students and was mostly comprised of White male faculty members. She mentioned the following in relation to the faculty composition in her program, “You have a Hispanic-Serving institution, but at the same time, most of the professors are White. So, it sounds like they’re serving Hispanic populations, but I think there’s a disconnect; and I had difficulty trusting people in the department.” Bella added that, when was almost done with her coursework, the head of the department emailed her to schedule a meeting with her and that she felt some discomfort since he had never wanted to see her before. The program director wanted to talk to her about her lack of academic progress with her mentor, which Bella deeply resented, as her mentor at that time never communicated to her that he had discussed her progress with the doctoral program director instead of having a prior meeting with her. She elucidated in her testimonio:

He basically told me, “You know, you're not progressing, what's going on?” And I told him about my mentor, you know, that I was not getting the mentorship I needed; that I've had conversations with my mentor about what I needed from him. His response was essentially, “Maybe you're not just cut out to get into a PhD program or maybe we can
look into other programs; maybe you can look into health sciences; maybe you can just look into a different degree.

Bella’s expressed in her *testimonio* that she felt very disillusioned in her mentor and director of the program, both White male scholars, as they opted to not assist Bella in her academic needs even though they were accustomed to having Latina students at Southwest University. She further elaborated:

Who tells a student to leave the program without even trying to figure out what's going on? This is telling them you don't like what's going on with the mentor, but they take the mentor’s position, like not really looking at the mentor’s problem, but looking at the student. So, I think it is because I was lucky. I got enough shit at Central Texas University. I always ask myself once things like that happen, there's no equality there! I ask myself: Would this happen to a White male? That's always my question, because there are times the answer is no, it wouldn’t!

Bella felt that she did not belong in the program, particularly because she had almost completed her coursework and had no plans to leave the program without earning her degree. Thus, Bella took the initiative to contact the department head, having in mind that she would never consider the option of changing her field of study. “He basically said, look, let's try to find you a different mentor, then, if you don't find a different mentor or if you don't find a good fit with another mentor, then, let's talk about other options for a different program.” Despite feelings of frustration and anger for being told, for a second time, to consider the “option for a different program” by the department head, Bella realized the importance of having a multicultural responsive department and faculty members, which was not the case in her doctoral program.
Bella’s ultimate decision was to seek another mentor who could help her graduate instead of changing programs, since there were five faculty members in her PhD program concentration. Therefore, she was fully committed to find a better fit for her dissertation research project, especially given that she had experienced similar gender discrimination and biases when she was in her master’s program. Bella spoke with a faculty to ask him if he could be her dissertation director, but unfortunately, he refused. As a result, Bella felt extremely stressed out by the situation since she needed to find someone who could support her with her research project in order to continue. Bella further explained:

I had an option to explore. And one of them was the head of the concentration [a White male], so he basically told me, “I can’t, you know our lab. I don't think that it would be a good fit for you.” So, he basically told me to go look for somebody else for a health concentration mentor, but don't look towards him, like, leave! So, I was going to ask Dr. Sala; and there was another faculty member, but he was basically on probation for doing bad things to graduate students, but that's a different story.

Bella channeled the hurt and anger she felt into making sure that she could find the right fit with a mentor, so that she could continue with her research project and be able to graduate. She felt extremely disappointed and anxious due to the way in which the situation was handled by the program director and her current mentor. Their expectations were clear, as she was asked to find another mentor to continue her doctoral program, which implied a huge determination and resilience on her part. After having to deal with the decision to stay in the program even though she never imagined that she would literally be asked to leave when she was almost done with all her coursework, Bella realized that higher education needs to have more ethnically diverse faculty to understand where the students come from and the struggles that they confront, in
addition to “having a non-aggressive, friendly department environment, not entirely comparative or competitive,” as the students and some faculty in her program had the tendency to negatively compare and criticize each other’s work, particularly during presentations. Bella wished to have less competition among the students and a more cooperative climate.

Indeed, the biases that Bella experienced made her aware of one of the major challenges for Latinas in academia and other minorities, which would imply restructuring the way academia was built. She explained that academia needed to be more inclusive of women in the United States. “It was created by White men and only for White men it wasn't meant for women. So, restructuring how things are done.” Certainly, Bella has had to overcome the biases from White faculty during her master’s and doctoral study, all of which have taught her to be fully committed to proving people wrong. She added in her *testimonio*:

I strongly believe that such struggles will only cease if scholars were fully aware of their students’ cultural background and if more ethnic diversity among faculty existed in higher education. They probably don't see People of Color as equal to them! So, I think it did have to do with my identity as a Latina.

For Bella, dealing with her mentor’s and program’s director lack of academic support was a very stressful and disillusioning experience. She believed the White male faculty members in her program saw her as a Latina who was expected to obey and be apologetic. Her previous encounters with White male faculty in her previous predominantly White institution (PWI) may have influenced the way she reacted and conducted herself as a doctoral student, since Bella says “no” when necessary and tends to be unapologetic, as a form of resistance to White male dominance in academe. For instance, she recalled in her *testimonio* that one of the professors had a negative attitude toward her when she told him that she would not be able to work for him
because she was planning to concentrate on her research project and needed time to fully commit to it. Unfortunately, the professor’s reaction was destructive, as he shared the incident with other faculty members in a negative manner. She commented:

I had this one professor who asked me, “Oh, would you want to be the instructor for this lab section for psychology? And I said that I really wanted to concentrate on my research. I thought I had the option of saying no, and because I said no, I was being unprofessional and rude to this professor, like it made me cry out, what the heck? That's what it is for me! I don't know if it's because I'm Latina due to all these other experiences I’ve had with White people. So, I wondered, are they treating me differently because I’m Latina or would they have treated me differently if I were White?

Bella mentioned that she felt highly disrespected by this incident as she did not know anyone else in her cohort or lab peers who had this experience before with the professor. However, dealing with these forms of biases was not unique to Bella. Margarita, a doctoral student in the field of education shared in her testimonio the frustration that she felt due to the lack of understanding that her academic institution had in relation to promoting Latinas in administrative or faculty positions. The literature has shown that Women of Color in higher education as faculty and/or administrators are oftentimes presumed less competent by White students, their faculty peers, and/or administrators (Gutiérrez y Muhs, 2012).

After having climbed the ladder from a secretary to an academic advisor, to a director position at Southwest University, Margarita acknowledged the importance of earning a doctorate in order to accomplish her academic and professional goals. Nevertheless, she understood that being Latina would present additional barriers for her professional advancement. She elaborated in her testimonio:
But my feeling is, if I don't go with a higher degree, this is pretty much all I'm going to climb because I've noticed, when I look around campus, and this is the truth: how many White faces are in positions of power? All of us, a ninety nine percent of the ones that look like me, we made it to assistant director of this or director of that, even assistant dean, but to say that anybody's gone higher than that, I have only seen one. I've heard horror stories to where people do get that degree (doctorate) and you're still not given the credence that you deserve because you're female, but my ultimate goal is to be in a position where I can enact policy that can make a difference to this demographic that we serve because it is very different. They bring these people from out of town who don't understand the demographic; they don't get it. And they implement these programs and these ideas; and then, they wonder why it doesn't work!

This excerpt above clearly illustrated the effect of the systemic racism and sexism that Margarita has witnessed during the years as an administrator. Unfortunately, Margarita has experienced the lack of support for Women of Color, specifically when applying for higher job positions in her institution. When declaring, “the ones that look like me,” it evidently denotes a reaffirmation of how racism and biases have been an impediment for her to continue moving forward in her career opportunities. Margarita shared in her testimonio that she knew the implications of pursuing a doctoral degree and what sort of sacrifices she would need to do in order to be a successful doctoral student, such as allotting sufficient time for reading and writing. Thus, Margarita had a clear idea of what she wanted to accomplish in the future based on her experiential knowledge as faculty and administrator.

Indeed, as a Latina first-generation college student implied significant challenges for Margarita when she had to witness in some of her classes various incidents of gender bias. First,
she saw how some of her male fellow students were given more time to turn in assignments and/or be absent in class because they were top administrators. “Some of my male peers are given more privileges by some professors. He's a superintendent, or he works in the government, or whatever, but I mean, how come you only make those allowances for certain people?”

Furthermore, Margarita felt discriminated against in one of her classes due to her gender and ethnicity, especially when she shared her opinions in class. She elaborated on these biases in her testimonio:

I see discrimination! They [White peers] answer a lot of questions and their answers are always great! I get challenged by the professor, some of these professors are Anglo, and it's like, your answer was good [peer’s] and yours [Margarita’s] was stupid. In a class with three Anglo female students, I was surprised that both sides of the room were racially divided; on one side, only the White students used to sit and on the other side, the Latinx students. We self-segregated when we walked into the class to take a seat. It was just weird! I had other professors that were not Hispanic, but weren't Anglo either and, everybody was mixed [seating arrangement]. And I felt stupid many times when my White peers constantly challenged my opinions! It had almost turned into this struggle, and fight, and debate, you know, but that's the only class with a couple that were like that. I had a big misconception of what it meant to be in a Hispanic Serving Institution. I expected the program to be hard and that being a Hispanic-Serving institution would grant me a better academic support system in order to finish my doctorate sooner.

Dealing with these forms of gender discrimination and biases, Margarita felt not only discouraged but also like an outsider in that class. Her extensive teaching experience along with her administrative experience at the university were completely disregarded and devalued by her
White male peers and her professor who made her feel “stupid” when she tried to contribute to class. In addition, the fact that her White and Latino peers diminished the scope of academic socialization among them by seating next to fellow students who were from the same racial background increased Margarita’s feelings of otherness and isolation. Having to deal with issues like these made Margarita realize that being a Woman of Color in the academy required a strong determination and resilience, especially in classes that perpetuated racial segregation and gender discrimination; these behaviors have perpetuated the marginalization of Women of Color through the historic manifestation of the White male, middle-class model in academia, which unfortunately has been and continue to be detrimental for women, Women of Color, and other marginalized populations.

Maya, another doctoral student in education also experienced discrimination due to her gender and sexual identity, specifically by some male peers in her cohort after she mentioned that she was bisexual in a class that covered feminist theory. As an experienced educator and writer, Maya shared in her testimonio that she never thought that such incident would affect the way she will be treated by some of her male peers. Maya was convinced that pursuing a doctorate implied that people would be more “open-minded” and inclusive since the academic environment deals with issues of diversity and inclusion in the classroom, including LGBTQ experiences in education. Maya deeply believed in the importance of being honest about her sexual orientation to feel liberated and to develop self-acceptance for herself and for others, as well. Maya stated the following in her testimonio:

Fui discriminada por mi género y por mi bisexualidad porque lo dije en una de mis clases y a partir de ahí, sí hubo unos comportamientos raros por parte de algunas personas.
Por ejemplo, ellos ignoraban mis errores ortográficos que hacía en los trabajos escritos a pesar de que debían de proporcionar retroalimentación académica y correcciones para mejorar la calidad de mis ensayos o trabajos que intercambiábamos como parte de una actividad que hacíamos en clase. Y ya no hablaban tanto conmigo como solían después de divulgar mi identidad sexual. Era una clase sobre feminismo. Yo dije que es bien importante la identidad sexual para tu desarrollo como individuo. Es completamente humano para llevarla a cabo sin una retórica religiosa, académica, o moralista. De hecho, Freire decía que los sistemas opresivos lo único que quieren es que no descubras lo que es ser humano. Y cuando vas descubriendo tu identidad sexual, entonces es bien importante que la reconozcas, que la aceptes, que te dejes de estar juzgando y permitir que empiece a fluir. Y cuando tú lo haces, al entorno le molesta. Sentí cosas raras, sentí más rechazo de los hombres, sobre todo de uno que es bien cristiano, de los hombres cristianos; y hubo una especie de complicidad y sucesión de ellos. ¡Fue tanto el daño que sentí en ese momento!

I was discriminated for my gender and because of my bisexuality, because I said it in one of my classes, and then, there were some weird behaviors from some people [peers]. For example, they ignored the orthographical errors that I made on my papers even though they were supposed to provide academic feedback and corrections to improve the quality of the essays or papers that we exchanged as a class activity, and they did not talk to me as much as they used to after I disclosed my sexual identity. It was a class about feminism. I said that your sexual identity is very important for your development as an individual. It is entirely human to carry it out without religious, academic, or moralistic rhetoric. In fact, Freire said that oppressive systems just want you not to discover what it
is to be human. And, when you discover your sexual identity, then, it is very important that you recognize it; that you accept it; that you stop judging yourself and allow it to flow. And when you do so, it bothers those people around you. I felt weird things. I felt more rejection from men, especially from one who is a fervent Christian, from Christian men. And there was kind of a complicity and continuation of that attitude towards me. I felt so insulted when that happened!

This excerpt shows the biases that Maya experienced and seemed to affect her not only socially but also emotionally, when she said, “fue tanto el daño en ese momento.” [I felt so insulted when that happened!]. This incident was disconcerting to Maya and a significant challenge after experiencing some discrimination from her male peers who were not open to her sexual orientation.

Another student who experienced similar overt discrimination and biases from two of her peers was Emilia, a fourth-year doctoral student in the field of rhetoric and composition. When describing her experiences with peers in the classroom, Emilia recalled that there were some instances where she and her peers had to read the experiences of the audience in relation to the readings the professor assigned. Unfortunately, on one occasion, a White male peer made a derogatory comment about Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings, questioning the academic and intellectual validity of this Chicana scholar. This disconcerted Emilia as she was very cognizant of the significance of Anzaldúa’s work in various fields, such as in composition studies, ethnic studies, Chicano studies, American studies, cultural studies, literary studies, feminism, women’s studies, queer theory, and critical pedagogy (Keating, 2005). Indeed, as a Latina from a city located in the border, her lived experiences have been crucial in understanding and validating Anzaldúa’s scholarly contributions. Emilia stated in her testimonio:
There were some instances where we had to read the experiences of Gloria Anzaldúa, so during one time, I remember a comment made by one of the White students. I had a confrontation with him about Gloria Anzaldúa. He said that he didn't understand why we were reading her work and he was very upset that we had to read her work because he didn't think that was academic level; he thought we should be reading things that were more academic. He pretty much trashed her work. He didn't like her! He said that her work was more anecdotal and didn't understand why we were reading that in a PhD program. He was criticizing Anzaldúa’s work as not being rigorous for a PhD program. But I think that comment came from a place of ignorance, and he doesn’t understand that that kind of work has meaning. He’s very Eurocentric, for sure! He was very opinionated and very arrogant! We didn’t get along most of the time; we were civil towards each other, but after several intellectual conversations, we were coming from different directions. He had in black and white what he thought was important literature and important works. And on the other hand, there were some works and some books that he didn’t consider were good enough and he was in that sense an elitist.

Moreover, Emilia had another similar instance with a peer who was a year ahead of her cohort; while she was in her early coursework taking an introductory course, one of her peers, a White female made a pejorative comment related to people who spoke Spanglish. Spanglish is a form of speech where Spanish and English are utilized and mixed (Spanglish), a linguistic phenomenon that takes place in the borderland region among Latinxs who are bilingual or multilingual, and that is seen as a creative and important linguistic resource (Auer, 1999; Garcia, 2009). Indeed, language mixing or translanguaging occurs in all bilingual or multicultural communities, as people tend to use all of the linguistic repertoires available to them in order to
communicate (García, 2009; O’Connor et al., 2019). Emilia is a vivid example of what García and Kleyn (2016) refer to as “dynamic bilingualism” that she enacted through her translanguaging, which goes behind the notion of additive bilingualism because it did not simply refer to the addition of a separate set of language features but acknowledges that “the linguistic features and practices of bilinguals form a unitary linguistic system that interact in dynamic ways with each other” (p. 16). They were also reading some of Anzaldúa’s texts where the topic of using Spanglish came up and her peer expressed that she did not understand why people used Spanglish or codeswitched to communicate if they could just translate. Emilia declared the following in her *testimonio*:

She said that Spanglish was a desecration of both English and Spanish. I was very upset! That day at school was pretty heated, and she got me very upset. I completely don't agree with that mentality. I thought she was completely being ignorant and rude! There were several instances where I felt like I was kind of judged, like I was looked down upon. Those two days we were having heated discussions and both times I stood up for what I thought was right. I feel like it's very attached to my personal identity. I'm not saying that all of the rest must feel this way, but me, in particular, my language, my languages, I should say both English and Spanish, and even Spanglish, are pretty intertwined with who I am. She stood by her ground. She didn't really change her mind about it. I think it's because she was coming from outside. She came from Boston. She said: “My ancestors were from Europe and when we moved to the United States, they assimilated, and they lost their language. I don't understand why other people are not assimilating.” And she was talking about why Hispanics don't lose their language and assimilate. In my personal opinion, language is related to my identity, and I consider Spanglish to be one of my
languages and one that was criticized. I felt like I was being criticized, like my identity was not valid, like my culture wasn’t valid or it was being criticized in a negative way. So, based on the fact that I thought she was ignorant about it and just because her ancestors chose to assimilate in language and culture, or whatever, I feel like she thought everybody should do that. I thought that was a very ignorant point of view. I didn't continue my conversation with her; I felt like it was a waste of time because she wasn't going to change her mind about it.

As mentioned in her background section, Emilia grew up speaking English at school, Spanish with her mother, and Spanglish with her friends; therefore, this incident provoked sentiments of indignation as her ethnic/racial identity intersected with her linguistic identity, particularly the use of Spanglish. It is evident in her testimonio that Emilia felt profoundly discriminated due to the biases that her Bostonian peer had regarding the Spanglish phenomenon in the borderland region. As such, Emilia made sure that her voice was heard within the classroom where other Latinx peers were present but who did not speak with the same conviction she did. Emilia shared that, unfortunately, they did not defend her stance as vehemently as she did. She further explained:

One or two of the Hispanic students did say a comment, but definitely, nobody said it as me, with such conviction! I think I spoke with a lot of conviction and passion because I was really feeling it! She said it was a desecration of both English and Spanish, yeah, I remember that word very vividly! And a lot of Latinos, what I have noticed, do assimilate. I have noticed that similarity, they don't speak Spanish and don't write it, and they don't see language as part of their identities because it is something difficult to stand up for. A lot of Latinxs, I feel, are ashamed and this is just my personal opinion. I feel
that a lot of Latinos are ashamed of their culture or are ashamed of how they got here because, you know, especially in today's political environment where you come from and whether you're here legally or illegally are kind of like a big debate. A lot of people are ashamed of how they got here.

Interestingly, Emilia also commented the following about the professor’s reaction after the heated conversations with her Bostonian peer:

She was just hearing and, at the end, when it got more heated, she was just kind of like, “well, let's move on, let's move on.” She just wanted to not have that conversation anymore, which I don't blame her because you have two students that are arguing two points that a lot of people see validity in. For sure, if she would have supported me, I would have felt like my opinion was more validated; but I don't blame her because it's kind of a difficult stand, you know, as a professor. I think that as a professor, you're kind of put in a difficult situation because if you give one student voice on her opinion, you're kind of shutting down someone else's voice; so, I think she was she was tiptoeing a very difficult line. The professor had no opinion, either positive in my direction or negative; she was very careful to force herself from the situation.

Emila’s excerpt illustrates how she understood her professors’ stance by not giving her own opinion about the issue in order to avoid further confrontations in class that may affect the classroom environment. Emilia defended her stance with integrity and conviction because in her personal experience she recognized the importance of her intersecting identities, in this case of ethnicity/race and language. In her experience, she utilized Spanglish as part of her cultural and linguistic repertoires. She deeply expressed her pride in being a Latina doctoral student who not
only speaks and reads academic English, but uses Spanglish to communicate, an important aspect of her linguistic identity.

Regarding the intersections between gender and age, Socorro, a 47-year-old student in the field of engineering, also experienced instances of overt gender and age discrimination from two young male classmates with whom she had to work in teams. In her testimonio, Socorro shared that she felt they discriminated against her because she was older than the other women and men in the program and one of the oldest students in her cohort, as most of the peers were in their mid-20’s or early 30’s. For instance, a male peer from India was in her team and often ignored her comments and tended to interrupt her while she was talking, thus, making her feel disrespected and discriminated for her age and gender. Socorro commented in her testimonio:

En una clase que tomé este semestre y teníamos que tomarla en equipos. En ese equipo me tocó una persona que yo siento que era su cultura, una persona hindú. Yo siento que no me tenía el respeto que debería de tenerme. Estaba hablando yo y no me respetaba, me interrumpía, nunca ponía atención a lo que yo estaba diciendo; varias actitudes así, desagradables. Pero no sé si es por su cultura porque he conocido otras personas hindúes que no son así. ¡Mostraba una falta de interés total a lo que yo decía! ¡Era muy irrespetuoso! Mi otro compañero de equipo a veces le tenía que decir, “espérate ella está hablando, déjala que termine”. ¡Así de maleducado! Sí me hizo sentir molesta. Creo que era así conmigo porque era mujer y por mi edad porque yo sabía que él quería trabajar con gente más joven que yo.

In a class that I took this semester we had to work in teams. In my team, I got a person whom, I feel that it was his culture, a peer from India. I feel that he did not have the respect that he should have had for me. I was speaking and he did not respect me; he
interrupted me and he never paid attention to what I was saying; various attitudes like
d these, which were unpleasant. But I do not know if it was due to his culture, because I
have met other people from India who are not like him. He showed a total lack of interest
to what I said! He was very disrespectful! My other teammate sometimes had to tell him,
"Wait, she's talking, let her finish." He was so rude! It did make me feel upset. I think that
he was like that due to my gender and age, because I knew that he wanted to work with
people younger than me.
Socorro’s previous experiences with gender discrimination were not something new to her. In
her former jobs with mostly male engineers, she learned to act with determination and
persistence to overcome the obstacles she usually encountered as a woman in a field dominated
mostly by men (Blackburn, 2017; Johnson 2007; Kuntz 2009; Litzler 2010; Walton, Logel,
Peach, Spencer, & Zanna, 2015).
Unfortunately, this was not the only unwelcoming experience that Socorro had during her
first semester as a doctoral student. Another student who was in his master’s degree in the same
field refused to not only to work with her in the lab even though they were working in the same
team, but also avoided to work with her even though she offered her assistance many times even
though Socorro is an experienced water analyst. She recalled in her testimonio:
¡Los jovencitos tienden a discriminar, totalmente! Me ha pasado también en la clase de
matemáticas. Una vez no quiso trabajar conmigo. Yo siento que era por mi edad.
Él era mexicano, nacido aquí. Este muchachito y yo teníamos que trabajar en un proyecto
juntos en el laboratorio y me ofrecí muchas veces a ayudarlo. Él nunca quiso ayuda.
Buscó ayuda en otros lados. Yo soy especialista en análisis de agua. Me ofrecí a ayudarle
y de repente donde estaba haciendo mis análisis de agua, él llega con otra chica que pues,
estaba muy ocupada, le explicó bien rápido y él no había aceptado mi ayuda. Tiene entre 24 o 25 años. Está en la maestría. A mí sí como que me sacó de onda porque le ofrecí mi ayuda. Y le aconsejo cosas y hace cosas diferentes. Es curioso. Y a veces usábamos hasta un intermediario. Yo le aconsejaba a otra persona de mi equipo y ese muchachito iba y le preguntaba. Algo pasó ahí que no hubo simpatía o empatía, pero él nunca quiso trabajar conmigo. Siento que era por mi edad. El hindú era joven como entre 25 y 30 años. ¡Me topé con ese tipo de cosas, dos el mismo semestre! Y el hindú, ahí sí me afectaba porque teníamos que trabajar en equipo para la calificación. Pero la profesora puso unos cuestionarios donde nos preguntaba el desempeño de nuestros compañeros, entonces ahí sí le puse mis comentarios sobre su actitud y le expliqué el por qué y todo.

Young people tend to discriminate, totally! It happened to me in math class, too. He didn't want to work with me. Well, I feel that was because of my age. He was Mexican and born here. This young man and I had to work on a project together in the lab and I offered to help him many times. But he never wanted my help! He looked for it elsewhere. I’m a specialist in water analysis. I offered myself to help him and, suddenly, when I was doing my water analysis, he arrived with another girl who was very busy and explained to him very quickly what to do; but he did not accept my help. He’s 24 or 25 years old. He’s in his master's degree. It really surprised me because I offered to help him and I gave him advice on how to do things, but he did different things instead. It's weird! And there are times when we even used an intermediary. I would advise another person on my team and this young man would go and ask him instead. Something happened there that there was no friendliness or empathy, but he never wanted to work with me. I feel that it was because of my age! The Asian Indian guy was young between 25 to 30
years old. I've run into that kind of things, two in the same semester! And the Asian Indian guy, in that case, it affected me because we had to work as a team for a grade. But the professor gave out some questionnaires where she asked us to evaluate the contributions of our teammates; so, I wrote comments about his attitude and explained to her my views and everything.

Although Socorro had previous experiences where she felt that her expertise was disregarded by coworkers when she worked in the maquiladoras in Mexico, it was the first time she encountered a situation in which not only her gender but also her age was an issue. Hence, such incident made her feel confused and disoriented as she never imagined before that her age would be an obstacle. Certainly, these two experiences within the same semester influenced her academic socialization experiences as a non-traditional Latina doctoral student.

Interestingly, Sally was another student who was also working on her doctorate in environmental engineering. She shared in her testimonio that a classmate from India told her that she was a “dominant woman” even though she had never approached him in class for him to label her as “dominant”. Sally shared that she felt that his comment was biased, which was probably due to the way she behaved in class because most of the time, she just listened to others and did not socialize with him or other peers neither personally nor academically. Moreover, in a different occasion he compared her with other female peers in the program, which was something that also bothered Sally. She explained in her testimonio:

A guy from India told me in class when he saw me, “Oh, you’re shy; you’re dominant; you’re a dominant woman.” I never told him anything. I don’t know if it was because the way I look at him or because I don’t talk too much in class. I just listen and look. He doesn’t even know me, and I thought like, whatever stupid! [laughs]. They talk a lot the
Indian guys! I think it is because of that. I don’t know why he said that; maybe because I’m taller and stronger than the peers from India. Or maybe because all the girls from India are laughing all the time and I don’t laugh at all. There are other Latinas there, but he didn’t say that to them. Like there was one Latina girl, and he said to her, “You’re smart and intelligent!”

Being a woman who did not behave like the rest in the cohort was probably seen as a type of deficiency in her peer’s point of view. This experience made Sally aware that he expected Sally to be talkative and social in class as the other women with whom he socialized personally and academically. Her Indian peer revealed his biased behavior. Moreover, Sally felt that by labeling the other Latina as intelligent, he wanted to imply that she was not as intelligent as the other women in the program. Indeed, such expectations were examples of biases against Sally perhaps due to her physical appearance (tall and robust) and her quiet personality. Interestingly, during her masters, Sally felt discriminated by a Polish peer.

In my masters, a Polish girl spoke English very well. I think she felt superior. She even told me once, “Oh, you’re an Inca from South America.” We were all Latina women [in class] except her and she even left the program because she could not stand living in this city.

The preceding except shows the racial/ethnic discrimination that Sally experienced by being identified as an “Inca from South America” by her Polish classmate, which clearly shows her lack of cultural sensitivity toward people from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, on a different occasion, Sally felt racially/ethnically discriminated when she was sitting at a bus station waiting for the bus to arrive next to the university campus. She explained in her testimonio:
I felt discriminated for being Latina when I was on the street, walking and then the immigration police came and asked me, the border patrol, “Where is your passport, where are you going, where are you coming from?” I was waiting for my bus; it was Sunday morning. And I told them, “Do you want to wait for me? My house in one block from here, if you want to see I have a passport, I have a visa. I have a passport to be here.

Being asked for her papers was clearly an act of profiling, something Sally never expected as most of the inhabitants who live in the city are people of Mexican descent. Luckily, as soon as she explained to the Border Patrol agents that she could prove that she was a documented immigrant, they did not continue to question her anymore and left the scene. The fact that Sally was identified by the Border Patrol as an undocumented Latina was most probably due to the xenophobic rhetoric and sentiments against immigrants in the United States during the Trump, including profiling people based on their ethnic/racial backgrounds. Indeed, the intersection of Sally’s identities, being Latina, a woman, an immigrant, and doctoral student in engineering, evidently shaped how she experienced the world around her.

Unfortunately, for Mari, another student who is pursuing her doctoral degree in biology, a very negative and demeaning comment her mentor and supervisor made changed the dynamics of their relationship. Mari shared that her mentor is a very successful scientist who tends to challenge her and her peers intellectually and has the tendency to ask them scientific questions in public to test their knowledge. “You feel embarrassed, but it just makes you want to know.” Mari also shared in her testimonio that her mentor has more considerations with her male lab peers, especially when they make mistakes and does not yell at them as he does to her and her female lab students. Unfortunately, Mary had a serious conflict with him that negatively affected their
mentor-mentee relationship academically and professionally, as he made some overt
discriminatory comments about her mother and sister. Mary declared in her testimonio:

He insulted my family pretty much! I'm not going to let him! I told him that my dad is a
doctor, he kind of would understand [an experiment]; then, I was like, yeah, probably my
sister too because she's a nurse” and then, he's like, “Well, nurses are not the sharpest tool
in the shed.” And then I said, oh you know, my mom's a nurse too. And he said, “Well
there you go, that explains everything.” So, I don't know if he said that because she's a
nurse or a woman, and not a doctor [mom]. I said to him, you know, it's getting very hard
not to insult you, and after that, he went to a meeting and didn't talk to me for like a
month until I went up to him and I told him: I don't know what it is you're doing. I'm
here, I can work! I don't know why you're not talking to me! With him, I used to get
along very well, but after that, I felt very disappointed in his behavior because during that
month, he didn't speak to me! We had visitors from big universities, and had lunch with
them, and we were sitting right across from each other; and then, another scientist that's
very well-known and the whole time he was not making any eye contact [her mentor]; he
never spoke to me and never gave me the opportunity to network with these people. And,
we had a conference the following day, we were supposed to present our posters and he
pretty much presented my poster for me to his old boss. So, to me, that was very
disrespectful and after that I felt like I just didn't want to have anything to do with him.
I'm not going to hold it against him. I don't hate him. I don't wish him anything bad!

In this excerpt, it is evident how Mari’s mentor completely disregarded her feelings and
disrespected her family. He tested her intelligence and her peers in front of her male peers in the
lab (undergraduate and graduate) and said derogatory comments about her mother and sister for
having a bachelor’s in nursing. Mari was still feeling overwhelmed and very disappointed in her
mentor when she shared her testimonio, as it was something that affected her emotionally as well
as academically. In addition, her own experience presents how some White male faculty and/or
mentors can reproduce the status quo without considering the importance of a dignified
mentoring and cultural awareness when dealing with their mentees, particularly Women of Color
and other marginalized student populations in STEM fields. Moreover, Mari is very proud to be
a Latina, but she feels very disillusioned when her mentor makes sarcastic jokes about Mexican
heritage students’ lack of opportunities and financial struggles as first-generation college
students, which is the case for many students at Southwest University.

He says the “Mexican tragedy” when you want to go to a fellowship. He says like, “Oh,
you need to start with the Mexican tragedy” or when we say to someone, “They’re
looking for you. She was short with long hair,” and then, he'll say, “Oh, that's like every
Mexican here at school.”

Moreover, Mari gets frustrated by being treated with rudeness and less consideration at work
compared to her male peers, and, unfortunately, this has been an ongoing situation since she
started to work in the lab with her mentor. Therefore, Mari’s gender and ethnicity intersected
with her identity as a scientist, an area that has been historically underrepresented by women and
Women of Color in academia. When asked about what she disliked the most in her program,
Mari elucidated:

It started to feel like he wanted me to look stupid in front of my other colleagues. You
know, be rude to me, and stop talking to me, or treat me in a different way [her mentor]
because I'm not a dude, because I'm not a guy! And I think with him, it's not so much
because you're Mexican or not. I think it has to do with women. I think it's been the
treatment! It’s different because you're a woman in science! Sometimes I feel like some of them (male peers) think that because we're women and we're there, that we're supposed to help them. My undergraduate and graduate male peers are better treated than the females at work [in the lab]. Our boys, they're better treated! Oh, yeah! They will not get yelled at! Like, if we have other students that we're working with and they screw up after we've trained them, we get the credit for it, even though some of them were grad students from other labs. He is not going to yell at them! He’s not going to call them morons!

In this preceding testimonio, Mari’s gender identity has been tested several times by her mentor during her doctoral study. Unfortunately, this overt manifestation of gender and racial/ethnic discrimination by her mentor is not new to academia. She has had to put up with these obstacles as a Latina woman and her various identities have played a crucial role in defining who she is and what support systems she will seek during her doctoral journey to overcome mentor’s gender discrimination and microaggressions. Mari is indeed a vivid example of resilience and indomitable determination.

The last participant in this section who encountered her first semester to be very challenging was Ana. She shared in her testimonio that she felt that one of her White female professors agreed to everything that one of her White male peers responded in class, but often disagreed to what she contributed. Moreover, Ana was the only student who was asked for class notes by the professor. She explained the following:

When started the program, I thought, oh, my gosh, because I was coming from a business background. In my first semester, I had several challenges. One is that I felt completely disconnected with one of the professors because all we read was from the European perspective. And then, the other professor, she seemed to have good intentions to include
diversity and made an effort to introduce us to a large variety of cultures of rhetoric and composition. But I felt like it was too forced. Maybe it was me, but I just felt like she only connected with the Mexican American culture. It’s okay, but the Mexican culture is a different story, you know. And I felt like she made a distinction with me. We had a couple of White males in the classroom and there were four or three women and me. And every time that one of the young males discussed something, she was like “Oh, yeah!” But she questioned me things and made the point to say like, “Wait a minute, stop! That isn’t the word that is supposed to be!” And I was like, well, that’s what I read. And she looked at me a little different. In that class sometimes it was fine and sometimes it was like, she would ask me for my notes [chuckles], but only to me. I was the only Mexican in class. There was another Latina, but she didn’t speak Spanish. Unfortunately, Ana had feelings of not belonging not only for being the only Mexican student in class but also for being scorned by a professor when she shared her comments in class based on what she understood from the readings. Additionally, she had a professor who had the tendency to emphasize that she was a part-time student, a situation that made Ana feel unappreciated. She stated in her testimonio:

Most faculty and peers are nice. The only one thing that I noticed is that one of my professors made comments quite often about the fact that everybody was full-time and that was a par-time student; so maybe he thought that because I’m part-time that I’m not from the cohort and that I will fall behind. He was always making that comment; and I don’t know if it that had anything to do with this, but some peers got together to present at a conference without inviting me. They’re all TA’s. It’s a diverse group and they take other classes together. I didn’t say anything to them for not being invited. I didn’t! They
were one Anglo woman, one Chicana, and one girl from a place close to India. I do think that they see me like, “Oh, she’d probably won’t have time to read because she works full-time.”

Unfortunately, being a full-time doctoral student may have influenced the way that Ana was perceived by the professor and her peers. As a non-traditional student, Ana felt that her peers excluded her because they had the misconception that she may not produce good academic work due to working full-time, thus decided to exclude her instead of establishing rapport with Ana, which could have led to a more fruitful academic socialization. Furthermore, Ana had to cope with her former and current colleagues at work. She declared the following:

And I just experienced that at my school where I work. The teachers are Chicanas but, you know, sometimes, because I teach higher level English and I’m doing a PhD. I don’t know if it’s jealousy or not, but I feel resentment because I’m the Mexican teaching higher level classes. And it doesn’t bother me because I worked for the cellphone industry where I was the only female in a management a position. I managed the New Mexico and Texas area. And I went through discrimination as a woman and because my English was horrible. I did trainings and I had to ask who spoke Spanish because my English was really bad. It was a male dominated business industry. But I think that sometimes people aren’t aware of their biases. I see that at my school and at the university the majority of administrators are male Anglos or if not male, female Anglos. You hardly ever see a Latina in a management position.

For Ana, being a Spanish speaker in a male dominated environment was a complex experience; however, despite her linguistic limitations when she just moved to the United States. Indeed, Ana was able to prove that being a native Spanish speaker was not a limitation to succeed when she
became the only female manager in two states in the Southwest. On the other hand, she also felt some “resentment” from her Chicana colleagues at work due to teaching the advanced English courses at her school, which implied having an advanced knowledge of English literature and strong teaching skills.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

Ten out of the 14 participants in this study experienced biases, discrimination, and/or microaggressions in their programs and/or community that often resulted in the participants feeling either emotionally stressed, anxious, isolated, disillusioned, and/or not belonging in their respective doctoral programs (Pierce, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). For instance, Margarita felt isolated, stressed, and that she did not belong in her program due to being the only Latina in her cohort, as well as being academically depreciated by a White male professor and some of her White male peers who tended to discredit her comments. She experienced this as racial battle fatigue (Franklin et al., 2014). Moreover, having to endure racial battle fatigue can lead to psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses to biases and racism (Smith-Doerr, 2004), which is exactly to what happened to Margarita when she stated, “I felt stupid many times when my White peers constantly challenged my opinions! It had almost turned into this struggle, and fight, and debate.”

Margarita also had to witness how the White and Latinx students racially segregated themselves in the classroom by deliberately choosing to sit with people of the same racial background, which also made her feel disappointed and isolated (Pierce, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). Interestingly, Tatum (2017) describes in her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, the racial segregation in schools, which has increased compared to last generation from K-12 school as well as in higher education
institutions in part due to the epistemic racism that has permeated the social structures including higher education institutions, not excluding the blatant racist rhetoric during the Trump administration against People of Color, immigrants, and other marginalized communities. For Tatum (2017), there is hope in the pursuit of racial equity and social justice through the power of dialogue on racism in American society to change the racial dynamics of the 21st century student population. Furthermore, if schools and higher education institutions are intentional in being inclusive and tolerant when dealing with people from diverse racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds, especially when they engage with each other even though cross-group interactions may be uncomfortable for some students in the classroom (Tatum, 2017), as it occurred in Margarita’s class.

As the dominant culture has created its convenient version of reality (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000), aimed not only to privilege the interests of the dominant group, but also to override the rights of others, Emilia’s testimonio is an example of a counternarrative of such a privileged version of reality. She explicitly resisted the Eurocentrism of her White peers by confronting them in class with conviction. This is one of the ways in which she validated her racial/ethnic and linguistic identities to counteract the production of the master narratives or dominant ideologies that they utilized to other her, including the lack of understanding that her Eurocentric White male peer had about Anzaldúa’s scholarly contributions. Indeed, being a Latina woman who was born and raised in a borderland city made Emilia extremely conscious of the importance of Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking publication, Boderlands/La Frontera. She connected with her work as it was an overt critique against colonialism and its supporters that contains Anzaldúa’s preoccupations with the historical processes by which dominant groups portray, produce, and represent the identity of the other as an inferior being, and utilize myths
and culture to create stereotypes about other people (Anzaldúa, 1987). Moreover, Emilia is representative of what Anzaldúa (1987) discussed in the Borderlands/La Frontera, particularly when Emilia expressed the intimate relationship that she had with her languages, which were intertwined with her racial/ethnic identities. Thus, Emilia’s resistance to her White classmates by perceiving herself in the process of being oppressed (Freire, 1970) when she openly acknowledged that “both English and Spanish, and even Spanglish, are pretty intertwined with who I am.” Therefore, these women, especially Emilia, are representative of the new mestiza consciousness that is born from this interplay between oppression and resistance as they heralded their racial/ethnic, and linguistic identities, as well as a deep sense of solidarity toward Scholars of Color, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa.

There has been an increasing amount of academic work documenting this resistance against racism and sexism through both qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as personal experiences from scholars of their own journeys in navigating academia (Bañuelos, 2006; Burciaga, 2007; Espinoza, 2001; González, 2006; Watford et al., 2006). My findings make it evident that more than half of the participants’ graduate experiences were characterized by different forms of resistance against racism, sexism, and other biases in order to persevere and continue their degree despite overwhelming odds. A good example of a participant who exemplifies such resistance was Mari who was in a STEM field usually dominated by men. Mari experienced overt microaggressions and gender bias from her White male faculty mentor and dissertation chair who made derogatory comments against Students of Color by affirming that they all look “the same” and needed to “start with the Mexican tragedy” when applying for financial assistance. Interestingly, Mari shared that his lack of empathy towards her and other people, including his racist and classist behavior towards minoritized students was mainly due to
his privileged background. Indeed, Mari’s mentor colonial way of thinking as a privileged White male in academia was evident in his derogatory comments towards People of Color. By othering others, including Mari and her family, he was recreating the social cycle of coloniality that supports ideologies of “deservingness” that have been very damaging in education, especially for underrepresented minorities to maintain his privilege and power as a White scholar. About this topic, Patel (2015) noted:

I suggest that the ubiquity of deservingness demands a reckoning with the specifics of how it is deployed relative to different peoples in a settler society, how they are racially minoritized and majoritized, and fundamentally, how that creates connected yet distinct social locations, rights, and relationships to self, others, the state, and land (p.12).

Certainly, Patel’s (2015) insights relate to Mari’s story. By yelling at Mari and other women in the lab and calling them “morons” as well as belittling her mother and sister for being nurses, Mari not only felt disillusioned, but highly disrespected by him as a Student of Color. His attitude negatively affected their mentor-mentee relationship for a long time. For instance, he stopped talking to Mari for a while, giving her the “silent treatment” as a form of punishment, which has been noted by several scholars in the literature (Cooke, 2019, as cited in Cortina & Magley, 2003; Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Robinson et al., 2013). Indeed, as a Latina in STEM, Mari had to constantly resist against her mentor’s sexism and “impolite hostilities” (Cooke, 2019) that Faculty of Color also have to face due to “their gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, and for simply existing in predominantly White spaces where their countenances are not the norm” (Cooke, 2019, p. 227).

Another participant, Sally, experienced discrimination due to her ethnicity and phenotype (Espino et al., 2012) when two Border Patrol officers questioned her migratory status while she
was waiting for the bus next to the university. In fact, racial profiling of immigrants has been reinforced by state and local police “to identify and turn over any suspect criminal immigrants they encounter during their regular law-enforcement activities (Hagan et al., 2009, p. 1807), which unfortunately happened to Sally in a border community mostly populated by Latinxxs.

In addition, Sally received a blatant racist comment from a female Polish peer who spoke “very good English” and dared to tell her that she “was an Inca from South America,” was indeed a form of overt discrimination, which happens against ethnic minorities. This has been noted in the work of Nguyen (2021) where she openly advocates for people who are considered as otherness due to their various intersectional identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, etc.) by those who are in positions of power and White privilege. Furthermore, the stigmatization of racial minorities may lead to a devaluation of their social identity, as “discrimination has often impacted the accurate evaluation of their performance” (Nguyen, 2021, p. 7). Research demonstrates a causal link between exposure to racial discrimination and adverse health outcomes among diverse racial and ethnic populations in the United States (Vargas et al., 2019). Additionally, a study that draws from critical race theory to analyze a new multi-dimensional measure of racial status –‘street race’ and its relation with discrimination found that Latinxxs who are racialized on the street as Black or as Arab/Middle-Eastern relative to White people were more likely to have experienced discrimination in the job and housing market, by police, in restaurants or shops and while getting medical care because of their phenotype (Vargas et al., 2019). Furthermore, several studies show that women in STEM face additional challenges such as biases, stereotypes, discrimination, unwelcoming campus, and negative classroom experiences with faculty or peers as part of their academic socialization experiences (Blackburn, 2017; Johnson 2007; Kuntz 2009; Litzler 2010; Walton et al., 2015). One of the findings in my
study was that the three participants in the STEM fields, Mari, Socorro, and Sally, experienced racism, and gender bias from faculty and/or Mexican American and peers from India, experiences that have been documented in the literature regarding women and Women of Color in STEM fields (Blackburn, 2017).

Therefore, the findings of this study are in line with the literature regarding gender stereotyping, sexism, and/or subtle insults, such as daily microaggressions in the academy to overt discouragement (Barthelemy et al., 2016). This reality made the doctoral experiences of these three women even more challenging. Nevertheless, the other participants in the non-STEM disciplines, such as Bella, Margarita, Emilia, Maya, and Ana also experienced instances of sexism, racism, and/or stereotyping, which also added to the stress generated by the demands involved in pursuing a doctoral program (Pierce, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). For instance, Maya was a participant whose sexual orientation made her part of the LGBTQ community; nonetheless, feeling discriminated by some of her peers due to her bisexualism weaken her sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Similar findings were also found in McLaren and Castillo’s (2020) study on bisexual women’s sense of belonging and emotional well-being an aspect that has been found to be crucial for a student’s self-esteem, academic growth, success, and persistence, particularly among LGBTQ students (Hahm et al., 2018) and other minoritized student populations (Gopalan & Brady, 2020). In relation to be open to diversity and inclusion, John F. Kennedy said: "So let us not be blind to our differences but let us also direct attention to our common interests…And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity." Fortunately, these women were able to resist such oppressive behaviors through their own agency (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001),
persistence, and resilience to challenge the status quo in order to successfully continue their doctoral journey

**Theme 1.2: Decolonizing Personal and Academic Spaces through Language, Culture, and a Deep Sense of Solidarity**

Remarkably, the 14 participants in this study self-identified as bilingual and all of them saw their bilingualism as an asset as well as an important part of their identities as Latina doctoral students. They all expressed a deep sense of responsibility for improving the lives of other Latinxs through their knowledge, research projects, and future endeavors. They strongly believed in making a difference in society by becoming agents of positive change for Latinxs and other marginalized populations. Furthermore, the intersections of their ethnic, racial, and linguistic identities deeply influenced their sense of *latinidad* as they saw their linguistic and cultural backgrounds as very useful and valuable for their personal and academic endeavors.

One of the participants who resonated with this finding was Bella. Her connection to the Spanish language was also part of her ethnic identity as a Latina doctoral student. When asked about the importance of Spanish in her academic development, she considered her bilingualism as a very positive attribute, particularly in a region where many people are bilingual with Spanish and English. Bella believes in the positive effects of bilingualism in academia as it has opened some doors for her, especially when working as a teaching assistant when she started her doctoral program and some of her Spanish-speaking students had questions related to concepts in the lecture that they did not understand in English. She shared in her *testimonio*:

In one way, I think just having a different perspective as a Latina would offer more career opportunities; also, just excel in whatever job I have that [being bilingual] would provide me with a different perspective as well. I've been telling my husband, what if I wasn't
there, like what if they had a white teaching assistant or what if it was a professor; maybe they [the students] haven't felt comfortable to ask what a word means even though they've been using it in the lecture frequently.

Interestingly, Bella felt more motivated than ever to continue with the doctoral degree because she has seen a lot of barriers for Latinxs in academia, including herself. She has attended many conferences such as the National Hispanic Science Network Conference where their focus was to make sure that Latinxs do not veer off the track in their doctoral study, “It's like, you know, how do we keep them in the pipeline of academia? So, they recognize that a lot of times if they go off the pipeline is because there's academic barriers and they’re just discouraged.” She added in her testimonio:

> Who will they be in the future? Who will be their professors or mentors? Just another White person who will not be able to understand that they have had obstacles in front of them? So that's another reason, you know, I've had good mentors and some bad mentors. So, helping other Latinxs, that's one of the main reasons that keeps me on this path of academia.

Bella’s multiple struggles to continue her education have made her more conscious of the existing barriers and valuable opportunities for Latinxs in higher education institutions. Her own struggles have influenced her decision to pursue a doctoral degree so that she can become a good mentor to other students and a Latina role model who will support students’ academic growth and assist them when dealing with academic challenges.

Another participant who described her pride in being a Latina doctoral student and a Spanish speaker was Andrea, an international doctoral student in health sciences. Her identity as
a Spanish speaker shaped how she interacted at the university, at home, and in her community as well. Andrea shared the following:

En la academia valoran que soy bilingüe, académicamente sí. He tenido oportunidades de trabajar corrigiendo traducciones es español. Lo hago en inglés y en español porque aquí hay gente que sabe español, pero no lo sabe escribir muy bien y como mi educación hasta la carrera fue en México, mi manera de escribir en español es más fuerte que en inglés. Y me ayuda en el trabajo y hay mucha necesidad [uso del español]. Y ya ves que los hispanos van en crecimiento. Aquí es muy cómodo saber los dos lenguajes. En este momento de mi vida me siento bien orgullosa de ser Latina, de estar aquí porque soy la primera que voy a hacer un doctorado; tengo primos y primas, pero nadie ha hecho un doctorado. ¡Para mí es un orgullo ser yo quien lo está haciendo!

In the academy they value that I am bilingual, academically. Yes! I’ve had opportunities to work correcting translations in Spanish. I do it in English and Spanish because there are people here who know Spanish but cannot write it very well; and, since my education up to my undergraduate degree was done in Mexico, my writing in Spanish is stronger than in English. It helps me at work and there is a lot of need [of Spanish]. And you see that Hispanics are growing. Here, it is very useful to know both languages. At this moment in my life, I feel very proud to be Latina, to be here, because I’m the first to do a PhD. I have cousins, but no one has done a PhD in my family. I’m proud to be the one who is doing it!

For Andrea, being bilingual is an asset not only in academia but also at home, where speaking Spanish is deeply cherished as part of her Mexican cultural background as she saw the importance of Spanish. Unfortunately, when she moved to the Unites States, Andrea was
discriminated by some Latinx healthcare providers because she did not speak English too well. As an international student, she learned sufficient grammar and vocabulary to earn a passing score on the TOEFL exam; however, her oral skills (i.e., listening and speaking) were still developing when she began graduate school, which is what happens to international students when they are developing their English proficiency. Andrea recalled that when she was pregnant with her son, she did not receive good service from the healthcare providers and decided to ask her husband to accompany her in order to receive a better service. She further explained:

Cuando recién llegué, que hablaba muy poco inglés, hablaba más español y andaba buscando dónde aliviarme ahí fue así como que si no hablaba inglés no me querían atender. Pero no estaba en la escuela y mi inglés no era bueno. Y le dije a mi esposo que viniera conmigo porque no me querían contestar si les hablaba en español. Y notaba que si iba él y hablaba inglés le daban mucha información. Y eran hispanos y no sé si sabían español; en vez de verlo como una herramienta; se me hace que es la educación que tuvieron.

When I first arrived here, I spoke limited English. I spoke more Spanish, and I was looking for a place where I could deliver my son. And it was evident that if I did not speak English, they did not want to assist me. But I was not in school, and my English was not good. And I told my husband to come with me because they don't want to help me. And I noticed that if he went and spoke English with them, they gave him a lot of information. And they are Hispanic, but I don't know if they speak Spanish or not. They should see Spanish as a tool. I think it is due to how they were raised.

As we can see, Andrea’s appreciation for her native language goes beyond the academic environment. Andrea acknowledged the lack of interest in some people to use Spanish as a
linguistic tool attributing it to the way these people were raised at home regarding the benefits of learning a second language. Furthermore, when Andrea shared her views about her native language, it is evident that she is critically aware of the importance of inculcating the love for his heritage language and culture despite the peer pressure that her son was experiencing in and out of the classroom (Leeman, 2018). She shared the following about the aspects involved in being Latina:

Ser Latina significa enseñarle a mi hijo que es importante ser hispanos y enseñar la cultura, el lenguaje; enseñarle palabras que nunca va a oír si no se las dices. Enseñarle a quererlo de la misma manera que tú lo vas queriendo, que se sienta bien orgulloso de ser hispano, transmitirle orgullo a mi hijo, que lo sienta como algo que lo hace más fuerte, no más débil. Te comento porque mi niño hace un año me decía que no le gusta la clase de español y le digo por qué, no hijo, y me dijo esto y aquello. ¡Entonces es que tienes que crearles el amor también por la cultura, su amor por la cultura! Y saca su bandera de México y le dicen, “aquí no es México, apuesta” le dicen en inglés los chavalitos y son hispanos. Siento yo, en mi experiencia, que tiene que crearse el amor hacia las dos culturas, no nada más amor hacia una, se tiene que enseñar e inculcar en casa donde son los primeros años de aprendizaje, que es una habilidad más y no una vergüenza. Porque hasta es una herramienta de trabajo y le digo, mi amor es que tú hablas dos idiomas. ¿Pero sabes quién se lo da? Siento yo que las mamás, porque tengo muchas amigas hispanas como yo, que estudiaron en México y viven acá y sus niños hablan pésimo español y no les enseñan, no les corregen. Entonces dije, no les quieren enseñar y no es por trabajo sino porque también ya ellas se sienten mal. Ahí es el papá también, él tiene que inculcar y los papás a veces exigen y a veces no. Cuando mi marido y yo estamos en
México y le habla en inglés, le pico y le digo español, tienen que hablar español. Porque si no lo haces tú, él [hijo] no le tiene ni el respeto, ni el amor, y así se siente con el valor de enfrentarse en la sociedad a decir, bueno yo hablo español. ¡Es una lucha!

Being Latina means teaching my son that it is important to be Hispanic and to teach the culture, the language; teach him words that he will never hear if you don't say them. Teach him to love the language in the same way that I love it and feel very proud of being Hispanic. I want to transmit that pride to my son, that he feels it as something that makes him stronger, not weaker. I'm telling you this because my child told me a year ago that he didn't like his Spanish class and I told him, why, no my son, and he told me the reasons. Therefore, you have to create love for culture too, his love for the culture! And he took out his Mexican flag and they told him: "This is not Mexico; it sucks." The kids told him in English, and they are Hispanic. I feel in my experience that loving both cultures has to be instilled, not just love for one; it has to be taught and instilled at home when the first years of learning happen; that it is one more skill and not something to feel ashamed of. Because it is even a tool for work and I tell him: “My love, but you speak two languages.” But do you know who gives it [love for Spanish] to them? I feel that the moms, because I have many Hispanic friends like me, who studied in Mexico and live here, and their children speak terrible Spanish; they don't teach them; they don't correct them. So, I said to myself, they don't want to teach them and it's not because of the work it takes, but because they feel bad about speaking it, too. And the father is in this, too. He has to instill it; and the parents sometimes emphasize the use of it and sometimes they don't. When my husband and I are in Mexico and he speaks to my son in English, I punch him up and tell him, “Speak Spanish, you have to speak Spanish.” Because if you don't
do it, he [son] would neither have respect for it nor love it; and then, he would have the courage to confront society to say, “Well, I do speak Spanish.” It is a fight!

This extensive preceding excerpt clearly demonstrates how significant it is for Andrea to continue speaking her native language with her son and her husband. As an international student, being bilingual has been a positive experience; she has been asked to do translations in Spanish related to her research projects, which Andrea saw as an opportunity to contribute to her field of study. Indeed, her orgullo latino is evident in her willingness to continue fomenting love for both cultures, which speaks highly of her appreciation of the American culture, as well. Furthermore, Andrea has resisted the language assimilation that her Mexican friends are fomenting and perpetuating by not taking the time to correct their children’s’ mistakes in Spanish even though they are native speakers of Spanish. Undoubtedly, Andrea’s linguistic and ethnic identities are directly tied to her intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to maintain her mother tongue, especially during the process of acculturation for her and her family.

Another participant who highly valued Spanish, her native language, was Maya. As mentioned in her background, Maya was an ESL student who started learning English at the age of 26. Therefore, her experiences as a Spanish speaker and second language learner shaped most of her socialization experiences while she was earning her master’s degree, as well as in her doctoral study. Being at an American university on the border offered Maya the possibility to learn about the Chicano fight for their culture and language, due to the Arizona Senate Bill 1108, the anti-ethnic studies bill, which proposed to eliminate ethnicity-based organizations ethnic studies programs that were state-funded, among other things. As a result, this bill created an oppressive climate of discrimination against people of Mexican descent in Arizona, including discrimination against their language and cultural values (O’Leary & Romero, 2011). Therefore,
Maya found an opportunity to vindicate the Chicano movement in their efforts to use their mother tongue in academic institutions. She used Spanish to enact her language ideology as a doctoral student, including speaking Spanish with a “heavy Mexican accent,” which was an integral aspect of her linguistic identity. She acknowledged:

No conocía a los Chicanos ni sus manifiestos políticos ni sus derechos porque ellos exigieron el derecho del español y no se les daba en contextos académicos ese derecho. Entonces leo todos sus artículos y leo toda esta situación de injusticia y para mí no aplica la lógica en Southwest University, la gran universidad bilingüe; y todo mundo usa el inglés todo el tiempo y no hacemos ese mínimo acto de rebeldía, de desobediencia. No me voy a avergonzar cuando hable inglés con acento mexicano, al contrario, lo voy a hacer como un acto de orgullo, un arte bilingüe y eso es bien bonito. Y cuando dejo mensajes y digo, qué bonito hablo el inglés con el acento a todo lo que da y no avergonzarme por ser Mexicana que habla el inglés con acento mexicano. Entonces, el inglés ha sido complemente mi segunda lengua y lo domino más escribiéndolo que pronunciándolo o hablándolo. Pero también el empleo del español es una decisión personal es un manifiesto político completamente pues por todos los sistemas que existen aquí de injusticia hacia los mexicanos en Estados Unidos. Entonces fue una decisión personal y va conmigo. En la última presentación en la feria de investigadores me dije, bueno ni modo, sin disculparme; y cuando tengo que usar el inglés pues lo uso, pero sí me tengo que preparar mucho más, tengo que esforzarme más. Está bien porque aquí sobre todo en esta región nosotras fluimos en las dos lenguas; y aquí sí hay un cierto nivel de respeto hacia las personas que decidimos usar el español pero igual existe discriminación lingüística.
I did not know the Chicanos or their political manifestos or their rights because they demanded the right of using Spanish and they were not given that right in academic contexts. So I read all their articles and all these situations of injustice; and for me, that logic does not apply at Southwest University, the great bilingual university and everybody uses English all the time. And we do not enact that minimum act of rebellion, of disobedience [speaking Spanish]. I’m not going to be ashamed when I speak English with a Mexican accent, on the contrary, I’m going to do it as an act of pride, a bilingual form of art, and that is so nice. And when I leave messages [on the phone], I say to myself how beautifully I speak English with such a heavy accent; and I’m not ashamed of being a Mexican who speaks English with a Mexican accent. English has completely been my second language. And I have a better command writing it than pronouncing it or speaking it. But the use of Spanish is a personal decision. It is a completely political manifesto due to all the systems of injustice that exist here toward Mexicans in the United States. So, it was a personal decision, and it works for me. The last presentation I did in a research fair was in English. I said to myself, well, here it goes, without apologizing. When I have to use English, I use it, but I do have to prepare myself much more; I have to try harder. It's okay because here, especially in this region, we flow in both languages; and there is a certain level of respect for people who decide to use Spanish, yet there is linguistic discrimination.

This excerpt shows how Maya is cognizant of the importance of validating her language identity as a Latina as well as a doctoral student. She embraces the use of Spanish at the university, but also recognizes that it is a challenge when she presents in academic settings in English. Fortunately, she has had the support from some faculty in her doctoral program when utilizing
Spanish for academic purposes, such as writing papers in Spanish, writing a dissertation in Spanish, or using Spanish to communicate in class depending on the professor, which she admitted that it has given her more confidence as a doctoral student and a stronger feeling of belonging in the program. She added in her testimonio:

No absolutamente, mentiría, al contrario, hay un esfuerzo, hay un afán muy grande por parte de los mismos profesores por entender el español, escribirlo y poder ayudar porque ellos promueven que es un doctorado bilingüe; entonces, hay un esfuerzo, a veces lo logran algunos maestros. Y cuando uso el inglés he sentido que se ajustan a mi forma de comunicarme en inglés. Claro que he recibido correcciones; he tenido incompletos porque yo tengo que volver a hacer el trabajo por los comentarios, pero yo lo acepto. Yo no estoy en contra; sé cuáles son mis fortalezas y mis debilidades.

There is an effort; there is a great desire on the part of the professors to understand Spanish, to write it, and to be able to help because they promote bilingualism; so, there is an effort; sometimes some teachers can do so; and when I use English, I have felt that they adjust to my way of communicating in English. Of course, I have received corrections. I have received incompletes because I was asked to do the work again; but I accept it. I am not against it since I know what my strengths and weaknesses are.

It is evident that Maya feels supported by some professors who see Spanish as an asset. They have instilled confidence in Maya by helping her to develop her writing skills in English, which is a very important aspect for her academic success in the program. Blanca had similar views on bilingualism and having an accent as a second language learner. As mentioned in her background, Blanca came to the United States in her twenties and was also in an ESL program.
prior to attending college. For her, being bilingual has played a significant role in her academic socialization experiences through the doctoral program. She declared:

I have some colleagues that feel their English is not strong enough because they’re coming from Mexico. I do see bilingualism as an asset; but I also see it as your identity and part of your culture. It opens your mind to other possibilities and to other cultures; to embrace other cultures and other people. So, definitively to me, it’s very good that you can have the ability to speak two languages and to think in two languages.

The preceding excerpt illustrates Blanca’s language identity as a bilingual and how significant it is for her to communicate in two languages. Interestingly, Blanca experienced, for the first time in her doctoral program, an incident that made her deeply reflect on her various identities and subtractive schooling and language ideologies that have negatively affected the language development of her students. Indeed, Mexican American students’ lack of academic achievement is embedded in deficit perspectives that blame their language and culture, mainly due to the educator’s inability to demonstrate genuine caring and understanding of their cultural roots (Valenzuela, 2005). In her testimonio, she described how one of her Latina peers mentioned during class that she did not speak with a Mexican accent, thus, indirectly criticizing Blanca and other doctoral peers for speaking English with an accent. Blanca further shared:

She was very happy and proud that she did school in Juárez and came to school in the U.S. She was very grateful that she didn’t have an accent, meaning that she didn’t have a Mexican or Spanish accent that she had like a White’s accent, not a Mexican accent. What she meant is that she didn’t have an accent like us! She was very grateful for that! And I was just worried for her [doctoral peer]; what’s going to happen to her? Because to me, to be at this point in a doctoral program, and to be thinking like that, to me, oh, that’s
trouble! But I hope that she changed now. I think that I know who I am and I’m very proud about my roots! I respect everybody and I am open to diversity. I feel very comfortable speaking in English or in Spanish. I don’t have any problem with that. To me, having an accent is not an issue! I think it is the content, not having an accent! To me an accent is meaningless!

Indeed, Blanca felt that she was a *nepantlera*, referring to Anzaldúa’s (1987) notion of *nepantla*, which she coined as the “third space” or “in-between-ness” of being between various spaces, such as the culture of academia and the home life and/or cultural background of Students of Color, which may often lead to balancing the tensions that these two different environments bring to their lives. However, being in such space can be an opportunity for self-awareness and growth (Anzaldúa, 1990, 2000), which was the case for Blanca, as she deeply reflected on the English hegemony that had a detrimental effect in the linguistic development of her Spanish speaking students. She explicated in her testimonio:

> Sometimes I felt hopeless! Why my students are being so discriminated? Why they take their Spanish from them? My identity got more affirmed and because of that, my research is on the identity of teachers. I just want to see how it happens because you see, some people, they speak Spanish; they get out of school and speak English and change their identity and feel American and they speak American! They don’t even refer to it as English. For me, to be Latina means to speak Spanish! To care about people from other countries who have the same background and ethnicity. We have a rich culture and to be Latina is to have the *mestizo* background, your language, your thinking, the spirit, everything, the spirituality of the *nepantlera*. Yes, soy una *nepantlera*.
Blanca’s excerpt unmistakably illustrates the importance of the intersection of identities, in this case of language, race, ethnicity, culture, and country of origin. Indeed, Blanca reflected on her own lived experiences as a bilingual teacher, and as a Woman of Color, questioning why Students of Color continue to be linguistically marginalized. As such, Blanca’s testimonio clearly reminds us about an educational system that has historically sustained deficit-oriented perspectives toward these students (Yosso, 2005), which includes, “taking their Spanish from them” with the goal of assimilating them into the mainstream American educational system and values. Certainly, Blanca’s experience not only shows how other Latinxs, in this case, a doctoral peer, may be, either unconsciously or consciously, a source of social reproduction and marginalization by excluding herself from the “other” peers who speak with an accent even though she is also a native speaker of Spanish.

Another participant who felt a deep connection to her language and culture was Verónica, a doctoral student in rhetoric and composition. Verónica mentioned several occasions in her testimonio in which she was extremely proud of her Mexican heritage and the Spanish language. As someone who pursued a master’s degree in Spanish literature, Verónica developed a profound pride in being of Mexican descent, which transcended her academic space. Thus, using Spanish and promoting it at home, at the university, and in the community, was a way of validating her language and ethnic identities and cultural values. She declared in her testimonio:

Even though I live here, I still feel Mexican and I’m very proud of it! And I know it will never change! But it’s very important for me to change the way Latinxs or Mexicans have been identified here in the United States. It’s very important for me to let people know that not all Mexicans are uneducated; that people coming from Mexico are educated people, too; that we bring more values to the American society; that we have a
different way of living and that we enhance it and enrich it through our traditions and that we want them to stay here, in the U.S. And I think that we (Latinxs) are having an important role in changing many of the American values, family values; and I’m very proud of it. I’m very proud of my traditions, of my language. By being here is not that I don’t like Mexico. I recognize the opportunities that we have here, but I don’t want to become Americanized. I want to keep being a Mexican in the United States. I don’t want to change my values! I do respect the American values, but I think that the Mexican values, particularly family values, are in some way better. But of course, there’s a conflict outside campus, outside in the communities; there’s a conflict because what they think is, well, some people, some Anglos, they are seeing us like a threat; that we’re changing everything for them, instead of seeing that we are enriching the American society. We are not a threat to society, but they don’t understand that!

Verónica’s testimonio shows a strong conviction in maintaining her cultural background and not becoming Americanized. Even though she has lived many years in the United States, she wants to “keep being a Mexican,” as she proudly praises her family values, which play an important role in her personal and academic life as a Latina doctoral student. Unfortunately, she also acknowledged that some White people do not value the contributions of Latinxs in the United States, mainly due to the racist master narratives that have perpetuated the historical marginalization and discrimination against Students of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2021), including blaming their cultural backgrounds for their low educational attainment. Verónica’s testimonio illustrates how stereotypes can denigrate the way People of Color are perceived by dominant groups whose institutions devalue their linguistic and cultural traditions when she affirmed, “We are not a threat to society.” She is undeniably an example of a counternarrative because she is a
highly educated Latina bilingual woman who is contributing to the workforce and to the betterment of society, contrary to what the “master narratives” have promoted within academic and non-academic spaces for the detriment of the People of color, immigrants, and the American society.

Verónica also expressed her desire to have a more inclusive curriculum in her doctoral program in rhetoric and composition studies. She commented that even though some professors discussed issues about bilingualism, culture, or language issues, only one professor covered Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, but none of them included Latin American authors in their classes during the first year of her doctoral study. Fortunately, there have been efforts to incorporate an equity-minded curricula and culturally responsive practices in higher education institutions in the United States. For example, there are movements in the U.S. academy to engage in more equitable educational practices, including that of decolonizing syllabi, something that has been spearheaded by the Center of Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California.

Interestingly, Verónica’s excerpt shows how the Whiteness and Eurocentric values in U.S. academia results in the exclusion of scholars who are People of Color. In fact, some faculty and/or administrators may be unaware of the positive impact of including Latin American scholars and People of Color may bring into their courses as a way of validating the students’ cultural backgrounds, especially at a university that is in the U.S-Mexico border and has a considerable student population from Latin America. Verónica further shared in her testimonio that she would like the professors to include Latin American scholars into their curriculum, “Yes, of course! Not only it will help us, but it will have others understand our culture because they are not aware of it. Because we’re in the border! That would be nice to include at least one every semester.” Undoubtedly, Verónica as well as other students in the doctoral program would
greatly benefit from having classes in which they can also study Latin American writers and rhetoricians.

Interestingly, Verónica’s love for her cultural roots is akin to Ana’s, another student in rhetoric and composition who had finished her first year of doctoral study when I interviewed her. In her testimonio, Ana expressed a profound connection with her Mexican heritage, language, and culture. Moreover, for Ana, pursuing a master’s degree in Spanish literature highly influenced her decision to incorporate Latin American writers into her doctoral research. She explained the importance of the rhetoric and the literature of her culture, and how it makes sense and intertwines with the American culture. “I still try to use Latin American writers in almost everything that I write for my classes. I try to include not just Mexican-American writers but also Mexican writers into my research.” Additionally, for Ana, helping other Latinxs has become one of her goals as an English teacher and doctoral student, particularly due to being one of the few students from a Latin American country in her doctoral program. In fact, Ana is the only Latina from Mexico in her cohort. She stated:

I noticed that there are Latinas but there are very few in the program. A lot of them are Mexican American. They were born over here and have lost a lot of the Spanish language. They have lost a lot of their cultural roots, even if I mix with them, there are still a lot of differences. And I see a lot of immigrants coming here and I don’t see a whole lot of these immigrants going into master’s degrees or PhD’s.

Moreover, Ana had a peculiar situation which made her realize the importance of being a critical conscious educator (Freire, 2020) when teaching underrepresented student populations at the university, particularly Latinxs. For instance, Ana and some of her program peers were assigned to teach first-year composition classes at the university, and, unfortunately, this experience
uncovered the deficit-based language ideologies that some of her peers held. She witnessed how some of her peers who were the instructors expected students to be good writers and explicitly criticized their writing skills as if they were illiterate and less competent individuals. Ana explained in detail:

We have a lot of discussions about Latinos and Chicanos, about the Spanish language, and about ESL students because half of the class, we were teachers; so, it was very interesting to see, all of these teachers were like, “wait a minute, some of these kids only speak Spanish.” But it doesn’t mean they’re illiterate, their Spanish is very good! And then, we have a lady in there, she’s a TA in the master’s degree program; she was barely learning English; and, oh my gosh, some of the people in there were very, well, they were not exposed to the reality of the university; they were not there to become teachers; they were there to get better at writing, so they said: “Oh yes, I just get so mad when somebody brings me a paper full of mistakes, you need to go back to school, you’re illiterate.” There were a couple of them that were very adamant that writing needed to be perfect and, they started making comments about them [students] and then, about all of us. But it also felt like the teacher, and a lady [student] disagreed, you know, the lady was like, “wait a minute, I am a very good writer in Spanish, my English is not very good, but I am not illiterate!” They were thinking in general about students; that they were not prepared when they came to the university, the Latinxs, too. We have so many students from all over the world.

This excerpt demonstrates how Ana’s “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998) was key in understanding the root cause of what her colleagues considered a problem since she had many years of experience teaching Students of Color. She understood that her peers were part of the
dominant culture that dictates the standards and the norms of what good or proficient writers should be, regardless of their ethnic/racial and/or linguistic backgrounds. As an educator and as someone who sees her profession as a vocation, she had the pedagogical and cultural knowledge to approach the Latinx students’ writing with completely different lens. Ana was extremely conscious that academic writing is a developmental process that takes time (Mantai, 2017), as well as patience and empathy, especially when addressing the academic needs of this student population. As a Latina who learned Spanish when she was an adult, she understood the students’ needs and Funds of Knowledge (Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992), thus challenging the deficit models in teaching and English teachers’ bias towards English learners.

Interestingly, Southwest University philosophy claims to be an institution that promotes equity and excellence for all the approximately 25,000 students, from which 90 percent are Latinx including those who commute from Mexico; and this has been the case since the 1980s, as the former university president turned a majority White university into a majority Brown institution, serving the community in which it resides (Ullman et al., 2020). Moreover, Southwest University served the most impoverished region in the Borderlands; nevertheless, the former president worked incessantly to bring access and excellence to all the Latinx students who desired to pursue an education by lowering tuition, establishing no-interest loans to avoid student drop out, and accepting every undergraduate student without lowering academic standards (Ullman et al., 2020).

Interestingly, Ana’s testimonio regarding the inclusion of Latin American writers into the curricula in rhetoric and composition studies coincided with Veronica’s and Emilia’s points of view, as they are in the same doctoral program. Ana considered it to be a great opportunity for
students and professors in her program to expand their literary knowledge and their appreciation for non-European writers and cultures. She elucidated:

To be honest, the first semester I felt completely out of place. Yes! I felt like, what am I doing here? Maybe this isn’t for me! Yes, because everything, everything, every single article that we read, the books that we read were written by Anglos. Everything is about Anglos and the history of rhetoric and the history of composition and it’s just, it was just from a European perspective. And, oh my Gosh! Nobody knows anything about Octavio Paz, you know, nobody knows anything about Sor Juana! I mean, Sor Juana was a great rhetorician! Nobody in rhetoric knows. It’s funny because they make it seem as if the history of writing was European. And now they see, they start thinking about the Aztecs and the books that they have. Now they’re talking about the Códices that were discovered; some are viewing them as the first books and writings in the Americas. But that’s like pulling teeth, like a little bit of that is coming out; but they still see it like, they talk about a Codex like something completely foreign, exotic. They see it like something very exotic that happened in a foreign land; but they see Aristotle like a friend over here. Aristotle, he’s their best buddy and the Aztecs aren’t at all. Hello! This is the history of America!

Ana’s feelings of not belonging are not only related to her academic background, but also to her ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. For her, there was a complete personal and academic disconnection due to her doctoral program’s emphasis on Eurocentric epistemologies and research paradigms that have consistently been promoted and validated in academia, which usually exclude People of Color. As the only Mexican Latina in her program, Ana felt completely disconnected to what she was learning and utilized her own agency to include Latin
American writers in her assignments and research to decolonize the doctoral program’s curriculum, thus, overtly resisting academic Eurocentrism.

I have one main goal. I'm trying to see how I can put together, really put together the Mexican culture or the Latin American culture into rhetoric and composition; somehow to put it together like, make a connection. But what I’ve been finding out is that the majority of Latinxs that are over here working in rhetoric and composition are not trying to do something like that, you know, they're kind of like, their frame is usually somebody like Gloria Anzaldúa’s, which is great, but they don't have anything else, everybody talks about Gloria Anzaldúa. It’s like, that’s it! And it’s great, I like her; I love her; but it’s like they [professors] get stuck. But there are so many other Chicanas to include. I want to include Latin American culture into my research. Being Latina, it’s my family, it’s my language, it’s everything! I know that I sometimes make people uncomfortable, but I always make it a point to everybody to know that I’m Mexican even though I’m a U.S. citizen.

The preceding excerpt illustrates Ana’s resistance to Eurocentric perspectives in academia, which the next excerpt shows how she extended her critique of the work in her department further beyond her doctoral study and research goals. The following testimonio clearly shows how Ana, an experienced English teacher in K-12 education, utilized the literary texts in her classroom instruction to help her students make connections to the readings and to their experiences as Students of Color. She further explained:

Yes, like in my English classes, I don’t talk Spanish to my kids. I speak English, but every time we review, I’m always trying to make connections with what they know, always; for instance, we review SAT words, all these fancy words, lots of cognates, they
are learning fancy language. And their background, you know, when we discuss novels, I’m always picking novels that they can make connections with, and I tell them eventually that were going to move on with British literature but to know that American literature also includes people that looks like them. We’re finishing, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, so before I introduced the novel, I showed them segregation pictures and the majority of the kids there are Latinos, about 95%, three African American, another three Anglos, and the rest are Latinas. And all these girls in the class said: “Miss so, all this segregation happened between Anglos and African Americans and where were the Mexicans?” And I’m like, oh, we were there! And I start showing them pictures when Mexicans were segregated as well. We were just not in the textbooks; the textbooks only talk about Anglos.

Remarkably, by including the historical voices of marginalized communities, Ana not only enriched their literary knowledge but created awareness among her students regarding the exclusion of People of Color in the U.S. history textbooks. Again, Ana’s own agency triggered a deeper understanding of the discrimination and racism that had permeated the everyday realities and experiences of underrepresented student populations in America. Ana appreciated having a Latina professor whose class inspired her to write a manuscript related to the Mexican American young people who painted murals on walls in a Mexican American neighborhood to express the cultural background, which Ana saw as an illustration of their cultural capital: She further explicated in her *testimonio*:

I just finished a class with Dr. Amador. It was very helpful only because I connected a lot more with her because she teaches it from a point of view of an immigrant. She is from Latin America. How she sees rhetoric and composition is also my point of view, from a
Latin American perspective. It’s a different point of view; I’m not saying that it’s better or worse. And I just submitted an article that I wrote in this class for publication to the CCC, one of the main publications for rhetoric and composition in the U.S. It’s in the process of review and hopefully it goes through. The topic is about the Chicano murals that we have here in the city, how they actually tell a story of the Mexican Americans, and how they serve almost like books. And I think that they are very connected to the way the Aztecs wrote books, which was with illustrations; the ancient civilizations relied on illustrations to communicate. They used illustrations for what we know now as literature and writing; the Aztecs called it, La Flor y el Canto.

As seen in this excerpt, Ana was determined to incorporate her cultural capital and knowledge in all her academic endeavors. Her identity as a bilingual speaker and Mexican woman also influenced the topics for her academic writing. Ana saw great value in portraying the sociocultural and historical aspects of the murals that served as a form of storytelling from Mexican American people as well as a form of hieroglyphic legacy from ancient civilizations, such as the Aztecs.

A participant who used the Spanish language as a tool for her research projects in her doctoral program was Eva, a second-year doctoral student in health sciences. As previously mentioned in the section on her background, Eva was in bilingual programs, having grown up speaking Spanish and English. She uses Spanish with her friends and in her community-based research projects in low-income neighborhoods. Therefore, Eva’s socialization experiences as a bilingual person have greatly influenced her doctoral study as Spanish is not only part of her ethnic identity, but also her academic identity. Eva expressed the following in relation to Spanish:
Because the communities are bilingual, I do most of the sessions in Spanish. Right now, we're working in the Central Community Center; but I’ve also worked in very rural communities related to health sciences, like in the Colonias; so, you meet people like my parents, you know, who don't speak English or have a low level of education. Being bilingual has produced new opportunities for me, definitely! Spanish gives me a competitive edge, yeah! My mentor, she doesn't speak Spanish, but she does community work. So, I'm essential to her projects; the same way I was essential to the projects I did when I was hired here as a program manager. So, it’s strange, how I transitioned because growing up, I felt like it was something useless. In fact, I thought it was something that singled me out from not being able to participate in things, or not communicate well, or connect well with people. But now, it's an advantage and a skill that I offer! And this is very much needed [Spanish], especially in professional learning and it helps us, especially in this community right now.

Eva’s testimonio shows how she realized her Spanish skills were a resource in academic settings at the university (Ruiz, 1984), even though as a child, she saw Spanish as something that was not as useful as English because most of her personal and academic socialization activities were in English. Nevertheless, Eva’s sentiment towards Spanish changed from being “useless” to being an “essential” tool as a program manager and for her mentor’s research projects. This change of paradigm clearly shows how the intersection of her ethnic and language identities shaped her academic experiences and pursuits as a graduate student. Moreover, regarding her identity as a Latina and Spanish speaker living in a border city, Eva explicated enthusiastically:

And if you struggle with communicating effectively in English, or in general, you know, because sometimes I think in Spanish, and then I will say it in English, look for ways to
improve that. Because at the end, regardless of what type of work you do, being able to communicate effectively, showing your culture, and who you are, is going to make you successful. It’s possible! It's going take a while, but don't stop growing. Don't stop believing in what you really want! Be passionate in everything that you do! You're capable and smart. Show the world that! And don't be afraid to be yourself. Don't be afraid to be a Latina! Be true to yourself! My life has been shared by two worlds, you know, *ni de aquí ni de allá*, it's a border life. And it's a beautiful place to live and to grow up. There's a clash of cultures, a clash of people, a clash of values, but at the same time, we are one, you know, and we look out for each other regardless of our identities.

This excerpt illustrates that Eva is cognizant of the need to improve her English skills, which she sees it as an opportunity for growth and positive change through perseverance, self-awareness, and self-acceptance when entering the third space or *nepantla* in a border city where she was born and raised and that she truly cherishes.

Another participant who felt a strong connection with her gender and ethnic identity was Margarita. In her *testimonio*, she acknowledged that many people do not know the struggles that women have in academia. As a woman who has gradually advanced her career in higher education, Margarita said that she has always been proud of her ethnic background and fully aware of the gender discrimination against women and Women of Color in higher education.

“I’m female and Latina, because females, even if I was a White female, they don't advance any more than we do. I mean, they get maybe a little higher, but they still say they suffer.” As an experienced educator and administrator, Margarita emphasized that it was crucial to start looking at the ways in which gender dynamics work in academia and make the necessary adjustments for the next generation of female scholars. She declared that many talented women are not valued in
academia, especially when men are under the direction of a woman. “In my staff, right now, I have one male that probably doesn't like that I'm his boss, but tough, you know, I've never cheated him or mistrusted him or disrespected him.”

As a Latina, Margarita admitted that dealing with the lives of the underprivileged students she has assisted throughout her entire career has given her a sense of purpose. “I mean, when you're in that position, you always have to keep those students in mind.” Moreover, Margarita’s sense of ethnic or racial identity resurfaced not only during her doctoral study, but also during her undergraduate years in her Chicano Studies classes and, in more recent years, as an instructor in the Chicano Studies program. Moreover, the experience of teaching helped her to realize how many opportunities she had compared to previous generations of Chicanas. She affirmed:

I have read a lot about the struggles of the Chicano people in the U.S., and I realized the need to have people in academia that really care for them. I have this resurgence of culture in my family and in my kids now. I've always told them of the need to know Spanish. I've tried to put it back as you realize that your people have struggled; that your people have been oppressed; and that you're not going to let these people do this to you. You've learned that you're worth something; and that your life can be worth something, and that you're worth the degree, the journey. When I started lecturing and telling these students, they'd look at me like, oh my God, they can't even believe that some of this stuff still happens; that racism still exists, and that sexism still exists. My experience in that program has been really good.

Margarita said that being a Chicano Studies instructor allowed her to reflect on the historical discrimination and marginalization of People of Color. But most importantly, she was
determined to share that knowledge with her Latinx students, including revitalizing the use of Spanish in her own family as well as in her academic environment and praxis.

However, revitalizing the cultural heritage of Latinxs was not unique to Margarita. Emilia, a doctoral student in rhetoric a composition, chose a historical topic for her dissertation that directly related to her grandmother’s having been expatriated from the United States to Mexico during the Great Depression. Emilia shared in detail that nobody in her field has ever analyzed that historic event from a writing perspective and that she will be analyzing the way language was used to criminalize Mexicans in the 1930s. Thus, in her first chapter, Emilia plans to compare how language is being used right now to criminalize Mexicans, something that she takes very personally, due to the overt discrimination and racism that her family had to overcome when they were expatriated. She explained at length:

I'm going to be discussing how White Americans viewed Mexicans as aliens, as illegal, or as foreigners; all of these words that are used to other us, to other the Mexicans. There’s a parallel here and the reason I chose that topic was because of Trump. In 2016, on his first speech where he announced his presidency, what did he say? He said that Mexicans are not sending their best, they’re rapists, and they’re blah, blah, blah…! So those statements reminded me of this event! And the reason that I had this connection it’s because my grandmother on my father's side was repatriated. She was born in California in 1920 and in 1931, she was repatriated to Ciudad Juárez; that’s how she ended up here with her family. The reason it happened was because in the late 1920s the Great Depression happened and there was an economic crisis. So, in order for charities and welfare agencies of the time to have more money for white citizens, they kicked out those that they didn't consider were Americans; those were the Mexicans and my grandmother
happened to be one of those people. She was born in California and so were all her four siblings. So, there are definitively a lot of parallels! And it’s because of the negative ideologies that people have about Mexicans and Hispanics and other ethnicities and we're never part of this country; even though we're born here, we're never truly part of it; we're like outsiders. I think that they always see us as outsiders. That’s my topic! It’s so close to home because it happened to my grandmother and because that event is not taught in schools; and if it’s taught, it’s like one or two pages, or a paragraph, and then, it’s ignored. History is taught from those who are in power!

Emilia’s testimonio shows a deep connection to her ethnic, racial, and cultural identity as she is utilizing her topic to bring justice to all the marginalized voices that were silenced due to their deportation during the Great Depression. Through her dissertation, Emilia is enacting her personal need to repair the injustices against marginalized and racialized populations, including her own family. Her deep sense of ethnic and racial identity has indeed influenced her solidarity and empathy for People of Color, which is significant for the rhetoric of the past that clearly parallels the current racist and xenophobic rhetoric spread during the Trump administration, which has profoundly impacted Emilia’s experiences as a Woman of Color and doctoral student in a Hispanic-Serving institution (HIS) and Hispanic community, especially during the Trump regime. As such, Emilia hopes that her dissertation research will bring more awareness within academic spaces about historical events that have been excluded in the history books. Through her research, Emilia may as well revive the stories of those who were or are seen as “outsiders” or the “others” due to the damaging dominant ideologies often created and supported by those who have held power and privilege in this nation. Emilia is proud to be a bilingual Latina who uses Spanglish, along with Spanish and English, as her languages are intertwined with her ethnic
identity. Moreover, she is very conscious of the existence of discrimination against minorities as well as the lack of representation of People of Color in higher education institutions. She stated the following about her ethnic identity:

For me being Latina is being bilingual; it’s being at a very unique point, especially here. It’s very different than when you're a Latina like in New York, or in Washington D.C., or in Oregon, or wherever it is. Being Latina here is very different because there are a lot of people like me, something that I'm very proud of and that I treasure. Growing up here in the border as greatly impacted and influenced me because of my identity as Latina and as a Spanish speaker because we're minority and we suffer from a lot of discrimination, even today. So I'm blessed to be in the job position that I am and to be able to be pursuing a degree. I know that there are not a lot of us out there pursuing PhD’s or that are in positions in academia, not just Latinas, but any other ethnicity. We need more blacks, more Asians, more Native Americans, people that identify as LGBTQ. We need more of that! That’s something that I would like to see more of in academia!

Regarding lack of representation of minorities in the academy, Emilia’s opinion in relation to including less non-Western authors in her doctoral program coincided with what Verónica and Ana expressed. Interestingly, the three participants’ stance was the same in that there is a need to decolonize the curriculum to access the perspectives and knowledge of Scholars of Color through more inclusive and diverse curriculum. Emilia explicated this in her testimonio:

We study a lot of social theory. We read a lot of Foucault and Bourdieu, and other people. So, something that has strengthened my conviction and my identity is that you don’t read a lot about yourself in the textbooks. You read Western points of view the most. So, for me, it has strengthened my opinion that there needs to be more articles and
books about people that are minorities, not just Latinxs, more minorities in general. There needs to be more openness and more tolerance; and, for sure, my opinion has been strengthened! There needs to be other points of views. I know my department makes a point to include the perspectives of Latinxs, and Blacks, and Anzaldúa, but there are other authors.

Indeed, Emilia is an advocate for giving minorities stronger voices in the academy by decolonizing the Eurocentric views of knowledge for a more inclusive and diverse academic environment. Her conviction and her advocacy for the inclusion of People of Color and other ethnic minorities in the textbooks is significant as she knows that different epistemologies need to be included and validated by faculty members to create a more culturally responsive and equity-minded curricula in her doctoral program.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

One important finding in this study was that the fourteen participants deeply valued being bilingual and considered it as an asset (Allard et al., 2014; Ruiz, 1984) for their current and future academic endeavors. However, the 10 participants that are highlighted in this section were adamant in expressing that their language identity was intertwined with their ethnic/racial identity, highlighting that this played a significant role in their personal and academic socialization, including how they enacted their *latinidad* (Grant & Zwier, 2011; Rosa, 2019). Furthermore, some of them, such as Maya, Margarita, Ana, Emilia, and Verónica, used their native language and/or culture to decolonize the dominant Eurocentric curricula and ideologies in their academic environments (Arday, 2018). In their *testimonios*, they presented the various ways in which they enacted their *orgullo latino*, more specifically through the Spanish language (Portuguese for Julieta) within a sociocultural environment that provided them the opportunity to
see their native language with the same high regard as English (Norton 2006). Moreover, they saw their linguistic abilities as additive bilingualism within academia contrary to the subtractive bilingualism that has permeated the dominant language ideologies, especially towards Students of Color (Landry & Allard, 1993).

The participants illustrated various forms of community cultural wealth (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006), such as navigational and resistant capital in their educational trajectories as they employed multiple resources such as the use of their native language and cultural background to challenge the hegemonic beliefs in academia regarding English as a normative language. For instance, Verónica expressed her concern about the stereotypes associated with being a Person of Color during the Trump presidency, which brought erroneous assumptions about Latinxs/Mexicans in the United States. She emphasized that Mexicans could also be educated people who can positively contribute to this nation, “not a threat” to society, thus, openly voicing her concerns towards the racist and discriminatory rhetoric of the former presidency against immigrants and their communities (Santamaría Graff, 2017).

Similarly, Emilia’s dissertation topic regarding the expatriation of her grandmother during the Great Depression is also a form of navigational and resistant capital to explicitly bring justice to those who were deported from their own country of birth. This finding is similar to what some scholars found during the Trump administration, which positioned “Mexicans as enemy” and amplified divisive anti-immigrant sentiment (Santamaria Graff, 2017); brutal violence against the immigrant community (Valenzuela, 2017); and cooperativeness with a White supremacist status quo (Stewart, 2017).
Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars in the field of education contend that academic institutions have the potential to empower and emancipate its members while also having the potential to oppress and marginalize (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This phenomenon is seen in the doctoral educational attainments and experiences of Latinxs and in the startling statistics that clearly demonstrate how they are left out of the educational system, including Scholars of Color. For instance, Ana, Emilia, and Verónica, the three participants from rhetoric and composition concurred that they would like to have more culturally responsive and diverse curricula that could include different People of Color and other marginalized populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ people) instead of just focusing on European or Anglo writers and scholars, which is what Banks (1991) advocated for in *A curriculum for empowerment, action, and change*, where he emphasized that, “groups without power and influence often challenge the dominant paradigms, knowledge systems, and perspectives that are institutionalized within society” (pp.126-127), which was exactly what the 10 participants challenged in their own unique ways during their doctoral study.

For all the participants, living in the U.S.-Mexico border implied constant change and a strong determination in resisting to the dominant ideologies of the White mainstream culture including not assimilating to the American mainstream culture and viewing their Spanish language as a linguistic asset, thus, reaffirming their ethnic identity (Fishman & García, 2010). One example was Maya’s way of describing the use of Spanish in her program as a “political manifesto” and a way to validate her own use of Spanish to combat the English language hegemony that she observed at Southwest University even though a large number of Latinx students are bilingual (English/Spanish) and decide to use English. Furthermore, Maya’s identity as a native Spanish speaker intersected with her racial/ethnic identity as a Latina of Mexican
descent, which played an important role in how she approached her academic endeavors. This was the case for Emilia, Verónica, Andrea, Ana, and Eva, as well (Rodríguez, 1994; Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

Another example of the importance of maintaining and using Spanish with her 8-year-old son was Eva. He was attending second grade in a well-known and successful bilingual program in the city. “I want to transmit that pride to my son, that he feels it as something that makes him stronger, not weaker.” Nevertheless, his neighbors, who were also in elementary school and lived in the same neighborhood, did not share the same views. Instead, they opted to speak English and made derogatory comments about Mexico’s flag when he took it outside, saying, “it sucks”. Similarly, in Miller’s (2017) study on language attitudes in young Spanish-English bilinguals, it was found that a shift on language preference [English] occurs before a shift in language dominance and that negative attitudes toward the heritage language [Spanish] lead to a dominance shift [use of English] among second, third, and fourth grade bilingual students. Additionally, Andrea made clear to her husband to use Spanish so that her son could continue learning and speaking it and see the value in becoming bilingual. Therefore, Andrea’s testimonio is a counternarrative of the historical subordination of Spanish speakers in the United States and how language is permeated with power relations and social meaning since she maintained a language awareness that aided her in challenging the linguistic subordination that her Mexican friends and their children fell into by opting to use English as the dominant language, thus limiting their children’s development as bilingual learners. Andrea describes this subordination as a “fight” that implies confronting the dominant language ideologies in her community (Leeman, 2018). However, Andrea was determined to continue teaching and speaking Spanish to
her son as a form of resistance against the English hegemony through acceptance and love for her culture and language.

Interestingly, Eva’s *testimonio* clearly shows her pride in being born and raised in a border city where there is a clash of cultures and ideologies. Indeed, Eva welcomes the third space with genuine acceptance and resilience, inviting the collective Latina to join her when she affirmed: “Don’t be afraid to be a Latina! Be true to yourself! My life has been shared by two worlds, *ni de aquí ni de allá*. It’s a border life. And it’s a beautiful place to live and to grow up.” Evidently, Eva’s state of mind is in *nepantla* which is a term in *nahuatl* (the language of the Mexicas or Aztecs) that means *a la mitad de*, or *en medio de* [halfway or in the middle of]. However, for Anzaldúa, *nepantla* is also the space in-between various spaces, “*el lugar en medio de todos los lugares*” (Keating, 2006, p. 238), in other words, the transitional stages in identity formation. Interestingly, Eva’s *testimonio* portrays her various identities (i.e., a border woman, Latina, bilingual and bicultural, and doctoral student) that not only intersect but are also enacted inside her psyche, her mind, and her spirit simultaneously when she emphasized that “at the end, regardless of what type of work you do, being able to communicate effectively, showing your culture, and who you are, is going to make you successful. It’s possible! It's going take a while, but don't stop growing!” Indeed, Eva is a perfect representation of the new *mestiza* consciousness that welcomes *nepantla* or the third space willingly in order to dare to show her multiple identities all together (Keating, 2006).

In the preface to the *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa stated, “I am a border woman” (Anzaldúa, 1987). And, similarly, for the nine participants (except Juliana) who were of Mexican descent, their connection to the border and to the Mexican culture was entwined to their ethnolinguistic, cultural, and academic identities, as it was for Gloria Anzaldúa, when she
declared that, “Being a Mexican is a state of the soul -not one of mind, not of citizenship
(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 62). It is crucial to mention in this section that in the 1950’s the civil rights
movements brought a social transformation to the United States that looked to gain rights for
oppressed people and to eradicate discriminatory practices and racism against the African-
American community and other minority communities, including Mexican Americans and
Indigenous peoples. The Chicano movement was composed of the Mexican Americans/Chicanos
whose major concentration was in the U.S. states that once belonged to Mexico.

Even though Mexican Americans were granted full citizenship rights under the decrees of
the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaties, their rights were and are continually undermined by the
institutions created by Anglos. In addition, the number of Mexicans was surpassed by the
number of Anglo settlers in these regions, something that was detrimental to Mexicans, as the
land established by the treaty as belonging to Mexicans was soon taken away from them
(Anzaldúa, 1987; González, 2002). As a result, the Anglo domination over Mexicans positioned
the latter as second-class citizens where Mexicans had limited or no participation, (i.e., housing,
education, health services, white-collar jobs, etc.). However, after 1910, immigration played a
significant role in enlarging the population of Mexican Americans/Chicanos in the border region.
As a result, Mexican Americans/Chicanos and migrants from Latin America have profound links
with the borderlands, as they are the largest minority group in the borderlands, where people
have a Spanish/Mexican heritage that was closely related to the Spanish language, which was
slowly replaced by English and Chicano Spanglish, a combination of Spanish and English or
what scholars have coined as translanguaging (Anzaldúa, 1987; González, 2002; O’Connor et al.,
2019).
Therefore, the findings in this study revealed that the use of Spanish was instrumental in the participants’ resistance and navigational capital, as well as their cultural and linguistic capital during their doctoral journey (Solórzano & Yosso 2000; Yosso, 2006). These women represent a new wave of Latinas who opted to utilize and embrace the Spanish language within personal and academic contexts as a promising path for language decolonization by consciously disagreeing with the English-only ideologies (Crawford, 2000) and language hegemony that has pervaded American schools and institutions (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Emilia is a clear example of the resistance to such linguistic hegemony by validating Spanglish as one of her languages as well as by selecting a dissertation topic related to the expatriation of her grandmother and her family during the Great Depression, an event that is often ignored in the history books, including the negative and racist rhetoric against Mexican immigrants during the former Trump presidency with the intention to “other” and criminalize Mexican people and other minority groups (O’Connor et al., 2019). Emilia used her academic voice and knowledge to bring justice to those who were left behind by a political system that denied them the right to stay in the country of their birth. Such dynamics of language use for political propaganda is central to Gramsci’s notion of language hegemony (Ives, 2004), which aids in the construction and perpetuation of “otherness” at the micro and macro levels of society. Anzaldúa (1987) mentioned the following in the preface of *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the southwest. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle, and upper classes touch.
Certainly, these women transcended the psychological borderlands by embracing and enacting their *orgullo latino*, including a deep sense of solidarity toward the Latino community and other marginalized populations; their strong connection to their ethnic roots significantly influenced their own views about what it meant to be Latina and how it shaped their personal and academic socialization (Yosso, 2013). Furthermore, their linguistic capital was valued in academia made them feel empowered to continue learning English but not at the expense of their native language. They represent what Norton (2006) pointed out, that rather than seeing language learning “as a gradual individual process of internalizing a neutral set of rules, structures, and vocabulary of a standard language, speakers need to struggle to appropriate the voices of others, and to ‘bend’ those voices to their own purposes” (p. 5).

Unfortunately, within higher education institutions, particularly Research Intensive Institutions, there is an “apartheid of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) that silences the voices of People of Color, but privileges the Eurocentric epistemologies that tend to discredit and ignore the ways of knowing and understanding the world that People of Color bring to the academy (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Yosso, 2005), which coincided with what Margarita, Maya, Emilia, Ana, and Verónica elucidated in their *testimonios*.

This section only showcased the experiences that Bella, Andrea, Maya, Blanca, Verónica, Ana, Eva, Margarita, Juliana, and Emilia had during their PhD programs regarding their linguistic and cultural identities as Latinas. These participants enacted their *latinidad* through their heritage language and their ethnic/racial identities with resilience and conviction. For instance, Verónica, Ana, and Emilia, students in the field of rhetoric and composition, considered the need to incorporate People of Color into their academic projects and doctoral program curricula to balance the Eurocentric curriculum that faculty members implemented in their
program. These testimonios showed the participants’ ways to resist the dominant ideologies that have historically marginalized and discriminated Students of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Solórzano, et al., 2005; Yosso, 2013). While each story is unique, all of them were profoundly aware of not assimilating into the mainstream American culture by preserving their native language and culture and using them as valuable assets (Martínez, 1999; Smith, 2003). In sum, these ten participants aimed at decolonizing the structures of White privilege and power not only in academic settings, but also at the personal level. Indeed, their various identities shaped how they socialized personally and academically, as they navigated their doctoral journeys by enacting their language, culture, and a deep sense of solidarity toward People of Color and other marginalized populations.

**Theme 1.3: Stress between Academia and their Culture and/or Home**

The theme in this section that looks at how Latina doctoral students’ identities shaped their socialization experiences during their doctoral journey, describes the stress that occurs between the culture of academia and still coping with home life. This phenomenon was described in Anzaldúa’s (1987) work with the notion of borderlands, and in recent years, the concept of *nepantla*, or the “in-between-ness” that happens when being between different spaces. The fourteen participants had to balance academia and their cultures, especially in relation to family dynamics, such as limiting the time spent with family and friends as well as the time spent doing household chores. As such, six of the participants highlighted in this section shared instances of feeling in the “nepantla” zone as they had to balance the exigencies of their academic environment besides their home cultures. Bella was one participant who spoke at length about this stress and the way she negotiated it during the beginning of her doctoral program. She elaborated in her *testimonio*:
When I decided to move away, my mother could not relate to my educational goals. I acknowledge her sacrifices and love for me, but also realized that my mother was just not prepared to set me free. I think she does want her children to be close by. I think it's also because she doesn't know what it is being a first-generation student. So she can't relate. She doesn't know the experience of it because I know that for any other family, like White family, that this would just be normal. My family usually reminded me that I have been attending school for a long period of time and they frequently ask me the date of my graduation. I just have my thesis left, you know, so it's kind of hard to explain to them what the process is like, what it actually entails; but they don't really know what it means, but other than that, they don't really know the struggles of it. At first, my mom didn't understand why I had to move away, and she didn't like that I moved away because I got into a master's program at Central University, so I had to move away. Nobody in my household had moved away to another city for school or something else, and she didn't understand that! So that was a struggle!

In this excerpt, Bella describes the stress involved when entering a doctoral program and her family’s limited understanding of her academic endeavors. This stress has been documented in the literature, describing how the culture of academia can often cause students to be socialized in ways that may conflict with their own values and cultural backgrounds (González, 2006; Espinoza, 2010). For Bella, coping with the exigencies of a doctoral program and, at the same time, with her family’s pressure to finish caused her some stress. However, as Bella progressed into the doctoral program, her family started to understand her academic goals and became more supportive of her education away from home. Over time, her parents and her siblings learned about the process of earning an advanced degree, and came to be proud of Bella’s academic
accomplishments. Furthermore, Bella’s ethnic identity as a Latina had a great effect on how she perceived some of her White male peers’ behaviors, which differed from her own values in relation to her academic achievement. She mentioned this in her testimonio:

I have wonderful open conversations about race with Amy even though she is not Latina. We talk about the struggles. We also talk about the people in the department, just like, White privilege. Some people in my department are ignorant of every culture and pretentious. I just feel like they are so pretentious and, you know, as a Latina, you're kind of taught not to be selfish, not to be pretentious; you're humble, you do your hard work, and you have your work show for itself; you're not showing off like, look at all these publications. I go to all these conferences and there's a difference between confidence and being pretentious, and you can have confidence. I think that's a cultural thing, that they're more pretentious [White peers]; and they think they have that right to be showy and that right to just be so cool about their achievements and everything like that.

For Bella, having this type of conversation with her White female peer was important in order to reiterate her home values in relation to being modest and discreet in academic settings. As a Mexican Latina, Bella understood that she will have to continue engaging in the culture of academia even though it may fall in contrast to her cultural background.

Another participant whose mother was not entirely supportive of her decision to leave her to move to the United States to continue with her graduate studies was Sally, a doctoral student in engineering. She explained in her testimonio:

My mom didn’t want me to come because she feels alone. My mom was like, “You will never find anyone because you don’t take care of yourself and because you’re studying or working or sleeping all the time.” She’s worried because I’m alone here. She says, “If’
something happens to you, who will take care of you?” She’s worried about me. For example, sometimes, I’m driving, and she says, “Where are you going? Are you going alone?” And she says, “Why you’re not with someone?” I tell her that I want to be alone. But I would like them [parents] to visit me more often or that I could visit them more often.

Evidently, Sally’s mother was concerned about her marital status when she said to Sally that she “will never find anyone” because she dedicated more time to her studies than to taking care of her appearance to find a partner in the future. Her mother could not understand why Sally was not worried about marriage at age 40, an expectation that most Latina mothers support and promote, particularly when educating their daughters about the traditional roles of women.

Furthermore, Sally’s friends did not understand her academic goals either, especially when she informed them that she had decided to pursue a doctorate. She further explained:

My friends in Peru think that I am crazy because of my age. They told me: “And you’re still studying, and you want to continue until you die.” They don’t like to study. Only one of them went to the university. She’s going to do her master’s only because she doesn’t like to study a lot. Actually, I have a friend who told me, “Yeah, go for your PhD.” My friends whom I grew up with said, “Oh my God, you want to study all your life. When are you going to start working?” They do not understand that a PhD is work! Not even my parents say that. Like, Latina women take care of their appearance, but I try hard in everything because I’m a fighter! I think we are fighters because in our culture they favor men, and we want to be better than men. If I feel I can’t do something, I try harder. I don’t get intimidated! If I feel fear, I don’t show it.
Sally’s explanation gets across the pressures she felt when leaving her country, her family, and friends to continue her graduate education. Sally’s agency allowed her to discover that being a “fighter” who could overcome her fears was necessary in order to succeed as a woman and doctoral student. Fortunately, Sally is cognizant that as a woman it requires hard work and discipline to finish her degree in engineering, especially if she wants to become an expert and a researcher in her area of study. In addition, this excerpt shows Sally’s different identities and how they intersect (e.g., ethnic/racial, gender, and scientific) as well as the cultural and gender expectations that are imposed on Latina women by family and friends, which often limit the opportunities to succeed, particularly in a field that is typically dominated by men.

Another participant who experienced such stress was Margarita, specifically when explaining to her family the stressful process of academic writing and how it affected her as she needed to allocate more time to writing her dissertation proposal. She declared the following:

A lot of my relatives have died including my parents; my oldest daughter lives out of town and my other half, he's a chef; so, it was great because I don't have to cook all the time. I come from a very close family and my only support is really what I have at home. But if there is something that I would change, it would be to sit down with my family and explain to them the intense process of writing my proposal since I have not had the opportunity to express my feelings more overtly a while ago. I don't think they get it yet! And I need to actually tell them that I really need this time to focus because I think they look at me, and they say, “Wow, she's been in school forever!” My partner's family, they're all wishing for me to finish as well. I really wish that I could change the way they see this! How to manage my time as a full-time employee, doctoral student, and lecturer gives me less confidence and working 65 hours or more per week has affected my well-
being. I have tried to write and finish my dissertation proposal while at the same time taking care of my 21-year-old daughter who lives with me, a college student as well. I’m less confident on the timing because commitment is a big part of this; and I have my hands in so many different pots right now.

Margarita’s experience with balancing family and academic accomplishments is evident in her excerpt. This excerpt shows the stress she felt due not only her family not understanding her academic identity as a doctoral student, mother, partner, lecturer, and administrator.

Balancing her academic and home life was indeed a challenging experience for Margarita, which unfortunately started to affect her well-being. This cultural tension also emerged as Margarita stated that she needed to “explain the intense process of writing” to her family because they did not really comprehend what she was required to accomplish as a doctoral student and full-time administrator at the university. Interestingly, family not understanding the process of being a doctoral student also happened with Blanca, especially during her first year of doctoral study. She expressed the following in her *testimonio*:

At beginning they were concerned because they would see, you know, that I had to do a lot of things and sometimes they would get frustrated because I couldn't be with them. And I would get sometimes, you know, some comments that I believed that I was more than them and things like that. But now, they got used to the idea, and I think that they are very proud of the things that I’m doing. Now they understand more, at the beginning, they didn’t! Now I share with them, and talk to them, and I think that they’re more understanding and, of course, they’re more supportive. My children, they’ve always been very supportive in whatever I do. I’m talking about my parents, my brothers, and my
sister. Now they’re more supportive! To be honest, in my immediate family, I’m the only one that has a master’s and is pursuing a doctorate.

Certainly, Blanca’s parents and siblings resented the limited time she had for their *convivencia familiar* that escalated to the point that her parents and siblings felt depreciated. This highlights the significance of balancing her academic and home culture. Although they were supportive and proud of her, Blanca still felt that they did not fully understand her. As such, dealing with her family’s lack of understanding caused some additional stress for Blanca.

Another participant who had to balance academics and family commitments was Andrea. She described in her interview how being a doctoral student affected her family dynamics and the role that is often placed upon Latina women. Andrea spoke at length in her *testimonio*:

A veces no me alcanza el tiempo para hacer completamente una cosa u otra. A principios de año mi niño iba todo reprobado, iba muy bajo en los puntos de *Advanced Reading* y yo ni por aquí, por andar acá metida. Me sentía muy mal porque lo dejaba y decía si no esa bien o está mal y como que no, los tienes que educar y que cuidar, es la cultura. Todo eso era estresante. Esa falta de balance no me gustó. No me gustó darme cuenta que tenía que soltar más acá [en la universidad] porque solté mucho mi casa y porque estaba pendiente de la escuela, y como que se me fue y me sentí muy mal, muy culpable. Una vez llegué a la una de la mañana y reviso la tarea de mi hijo y vi que estaba mal hecha; descuidé cosas importantes de mi vida y no me di cuenta. Siento que a veces estás, así como en desventaja, porque tienes un hogar y tienes un hijo porque es una tarea más; si eres soltera tienes más tiempo de dedicarle a la escuela; alguien como yo casada con hijo tienes que atender una casa, sacar lo de la casa y aparte lo de acá. Venimos muy influenciadas por nuestra cultura. Tuve una clase de ética y ver otras personas de otros
lados y ves que la mujer tiene otra ideología, que pone valores a las cosas diferente a ti, te
vas dando cuenta. Mi cultura es buena pero también puedo ver otras cosas y mejorar
como persona. Eso me ha cambiado, conocer otras culturas, tomas lo bueno de cada
cultura y lo vas metiendo a tus ideas, como el aprender a no sentirme mal por no ser tan,
una mujer de casa, sabes, porque es lo que nos educan. Mi mamá nunca me educó así,
pero es algo que viene en la cultura, que te hace responsable de todas las cosas del hogar.
Entonces, he aprendido o estoy aprendiendo a no sentir tanta culpa porque me gusta
estudiar, porque tengo amigas que dicen, “pero cómo sigues en la escuela, son muchos
años de estudiante”. Son siete años de medicina para graduarte en México, entonces si
tengo estudiando toda mi vida. Pero es algo que me gusta hacer y no sentirme mal porque
estás dando cosas para ti que es algo que culturalmente lo ven, así como que, “por qué te
dedicas tanto”. Porque mi papá lo ve mal, y me dice tu marido primero, bla, bla, bla,
sabes, él lo ve así. Y como el sigue siendo muy machista pues es aprender a darte ese
espacio para los estudios para seguir adelante.

Sometimes I don't have time to fully do one thing or another. At the beginning of the year
my child was failing his classes; he had low points in advanced reading, and I did not
even know because I was taking care of school. I felt very bad because I left him and
wondered if it was good or bad, and of course not, you need to educate them and take
care of them, it's the culture. All of that was stressful. I didn't like that lack of balance. I
didn't like to realize that I had to dedicate less time over there [at the university] because
I wasn't dedicating time to my house, because I was taking care of school, and I kind of
let it happen. I felt very bad, very guilty once I arrived at one in the morning, and I went
over my son’s homework and saw that he didn’t do it right. I neglected important things
in my life and didn't realize it! I feel that sometimes you are at a disadvantage because you have a home and you have a child because it is one more task; if you are single, you have more time to dedicate to school; someone like me, married with a child, you must take care of the house, do things at home, plus schoolwork. We come here [the United States] very much influenced by our culture. I had a class on ethics and seeing other people from other places and you see women have other ideology and that they value things differently, you start realizing that. My culture is good, but I can also see other things, and improve as a person. That has changed me, knowing other cultures; you take the good of each culture, and you include it into your ideas, like, learning not to feel bad for not being a housewife, you know, because that's how they educate us. My mother never raised me like this, but it is something that is embedded in our culture, which makes you feel responsible for all things at home. So, I have learned or I'm learning not to feel so much guilt because I like to study, because I have friends who say: “But how come you are still in school, it’s been so many years as a student”. It took me seven years to graduate in Mexico from medical school. So, I have been studying all my life. But it is something that I like to do; and I don't feel bad because you are giving things to yourself, which is something that culturally, they see it like, "Why are you so dedicated?" Because my dad sees it as something bad, and he tells me that my husband is first, blah, blah, blah, you know, he sees it that way. And since he still is very macho, well, you need to learn to give yourself the space for your study, so that you can continue.

Indeed, finding a balance between family and school is evident in Andrea’s excerpt. She clearly expressed the stress and the guilt she felt for not being able to fulfill her duties as a housewife and as a mother, even though she realized that those expectations that she do everything were
deeply rooted in her cultural background. Indeed, the juxtapositions of her various identities caused her stress as she tried to balance being a mother, a wife, an employee, and a doctoral student. Additionally, being a student for many years was something that not only her father could not understand, but also her friends; thus, adding more stress to her doctoral experience.

Andrea shared the following in her *testimonio*:

> Cuando llegué era en la maestría y no conocía a nadie. Tenía a mi esposo pero no tenía amigas aquí. Me acuerdo que me dio como una etapa de depresión cuando recién llegué el primer semestre y decía ¿qué voy a hacer Dios, si no puedo con esto? Y se me hacía muy difícil. Entonces fui al centro que tienen aquí de ayuda psicológica. Yo decía, no estoy mal pero estoy muy triste, y luego dije, no, es que sí estoy muy triste y tenía que hablar con alguien; fui a como tres consultas y el hablar con alguien era sacar lo que sentía, el estrés y me dicen que nomás estaba muy estresada. Yo decía no sé si voy a poder, me preocupa el no poder, porque ya ves que tener amigas te ayuda a socializar, es bien importante y cuando cambias de país, te quedas sin eso. Necesitas un lugar dónde empezar a hacer amigos y mujeres que se identifiquen contigo.

When I arrived, it was during my master's degree, and I didn't know anyone. I had my husband, but I didn't have any friends here. I remember that I kind of experienced a stage of depression when I arrived the first semester, and said, “God, what am I going to do if I can't handle this?” And it was very difficult for me. So, I went to the center they have here for psychological help. I said to myself, “I’m not feeling bad, but I am sad,” and then I said, “No, I am very sad.” And I had to talk to someone. I went to like three consultations and talking to someone was to bring out what I was feeling, the stress, and they told me that I was just very stressed. I used to say, “I don't know if I'm going to be
able [to do this]; I am worried about not being able,” because, you know, having friends helps you to socialize; it is very important, and when you leave your country, you don't have that. You need a place to start making friends and [meeting] women who identify with you.

Unfortunately, Andrea experienced “acculturative stress” (Berry, 2006) when she moved from Mexico to the United States to continue her education at the university. She experienced feelings of profound sadness after living her hometown as well as her parents, relatives, and friends in Mexico to start a new life in the United States.

Another participant whose mother did not understand what she was doing as a doctoral student was Emilia. She had to simplify her explanation to her mother so that she could have an idea of what her doctoral program was all about. Emilia also recognized how her linguistic and cultural background influenced her perspectives and experiences as a doctoral student as she navigated two different worlds. Emilia shared:

My mom doesn't understand what I'm doing academically. My mom, she didn't even finish primary school in Mexico because of her struggles and her and her family ended up moving out of the small town that they lived in Mexico. They moved to Juárez to have a better life for themselves. I think she didn't even go to second grade, so her formal education was in many ways very limiting. And in terms of how it related to me and the PhD program, she doesn't understand what I'm doing at all! She, for sure, doesn’t understand! When I was getting my master's, she knew that I was aiming to be a teacher, so when she had to tell her friends, when they got together, they're like, “¿Pues, qué quiere ser tu hija?” [So, what does your daughter want to be?]. “Pues quiere ser maestra.” [Well, she wants to be a teacher]. It was clear to her that I was studying to be a teacher,
but now that I’m pursuing a PhD, she just says, “Pues es que está estudiando para doctora.” [Well, she’s studying to be a doctor]. But she doesn't know what kind of doctora. She doesn’t understand what my degree is in. And I just tell her, “Well, it's about writing,” just to simplify things. In those terms, it has been to understand or not to understand, but have conversations with my mom about my degree, and what I'm hoping to do, and what my research is in. So, in those terms, I do wish I had more support in that part. But I don't care, you know, she can say whatever she wants because she already does so much for me! And being capable in both languages has definitely shaped me because it puts everything in two perspectives, for sure. You struggle in two worlds!

Being a Latina, specifically in the Mexican culture, can be difficult because there are different expectations for males and for females; you have the expectation where motherhood should be the first thing. And it’s also knowing that Latinas in academia are few and far between. So being Latina it's a very unique perspective where you have to find a balance between your culture, and your language, and dealing with the pros and the cons of both.

It is evident in this excerpt that Emilia loved her mother for who she was and did not expect her to understand what her doctoral program entailed, including the academic demands in order for Emilia to successfully advance in her doctoral study. For Emilia, being “in two worlds” (Anzaldúa, 1990, 2000) was part of her everyday reality as a fist-generation Latina doctoral student in academia.

The last participant in this section, Sunshine, noticed that her personal and academic socialization was different from that of her White peers. She attributed this to her cultural
background, which often caused her to ponder about the cultural differences among Whites and Latinxs. She shared in her *testimonio*:

Living in a border city in Mexico is something that I value since it allows me to connect with Spanish speaking people. And, if you know both languages, you can explain your research and you have a wider audience. But I’ve noticed that most of the White people here like to keep everything to themselves. They are not as open as Latinxs. My White peers usually don’t socialize, neither personally nor academically with the Latinx students; but we speak to each other in a respectful manner. I attribute this lack of peer socialization to the White culture. And that’s what I’ve been learning here. My Latinx peers are more united and more social due to our culture, the culture we grew up in. Latinxs are more in touch with others, more social. In Mexico, we’re more united with the family; we get in touch with friends; we maintain relationships for long periods, and I think that has an influence in the workplace. This is how they are [White peers], that’s the culture they grew up in. So I think that’s a very big contrast between Latinxs and Whites and how Whites talk and their body language. My peers know about my Mexican heritage not only for being one of the three Latinas in the program but also for showing enthusiasm and camaraderie in my classes since everybody tends to be quiet and the professors are usually the ones who speak. I always want to be the one who breaks the silence! We are Latinxs! And I’m very talkative! That’s the culture I’ve been taught in Mexico. Sometimes PhD students are kind of looked upon very serious, mentally concentrated, and working by themselves. And those people [peers] they’re always working by themselves. But I’m different because I speak with a lot of people, but at the same time, I find time to work and be productive. My mentor, I think he considered me
too immature to be in the PhD program. He didn’t like that I laughed and joked with everybody because I may have looked like a person that didn’t take things seriously.

For Sunshine, being one of the few Latinas in a doctoral program made her realize how she and her White peers socialized, which she mostly attributed to cultural differences. For her, being Latina included “breaking the silence” in class, being more social, enthusiastic, and family oriented. These characteristics Sunshine used to describe her may have influenced the way she interacted with her White peers, including creating some stress between her Latino mentor and her due to showing her *latinidad* in a more overt way. Certainly, being outspoken and social and living in Mexico since middle school may have influenced how she perceived her White peers’ behavior.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

The role of balancing family and academics for Latina doctoral students is a prominent topic in the literature (Castillo et al., 2008; Espinoza, 2010; Rudolph et al., 2011) and my findings align with this central point. This section highlighted one aspect of the doctoral journey for six of the Latina doctoral students, which was the stress that often came from entering the culture of academia and balancing their own cultural backgrounds and/or home lives. Espinoza (2010) and Rudolph et al. (2011) have described the concept of *marianismo*, or the type of familial expectations placed on women, where familial responsibilities, such as caretaking, are often placed exclusively on Latinas in the family. One of the participants that best represents this finding was Andrea. She expressed guilt for not fulfilling her family duties as a housewife and mother. Because she dedicated most of her time to her doctoral study, her father criticized her for putting her doctoral study ahead of the duties of a traditional Mexican wife and mother. However, Andrea’s husband was her strongest support since she started her program.
Espinoza (2010) has described the concept of the “good daughter” role as referring to Latina daughters are often expected to fulfill family obligations before anything else in their lives. This was the case for Bella and Sally, who also felt tension due to their mothers’ attitudes for pursuing graduate school and moving away from the family (Castillo et al., 2008; Espinoza, 2010). Additionally, Bella, Margarita, Blanca, Andrea, and Sally, they all had to negotiate their familial responsibilities in relation their roles as doctoral students. In addition, Blanca and Andrea strove to maintain balance between their roles as wives/mothers and doctoral students. Unfortunately, they also had family and friends who were jealous of their high academic achievement (Jackson & Marsden, 2012). Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) found that first-generation college students experience guilt about academic achievement since their families felt jealous of them and simultaneously saw them as arrogant and perceived them as looking down on their families. In Andrea’s case, even though she was not a first-generation college student, as both of her parents had bachelor’s degrees in Mexico, her father’s resentment towards her was evident when Andrea informed him that she had been accepted into a doctoral program. He replied that her school was not an institution that was as good as Stanford University, where he had earned his master’s degree.

A significant theme that emerged from my data was the confidence participants built over time, as they spoke out and found their places in their respective doctoral programs. They came to see themselves as creators of knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills (Delgado Bernal, 2002), which helped them navigate the academic environment and home culture through the re-creation of a “third space” or *nepantla* during the process of becoming scholars. Anzaldúa (1990, 2000) concept of “in-betweenness” that can occur when Latina women feel that they do not belong in various spaces, or feel as if they are living in a “third space.” For the six participants in this
study, entering the world of academia facilitated these feelings, especially when they had to leave their families to pursue graduate school, as was the case for Bella and Sally. Additionally, even though there was an initial tension with their families, Bella, Margarita, Blanca, Andrea, and Sally had to explain and communicate with their parents or family members their needs as doctoral students and what it meant for them to continue persisting when they first began their doctoral programs or during the doctoral program. They dealt with an academic environment that often conflicted with their home lives and cultures, especially when missing out family celebrations or events. However, Anzaldúa argues that *nepantla* can also lead to personal growth and greater awareness of the world, as it was evident in the participants’ *testimonios*. That is, they were able to grow even from the unpleasant experiences, for instance, Bella and Sally left their homes and their mothers were very unhappy when they left. Moreover, Sally had to leave her country and learn English to attend graduate school in the United States, which was an important milestone for her. Blanca had to deal with her family’s resentment due to missing out family events and spending more time reading and doing school assignments. Andrea’s father was jealous for her academic accomplishments, which made her value and strengthen her relationship with her supportive husband.

In this study, it was apparent that the participants did not give up their home cultures and languages in order to become part of their doctoral programs in the United States. They were able to acculturate but did not assimilate, which facilitated their connectedness to their cultural roots and values as Latinas. These experiences led them to become more aware of the differences between the culture of U.S. academia and their own cultural values, such as having families who did not understand their needs as doctoral students because they dedicated more time to fulfilling their academic endeavors. Fortunately, they were able to balance their academic and home lives,
something that contributed to seeing the world with a different lens. While some doctoral students may assimilate into the mainstream academic socialization, these participants did not go through the process of what Valenzuela (2005) calls the “de-Mexicanization or subtracting students’ culture and language” (p. 83), which has been found to be damaging to students’ success and orientations toward education.

For Bella, Sally, and Blanca, it was also important to open the lines of communication with their families and to push back on familial roles placed on them. Balancing school, home, and motherhood was a priority as well as a challenge for Andrea, as she felt guilty for not conforming to the Mexican cultural familismo values (Smith-Morris et al., 2013), particularly those related to being a traditional Mexican housewife that not only her father but also her Latina friends reinforced. Moreover, Andrea had to seek psychological help due to the “acculturative stress” (Berry, 2006) that she experienced when she emigrated from Mexico to start her master’s degree, leaving her family and friends behind in Mexico to start a new life in the United States. Sunshine also realized that her culture played a major role in her identity as a Latina doctoral student, especially when interacting with her White peers, including her Latino mentor who did not like her social and outspoken personality, as Sunshine mentioned.

In sum, all the participants in this study were able to navigate their doctoral programs through their own agency, resistance, and familial and community support. Sewpaul (2013) posited that ideology is culturally, socially, and politically constructed, therefore:

If people are provided with alternative learning experiences, whether formal or informal, they have the ability to disrupt dominant thinking as sometimes a single word, phrase, or observation can constitute an epiphany that makes us question and alter the ideas and values that we have grown up with (p. 119).
Indeed, the 14 the participants, particularly the six highlighted in this section were able to disrupt dominant ideologies and stereotypes toward Students of Color. Most notably, they never assimilated into the U.S. academic culture; instead, they showcased their orgullo latino in academic spaces and their community. Through their own agency, persistence, and resilience, they nurtured and embraced their cultural background, thus, fostering the “third space” in a dignifying way. Certainly, this hybrid third space or nepantla provided an opportunity for growth and change even though it may have been one additional challenge that these women had to deal with as Latina doctoral students.

**Theme 1.4: Grappling with Imposter Syndrome and Self-Doubt**

The imposter syndrome phenomenon was first identified and published in scholarly literature by two psychotherapists, Clance and Imes (1978) in *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*. This phenomenon is defined as a construct and is discussed in terms of “self-psychological theory” (Langford & Clance, 1993, p. 495). Clance and OToole (1983) observed that it happens approximately to 70% of the population at some level in specific circumstances. In 1972, Clance and Imes had coined the term after five years of studying this psychological construct among their students and clients at Georgia State University (Clance & OToole, 1983). In a seminal article titled, *The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention*, they defined this phenomenon as, “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). The authors mention and list the clinical symptoms as, “generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement” (p. 242).
Clance and Imes draw from the work of Deaux (1976) for their understanding of attribution theory. This seminal research indicated that women (unlike men) attributed their success to effort or luck, not to their ability. Moreover, the authors describe the role of family that they believed contributed to the formation of imposter syndrome from an early age and recorded four different types of behaviors which maintain this construct once it has been assumed: hard work, intellectual flattery, silence in the face of opposing views, and approval-seeking (p. 244). Interestingly, Imes’s (1979) dissertation study was to “examine relationships between internalized Femininity/Masculinity and impostor-related versus non-impostor-related causal attributions to academic and professional achievements in high achieving women and men, specifically university faculty members” (p. x). She found that those high achievers who lacked a strong sense of themselves as possessing either positively feminine or masculine attributes were the group most likely to experience lack of self-confidence and anxieties related to achievement intrinsic in the imposter phenomenon. This was the first empirical research on some aspects of the imposter syndrome.

Harvey’s (1981) research on gender, alongside with Imes (1979), and Lawler (1984) indicated that men also experience feeling as an imposter on the same frequency as women. In addition, Topping (1983) found that males in her sample were substantially more likely to experience feeling like an imposter than were the females among university faculty. Interestingly, Harvey’s most important finding was that imposter experiences seemed to be demarcated to areas of achievement and not to over-all self-esteem domain. Another significant contribution of her research was the development of the first published instrument to test for imposter syndrome characteristics among her students and her clients. This was the Harvey
Impostor Phenomenon Scale (HIP, 1981), and four years later, Clance (1985) also developed the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIP).

For all the participants in this study, the intersection of their various identities led to instances of self-doubt that prevailed during their doctoral journey. They all mentioned experiencing instances of feeling like an imposter at some point during their doctoral trajectory. However, the following nine participants in this section were the ones who experienced the most intense feelings of imposter syndrome. Eva was one participant that most resonated with the imposter syndrome. She mentioned in her testimonio that coming from a very humble background and being able to continue her education at the highest level is something that has given her a lot of motivation despite the many personal and financial challenges she has encountered since she earned her bachelor’s degree. However, Eva has been very successful academically. She has published her work, presented at conferences, worked as a research assistant on various projects, and has been asked to teach a class for undergraduates in environmental health. In spite of these achievements, Eva still experienced feelings of self-doubt. She stated in her testimonio:

Unluckily, Latinas, we're underrepresented in science. So, I've learned to embrace my intersectionality as a woman and as a Latina. Yeah! I learned to embrace it, own it, and use it to my advantage to get more academic support for scholarships, to get into competitive programs. I'm very proud of how resilient I am but sometimes I doubt what I can do! It’s like a failure mechanism. People see the potential in me, but I doubt myself, like, I can't do it! So, it’s the imposter syndrome. It usually happens with women, Latina women, and minorities because we don't think that we can be as successful as anyone
else. We think, “I'm not smart enough.” And sometimes these women have very high positions, and they still believe in not being so capable. I struggled with that, yeah! I struggle with that even though I've accomplished a lot on my own. And I, you know, I have the training. I get good feedback from my mentor and so forth. But I still doubt myself. I think I'm afraid that I'm going to do something wrong and that I'm going to really mess it up, you know; but I just need to take off that and just remain conscious about the fact that I think that I have imposter syndrome. Sometimes I realize that I need to overcome that.

In this excerpt, Eva acknowledges the phenomenon of imposter syndrome; nevertheless, what stands out is the connection between her self-doubt and her identity as a Latina. Although her academic socialization as a doctoral student has been successful, Eva is still afraid of not doing things right. Being able to publish, do research, and present at conferences still did not mitigate her fear of failure. Internally, she continued to downplay her achievements and capabilities. It is probable that the intersection of her various identities (e.g., border woman, Latina, doctoral student, Spanish and English speaker, mariachi singer, and first-generation college student) may have played a role in her feelings of self-doubt or feeling as an imposter.

These feeling of inadequacy not only affected Eva, but also Margarita. Unfortunately, Margarita felt some frustration for not being able to finish her doctorate as quickly as she had planned. She expressed that the reason for not advancing was that she did not have enough support from her mentor and her doctoral program. She expressed in her testimonio:

I was starting to feel very inadequate and dumb due to not being able to finish. My determination was stronger than ever as I always had in mind that my degree would open better opportunities for my career. I was nominated to receive an award by the Board of
Regents due to my dedication to the students and the community. I'm very persistent! I think that I still have a little bit of confidence left. I have a lot of grit and I'm determined to finish! Everything that I learned has made me become a better person and educator. I’ve had many academic and personal accomplishments including taking care of my mother before she died. In fifteen years, I could have been sitting at home doing nothing or been a secretary my whole life because I was good at that. But I think about everything I did and it takes people twenty to thirty years to do what I did in fifteen. So I'm very proud of that! The fact that somebody thought that I was good enough made a difference to me! But what really makes me angry at this point is that I started this program on a high, and to be honest with you, I never thought of myself as stupid. I've always thought that I can do this, because I've done it all along and I moved up the ladder at work and I passed all my classes. I never believed that I would be someone who would have this imposter syndrome or this negative feeling. And right now, I feel like I'm too dumb to finish.

While research has found that many graduate students experience feeling as an imposter or feelings of inadequacy (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Ullman et al., 2020), the preceding excerpt clearly demonstrates that Margarita was a high-achieving woman. Unfortunately, a negative voice in her head made her feel “too dumb to finish” her doctoral degree even though she was cognizant of her accomplishments, including taking care of her mother before she passed away, thus, fulfilling the traditional role of Latinas as caretakers within the familismo paradigm.

These feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt also affected Ana in her experiences as a bilingual Latina doctoral student in the rhetoric and composition program, where most students and faculty are native speakers of English. Ana elucidated at length in her testimonio:
I think that I have the drive like this is something that I really, really wanted, and I want to get it done quickly! Right now, that I’m doing the PhD. I have experience about what I can say, but about what I can do, right now, I have some uncomfortableness with me in an English program being Mexican, you know; and sometimes I experience it at work, too. Sometimes I feel like I want to go to a conference and do a presentation, and I want to talk about different topics that I want to write about, but sometimes I just don’t want go through it because I know they’re going to look at me because, even though I know that can speak the language, people can still pick up on my accent. Sometimes I feel like, ugh, and I just don’t have the energy to do that! Maybe I just need to grab my pants and feel comfortable and say, “Okay, I’m ready!” It’s like a battle! A professor told me and other male students at the end of the school year, “Your work could be published. I will give you feedback over the break because your work is really good.” And another professor, he has said several times to me that my writing is very good.

Despite this praise from her professors, Ana had also experienced these feelings of self-doubt at work as a high school English teacher. She explicated in her testimonio:

It’s like going to battle every time that I teach an English class in the school. I have done enough in different areas Spanish for business, accounting, journalism, yearbook, and all that, and every time that I go for English, I know that it’s going to be a battle; I know that the people [work colleagues] they’re going to look at me, and say like, you? And I just can’t help it! In my previous job, I was in charge of all the media, and Microsoft certifications, and I was the head of the electives department. I did well there, but I saw great opportunities in teaching only girls and English, so I asked myself, are you ready? Are you ready for this job? If you’re going to leave, you’re going to battle! I do see that!
And I do have battles with the same thing, you know, teaching English. Sometimes I do feel like as a part-time doctoral student, that you’re looked at differently. At work, they’re like, “Oh, so you’re studying your doctoral degree?” And I guess they expect perfection of you if you are at that level, you know, and if you’re not, it’s like a battle. And yes, you need to prove yourself, always!

These excerpts show how Ana doubted her ability to teach advanced English courses due to not being a native speaker of English, which she describes as “going to battle” despite her academic credentials. She doubted her capability to present in academic conferences or to teach advanced courses; therefore, having always to prove herself in a discipline where it is usually expected that people be proficient in the four domains of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Certainly, Ana had to deal with the imposter syndrome and recognized that she doubted her ability to teach advanced high school English courses and to present in conferences because people would notice her accent.

Interestingly, Sally also felt like an imposter due to her linguistic identity as a native speaker of Spanish, which played an important role during the time she started graduate school in the United States. She shared the following in her testimonio:

I changed from fisheries to geology to do the masters and I suffered a lot with the technical English. I had to learn about geology, so I had to learn technical English. After six years without practice, it was also really hard to take classes with some professors whose first language is not English. So, it was really hard for me to understand people. So during the masters, it was hell, terrible! And I almost left the masters. I was totally frustrated! The professors were really nice all the time, but I felt that I was failing. I felt that I did not deserve to be here to do the masters because my English wasn’t good
enough. The first semester was like that. Then, I went back to Peru to spend Christmas with my parents and my peers wrote me emails that I needed to come back. English is not my first language, but I’m trying hard! But I don’t feel I’m bilingual because my English is not perfect. It’s a challenge, my language barrier.

As seen in this excerpt, Sally felt undeserving to be in her master’s program for not feeling competent enough in utilizing academic English as a Spanish speaker. Unfortunately, Sally also felt that being bilingual implied having a perfect command of the English language, which not only affected her academic experience during her master’s degree, but also during her doctoral study. Evidently, feeling self-doubt was also connected with Sally’s linguistic experiences as a second language learner and international student.

Another participant who felt that she was not as competent as she would like it was Andrea. As a native speaker of Spanish, Andrea also experienced feelings of self-doubt, especially when she had to present in class. She commented in her testimonio:

En una ocasión me pasó, no me había pasado ni en la maestría, pero teníamos que hacer una presentación bien rápida de un minuto y me trababa, y me trababa, y me trababa y no me podía salir. Nunca me había sentido así. Y entonces le dije a la profesora que necesitaba sentarme que seguía después. Y me senté. Ella era anglo, y me dijo, “No te preocupes Andrea, el idioma no es una barrera.” Sentí el apoyo de ella. Pasaron otros compañeros y dije mi discurso en un minuto. Pero creo que es la vez que me he sentido así, que no podía, pero ella fue un apoyo. Y ella me tomó de ejemplo y les dijo a todos que nunca nos deben discriminar por quiénes somos, o qué idioma hablamos, ni por nada. Fue muy alentadora. Yo ya traía preparado mi discurso, lo tenía memorizado porque iban a contar el tiempo y no te podías pasar, tenía que ser un minuto. Entonces, si no lo decía
muy rápido, se me pasaba el tiempo y era la presión de presentar. Me acuerdo de esa sensación de presión. Me gustaría que fuera más habilidosa en el inglés. Como es mi segunda lengua, todavía siento que no estoy al nivel de la gente que es Anglo que es buena para hablar y expresarse en cualquier momento. Yo todavía estoy traduciendo al inglés; entonces, sería bueno que fuera muy habilidosa en el inglés y en escribirlo. Hay gente que es muy buena escribiéndolo. Me gusta ser muy buena escribiendo.

On one occasion it happened to me, it didn’t happen to me in my master's degree. It was when we had to do a very quick one-minute presentation and I got tongue-tied; I got tongue-tied, and I got tongue-tied, and I couldn't do it right! I have never felt like that! And then, I told the professor that I needed to sit down, that was going to be next. And I sat down. She was Anglo and she told me, “Don't worry Andrea, language is not a barrier.” I felt support from her. Other peers presented, and then, I presented my speech in a minute. But I think that time I felt that I couldn't do it! But she was supportive, and she took me as an example and told everyone that they should never discriminate against us because of who we are, or what language we speak, or for anything. She was very encouraging. I had already prepared my speech, I had it memorized because they were going to count the time and you couldn't go over it; it had to be a minute. So, if I didn't say it very quickly, my time would be over, and I had the pressure to present. I remember that feeling of pressure. I would like to be more proficient in English. As it is my second language, I still feel that I’m not at the level of people who are Anglo and are good at speaking and expressing themselves whenever. I’m still translating into English; so it would be good for me if I were more skillful when speaking English and writing it. There are people who are very good in writing English. I like to be a very good writer.
This excerpt shows how Andrea doubted her ability to present information in English even though she memorized her presentation, a strategy she employed as a native speaker of Spanish. Furthermore, after publishing an article, which shows that she could produce good academic writing, she mentioned that she would like to be a better English speaker and writer. Feeling as an imposter may have contributed to seeing herself as a weak writer and speaker, particularly when she compared herself with native speakers of English.

Verónica also expressed her self-doubt as a doctoral student in the rhetoric and composition program. Although she acknowledged her academic proficiency in Spanish, as well as her skills in translation and in teaching, she shared that she lacked confidence in her proficiency in English language, particularly when she had to speak it. She shared:

I feel very confident about my language [Spanish], my skills in translation, and teaching. But I feel less confident about the English language because of the level that we are working in the PhD, particularly in English [academic field]. But I try to do my best. It’s a high level of proficiency and sometimes it’s challenging for me to keep up with that level; that’s the reason I don’t feel very confident. And I try, but my writing it’s better than my speaking because we work every day doing translations. You have no idea the level of translations that we work on, like translating research or the president’s speeches [Southwest University president]. I’m totally aware that I’m not at the same level of my peers because of the language constraints because most of them [peers] have a master’s in English and I don’t. My master’s was in Spanish. So that’s one of the things that I see; that it is hard to transmit what I really have to say because of the language constraint.

In the preceding excerpt, it is evident that Verónica had feelings of self-doubt due to her linguistic identity as a native speaker of Spanish. She felt less confident because she did not have
the same language abilities in English compared to her doctoral peers in rhetoric and composition. Indeed, feelings of being an imposter were rampant among the study participants. For instance, another participant who had feelings of self-doubt about her linguistic abilities in English was Socorro, an international student who had completed her first year of doctoral study in environmental science and engineering. She declared:

Sí ha sido un reto para mí porque el inglés no es mi primer idioma. Entonces sí ha sido difícil, más al principio que ahorita. Ahorita como que ya me siento más confiada y más segura hasta en lo que digo en inglés. Pero yo soy una persona muy persistente. Y las cosas que me cuestan trabajo casi siempre las veo como retos. Tuve una materia que fue tan difícil, pero la vi como un reto. No sabía programar y aprendí a programar. Las mates, ya se me habían olvidado y las tuve que recordar; todo a base de persistencia y de trabajo. Entonces no soy a lo mejor demasiado inteligente, pero soy una persona muy persistente. Compenso mucho esa agilidad que traen las nuevas generaciones en las computadoras, lo compenso con trabajo. Pero me da cierta inseguridad mi inglés todavía; sobre todo cuando tengo presentaciones. Me siento todavía muy, muy nerviosa porque mi pronunciación es fea. Y entonces me digo que no es mi lengua y que la aprendí como adulta. En general la gente ha sido muy comprensiva conmigo. No he tenido ningún comentario negativo y eso me está dando un poquito de seguridad. ¡En inglés sí he ido ganando confianza, pero siento que me falta!

It has been a challenge for me because English is not my first language. So, it has been difficult, more at the beginning than right now. Right now, I kind of feel more confident even in what I say in English. But I’m a very persistent person. And the things that are difficult for me, I always see them as challenges. I had a class that was very difficult, but
I saw it as a challenge. I did not know how to program, and I learned how to program. I had already forgotten to do math and I had to remember how to do it; all I did was based on persistence and work. So, perhaps I’m not very intelligent, but I’m a very persistent. I compensate [for] the sagacity that the new generations have in computers with hard work. But I still feel insecure in English, especially when I have to present. I still feel very, very nervous because my pronunciation is ugly. And then, I tell myself that it is not my language and that I learned it as an adult. In general, people have been very understanding. I have not received any negative comments, and this is giving me a little bit of confidence. In English, I have been gaining confidence, but I feel that my proficiency in English is not there yet!

Ironically, Verónica feels confident about her ability to learn advanced math and computer programming, which shows not only her persistence but also her high level of cognition as a doctoral student. Certainly, her self-doubt feelings influenced how she viewed herself as a “perhaps not very intelligent” individual, including “gaining a little bit of confidence” in her development of the English language even though she has been successful in all her classes, has become an expert in water analysis and has been doing research in water contamination. Undoubtedly, Socorro is a high-achieving Latina doctoral student who persists and works hard, despite being self-critical about her pronunciation in English.

Another participant who struggled with self-doubt was Blanca. She shared that although writing and reading in English had given her more confidence in academia, she felt scared. This feeling of doubt was present when she thought about moving out of her “comfort zone” and looking for job opportunities once she earns her doctoral degree. Blanca explained:
Now, I’m very surprised because I’m writing a lot and reading a lot; before I didn’t know that I could do that! Now, I’m doing it! So that has given me more confidence in academia. I’ve been developing my writing skills and thinking skills. We had a presentation that talked about the number of women in positions of power; so that’s one thing that intimidates me because now I know that I have to get out of my comfort zone. I have to be there one day to look for an opportunity; it’s something that, you know, has to happen. I’m going to be in that position and that’s scary. It is intimidating to know the fact that eventually I’m not going to be in my comfort zone, and that I’ll have to do more. And that’s a little scary!

This excerpt shows how Blanca feels intimidated or scared when thinking about women in positions of power and the challenges that she may have to overcome as a Woman of Color in academia. But Blanca was not the only one whose feelings of self-doubt made her afraid of confronting the exigencies and challenges in academia. Bella also experienced similar self-doubt feelings when she shared the following:

My major goal is to become a tenure-track researcher and professor since I like to teach as well as conducting research. But sometimes I doubt my ability or say [that] maybe it's really not for me because of how I could aim at this? Or is it because I really want to make a broader impact?” I would like to dedicate more time to my academic writing because I tend to procrastinate. I feel guilty if I didn’t work! I guess that's one thing I wish I could change. I have like these mental blocks. I don't want to write because I'm just not in the mood; it's hard just getting back into literature, but then, I do it; and it’s not that hard! I also wish to be more proficient in writing articles. I have not published an article as first author yet, but it is about working diligently to co-author. I just promised
my co-author in my new lab to add in two paragraphs on a weekly basis. And if I cannot get it done, I get crabby about myself. I just wish to be more proficient in writing and a more proficient test taker. I feel like I'm not proficient enough. It's a struggle!

Indeed, Bella’s identity as a Latina influences the way she perceives herself in academia, particularly when she expressed “How could I aim at this?” Moreover, she wishes to be more proficient as a test taker and as a writer due to having “mental blocks.” These feelings may be a projection of feeling like an imposter when having to deal with the demands of academic writing, including allocating time for such rigorous process without feeling guilty.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE

This section emphasized a major similarity amongst the participants, which encompassed feeling like an imposter or feelings of self-doubt. Imposter syndrome has been a phenomenon particularly found in historically marginalized populations, such as women and Students of Color (Craddock et al., 2011; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Peteet et al., 2015). While all the participants spoke about imposter syndrome at some point, the highlighted nine, Eva, Margarita, Ana, Sally, Andrea, Verónica, Socorro, Blanca, and Bella, illustrate how the intersecting identities, being a woman, Latina, and first-generation college student (except Andrea) or immigrant (Holley & Gardner, 2012) were a major source in the manifestation of imposter syndrome. Interestingly, Eva, Andrea, and Sally were the youngest participants out of the nine women in this section; they were as likely to suffer from imposter syndrome as their older counterparts, which is contrary to the findings of Lin (2008) on exploring the presence of Imposter Phenomenon (IP) among a sample of high-achieving Women of Color where younger women were found to be more likely to endorse IP compared to older women. In fact, in this current study, the youngest woman was Eva who openly acknowledged that she had imposter syndrome, which was also tied to her
identity as a Latina and as first-generation college student. Moreover, Margarita, Ana, and Bella reported feelings of doubt, often due to isolation for being one of the few Latinas who were in the doctoral program and a similar finding was found in Espino’s (2014) and González et al.’s (2002) study.

Most of the participants in this study were immigrants, which also contributed to their feelings of self-doubt. Specifically, Ana, Sally, Andrea, Verónica, and Socorro felt that their English skills were not good enough since they were native speakers of Spanish. They also felt that they did not possess a high command of the English language and desired to become better speakers and writers. Therefore, their immigration status, particularly coming to the United States as adults, was often an added pressure in addition to the social, academic, and environmental factors (Arana et al., 2011). Unfortunately, this type of feelings may also be linked to pattern to the deficit thinking that has been disseminated throughout the educational system by educators and society, which often place blame the Latinx’s cultural background for their low educational attainment across the educational pipeline (Yosso, 2002).

This deficit thinking can lead to Students of Color to feeling like frauds in their previous and current academic pursuits, which can eventually shape the way they socialize and experience their doctoral programs. For instance, Eva, Sally, and Bella experienced previous negative or challenging educational experiences in their graduate education, which sometimes increased their self-doubt feelings in their doctoral programs. Espino’s (2014) study also observed similar findings with her Mexican American PhD holders, as they were able to rely on support systems, such as family or faculty to help them cope with imposter syndrome, or/and lack of diversity in their programs as well as biases or microaggressions. Even though imposter syndrome is not a new phenomenon, these findings illuminate how intersecting marginalized identities can cause a
higher likelihood of experiencing these self-doubt thoughts (Crenshaw, 1989) particularly during a rigorous academic experience, such as undertaking a doctoral program. These nine participants’ testimonios portray Clance’s (1985) description of the patients who exhibited signs of imposter phenomenon as, “bright, energetic, hardworking people… they are the types of people who are liked, loved, and respected (p. 126). Indeed, these women saw their challenges as opportunities. They are loving and respectable individuals as well as a source of inspiration to their families and friends. However, as they believed in change and self-growth, they were also able to gain more confidence and strengthen their voice in and out of the classroom during the process of pursuing their PhD.

**RQ2: Support Systems for the Success of Latina Doctoral Students**

The findings from the first research question described some of the challenges and obstacles that Latina doctoral students face during their doctoral study. For many of the participants, this included instances of biases, racism, sexism, and feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy. However, regardless of these obstacles, these Latina women stayed in their doctoral programs and were able to successfully complete their academic endeavors on their doctoral journeys. Along with their own agency and resiliency, these participants had solid support systems that ranged from family, to peers, to departmental and institutional resources.

The following section seeks to address the second research question of this dissertation: What are the support systems, if any, that Latina doctoral students utilize during the completion of the doctoral degree? The fourteen Latina doctoral students in this study discussed in detail their family dynamics, their faculty advisors/mentors and other faculty, and departmental and institutional resources that enabled them to persist. Even though this did not exclude them from facing some obstacles, having some type of support system allowed them the opportunity to
decrease the stress they experienced, gain valuable advice and mentorship, and provide them the persistence they needed to continue. The following themes will be discussed in this section: (a) familial relationships; (b) faculty advisors and/or faculty members; (c) peers; (d) departmental and/or institutional resources.

**Theme 2.1: Getting Support from Family and Changing Home Dynamics**

As the significance of family ties for Latinx students has been noted in the literature (del Rio & Alvarez, 1994; Quijada, & Alvarez, 2006; Wycoff, 1996), it is not surprising that all the fourteen women in this study considered their families an important aspect of their support systems when they described the various ways their families supported them prior to applying or during the doctoral degree. Seven participants in this study were first-generation college students, which implied having to explain the process of applying and pursuing a PhD and sometimes dealing with a lack of understanding from their families regarding why their daughter had to be far away or absent from family gatherings. Although this usually caused some stress, for most of the participants their families ultimately were accepting and a solid support system during their academic journey.

Julieta was one participant who had a very strong support from her family, particularly her mother. As mentioned in the section on participant backgrounds, her mother and her husband also moved from the East Coast for Julieta to pursue her doctorate, which implied a lot of sacrifices that Julieta mentioned in her *testimonio* as follows:

My mother has always supported me emotionally and financially from my bachelor to my PhD journey. She is very proud of me! She is the reason why I'm doing this PhD. My mom had a great position in her job, and she sacrificed a stable salary to be close to me. She was the manager of a huge travel consolidator. Now, she works from home in the
same company, but she gave up a big chunk of her salary. My husband also supported my decision to move to the Southwest. He has always been supportive to my academic endeavors. He also had his challenges because of moving, the adaptation process, but he is proud of me. He accepts me and that I want to be independent. My father doesn't care because he has his own struggles, but my mother has been instrumental in my journey as a graduate student. She has made personal sacrifices that go above and beyond in order for me to attend college! She paid for my tuition when I was in my master’s and now, she's helping to pay my PhD. I never had to worry about money. She even helps me to maximize my time by keeping track of deadlines for papers and exams. I’m a procrastinator, so she helps me with that. She’s always cheering me and pushing me to accomplish my goals! So, part of being a PhD student is having support around you and having a family. And that's my goal, to ensure that happens, to be able to provide for my family when I start my own.

For Julieta, having such a strong support from her mother and her husband was instrumental for her academic growth and success as a Latina doctoral student. She acknowledged the sacrifices that her mother and husband undertook for her to pursue a PhD. Therefore, Julieta was extremely aware of the importance of having that kind of support at home to be able to succeed in academia as a first-generation college student.

Another participant who had a big support from her mother was Emilia. As a doctoral student, she relied heavily on her mother to take care of her only child in order to continue her education. Emilia shared:

In terms of support, my mom has been my backbone because without her I would not have the ability to come to school just because of my daughter. My mom ended up


retiring when I was doing my masters. So, as soon as she retired, she started being my
daughter's primary caretaker. She saved me a lot of money by doing that, and a lot of
time, and a lot of pressure. Of course, no one is going to take better care of my daughter
than my mom. So, she has been a very, very, supportive mom in terms of being there for
me when I needed her, since forever! And, that’s why she says, “I have two daughters.”
When I was at the beginning of my coursework in my PhD, I separated from my
daughter's father. We were never formally married, so I always say that he's my
daughter's father. And she was very supportive!

In this excerpt, it is evident that Emilia’s mother was her biggest support in the family, as she
described as being her “backbone” in her personal and academic life regardless of her mother’s
limited understanding of her doctoral study, as previously mentioned in theme 1.3 regarding
stress between academia and home culture.

A participant who received huge support from her husband was Andrea. She relied on her
husband to take care of their 8-year-old and only child, who was in second grade, to be able to
pursue a doctoral degree. Andrea shared that even though her family dynamics had drastically
changed since she started the doctoral program, her husband has always helped her at home and
encouraged her to persist as a doctoral student, especially when she stays at the library most of
the day to write or to study for exams. She further explained in her testimonio:

El apoyo de mi esposo es una de las cosas que más me ayuda; hasta la fecha él me ha ido
apoyando. Me ha exigido más el doctorado que la maestría y ha cambiado la dinámica
familiar en el sentido que mi esposo me ha tenido que echar la mano más; sale de
trabajar, le paso al niño, le digo que lo bañe, lo duerma y que nos vemos al rato; y
termino a la una de la mañana en la biblioteca. Él sale de trabajar y se queda con él.
Sábados y domingos que no trabaja se queda con su hijo y yo me vengo a la biblioteca. A veces por esa dinámica no nos vemos. Pero es parte de nuestro ritmo que traemos ahorita los dos. Él me apoya, sabe lo que tiene que hacer para que yo pueda terminar y que es un sacrificio temporal. Me acuerdo de mi esposo cuando estaba en el suyo y estaba muy estresado escribiendo la disertación o un artículo. Los dos hemos requerido tanto tiempo porque lo que uno necesita es tiempo para sentarse, relajarse y escribir. Mi pareja es la que más me ha ayudado porque no tiene esa visión machista; él no espera que yo tenga la casa lista, la ropa, o la comida. Mi papá machista me dice que es muy difícil un doctorado y cuando entré al doctorado me dijo, “Pues un doctorado en Southwest University no es lo mismo que en Stanford”, porque él hizo su maestría en Stanford. Ni uno de mis hermanos ha hecho más que yo académicamente. Siempre ha habido esa pelea con él porque soy mujer, desde que estaba chica tengo problema con él. Mi esposo es diferente. Él me ayuda, hay equidad y eso es lo que yo siento que más me ha ayudado. Somos un equipo, somos iguales, pero eso es tan difícil de creer en nuestra cultura. Él fue el que me dijo que sí podía. Porque mi papá me dijo, “No puedes”. Pero él me dijo, “Sí puedes Andrea, es como la maestría, pero poquito más trabajo, verás que sí puedes”.

My husband's support is one of the things that help me the most; so far, he has been able to support me. The doctorate for me has been more demanding for me, so my family dynamics have changed in the sense that my husband has had to help me more. He leaves work and I leave him with our child; and tell him to have him take a shower and to send him to bed, and that I'll see him later; I stay until one in the morning in the library. He finishes work and stays with him. Saturdays and Sundays when he does not work, he stays with his son and I go to the library. Sometimes because of this dynamic, we don't
see each other. But it is part of the routine that we have now. He knows what he has to do for me to finish and that it is a temporary sacrifice. I remember when my husband was in his doctorate and that he was too stressed writing the dissertation or an article. We both have invested so much time to study because what you need is time to sit, relax, and write. My partner is the one who has helped me the most because he does not have that macho mentality; he does not expect me to have the house clean, the clothes, or the food. My dad, who is a macho, tells me that a doctorate is very difficult and when I entered the doctorate he told me, “Well, a doctorate at Southwest University is not the same as in Stanford,” because he did his master's degree at Stanford. None of my brothers have done more than me academically. There has always been that fight with him because I’m a woman, since I was little, I’ve had that problem with him. My husband is different. He helps me, there is equity and that is what I feel has helped me the most. We are a team, we are the same, but that is so hard for people to believe in our culture. He was the one who told me that I could do it. Because my dad told me, “You can't.” But he told me, “Yes, you can Andrea, it's like the masters, but more work, and you’ll see that you can.”

In addition to her husband’s support, Andrea also has had the support of her mother and stepmother, especially when she had exams or finals. She added:

Mi mamá me ha apoyado mucho, vive en Chihuahua y viene cuando la necesito, pero como trabaja no puede dejar su trabajo y venir a ayudarme siempre. Me dice que le eche muchas ganas. Anímicamente es muy buena como apoyo. También mi suegra, ella está retirada y me dice que cuando tenga exámenes ella se viene, entonces cuando viene tengo todo el día para trabajar ya que en la escuela a mi niño lo ocupan ocho horas. Ella vive en Chihuahua también. No tenemos a nadie de familia aquí.
My mother has supported me a lot. She lives in Chihuahua [Mexico] and comes when I need her; but because she works, she cannot always leave her job to come to help me. She tells me to do my best. She’s good at supporting me emotionally. Also, my mother-in-law, she’s retired, and she tells me that whenever I have exams that she could come; so when she comes, I have all day to work since my child is eight hours at school. She lives in Chihuahua, too. We don’t have any family here.

Nevertheless, Andrea was not the only participant whose husband has been a big support since entering the doctoral program. Socorro’s husband has also been a huge support for her. Also, her three children have been supportive and helpful. She mentioned the following in her testimonio:

Mi familia me apoya totalmente y mi esposo sobre todo me apoya mucho porque ha tenido que ayudarme en cosas que él antes no me tenía que ayudar y las hacía yo sola. ¡Es un apoyo muy fuerte, mi esposo! Y mis tres hijos también me apoyan. Ellos han tenido que amoldarse a mis horarios y a mis nuevas actividades. Mi familia me apoya bastante. Y mis hermanos dicen que se sienten orgullosos de mí. Me he sentido apoyada por todos. Una experiencia importante es el haber encontrado a mi esposo. Mi esposo y yo éramos compañeros en ingeniería y desde entonces trabajamos mucho en equipo. Somos muy buenos como equipo. Nos compaginamos muy bien. Mi dinámica familiar cambió bastante porque las actividades que hacía al cien por ciento, ahorita nomás tengo tiempo como para hacerlas al cincuenta por ciento; ese otro cincuenta por ciento se tuvo que repartir entre mis tres hijos y mi esposo. Me siento apoyada. El más grande ya terminó y dos están en prepa. Él está en Community College. Me lo traje porque no quería hablar inglés y lo tuve que obligar. Mis hijas hablan muy bien inglés porque están en escuela bilingüe en México. Siento que he dejado un poco de lado mi relación con mi
esposo y con mis hijos. Mis amigas me han reclamado que no me dejo ver. Hay veces que dejamos de asistir a eventos porque tengo que terminar un trabajo, hacer una tarea o estudiar. Pero hasta ahorita, mi esposo no me ha presionado de ninguna manera para que deje de hacer mis cosas para hacer las que hacíamos antes. ¡Sí me ha apoyado bastante! My family totally supports me! Especially my husband, he supports me a lot because he has had to help me with things that he did not have to help me [with] before, which I used to do myself. He is a very strong support, my husband! And my three children also support me. They have had to adjust to my schedule and to my new activities. My family supports me a lot. And my brothers say they are proud of me. I have felt supported by everyone. An important experience is to have found my husband. My husband and I were classmates in engineering and since then, we have worked a lot as a team. We are very good as a team. We get along very well. My family dynamics changed a lot because the activities that I did one hundred percent, right now, I just have time to do them fifty percent; that other fifty percent had to be shared between my three children and my husband. I feel supported. The oldest one has already finished high school and two are in high school. He is at Community College. I brought him here [city] because he didn't want to speak English and I had to force him. My daughters speak English very well because they go to a bilingual school in Mexico. I feel like I've put aside my relationship with my husband and my children a bit. My friends have complained that they do not see me anymore. Sometimes we stop attending events because I have to finish some schoolwork, do an assignment or study. But so far, my husband has not pressured me in any way to stop doing my things to do what we used to do before. Yes, he has been very supportive!
As is seen in this excerpt, Socorro’s family is a significant part of her support system as a Latina doctoral student. She admitted that her family dynamics have completely changed as her husband and children had to adjust to her new schedule and activities as she could no longer dedicate the same amount of time and energy to her home, family, and friends. Certainly, her family’s valuable support is a key element for Socorro to continue persevering and advancing academically.

Blanca, a doctoral student in education also received a lot of support from her own children and family, particularly from both of her parents. She holds her family in high regard as they have provided enormous personal support during difficult times in her life. Therefore, for Blanca, family comes first, as she expressed in her testimonio:

The love and the connection we have as a family, that’s what I value the most because they make me feel that I’m a better person. My children have always been very supportive. My mom is proud of me, but at the same time she sees the struggle, all the things that I do. Sometimes they [parents and siblings] tell me, “Why are you doing this? You have a lot of things to do.” Sometimes I take it as a negative, it’s not very encouraging. But then, on the other hand, I know that I can count on them in whatever I do. I know that they will be there for me. My parents, my sister, my brothers, they understand that I love school. They are just concerned about my health because I devote too much of my time to my studies. But now they understand that this is what I want, and they respect that. When it comes to family, I give them priority! Sundays are for my parents and family. When we have finals and I have to write a paper, I tell my mom and my dad that I’m not going to see them, and they understand that. They say it’s okay or sometimes they come home instead of me going; but like I said, Sunday is family day.
And one of the things that I don’t even think about is schoolwork on Sundays! They all motivate me to keep on going, to support each other; they provide guidance or help when it’s needed.

Certainly, Blanca considers her family an important source of support as they “provide guidance and help when it’s needed” even though they questioned her decision of pursuing a PhD, as it was taking an extensive amount of her time, which also made them to be concerned about her well-being. Blanca managed to socialize with her family every Sunday in order to balance her academic obligations and family life. Interestingly, Blanca was not the only participant whose family played such an important role in her personal and academic journey. Verónica also had strong family ties that made her feel supported and valued by her husband and children even though her family dynamics had changed drastically since she entered the doctoral program. Verónica explained:

My family dynamics have changed in many ways because now I don’t have the time that I used to have for them, for my husband, for my house, even for myself because, in many ways, everything has changed. I left many things out and sometimes I have not been available for my family. I used to visit them more often and I can’t do it anymore. But they are very proud! My son is studying his PhD in physics. He always told me, “Mom, why don’t you start your PhD? Because you’re there [at the university] and it would be easy for you.” I told him, no, that it was too much for me, too much! So, when I told them that I started to take some courses, they said, “Oh, that’s very good!” My daughter is an engineer. So, they are very, very proud of me! Now I know the effort that my son has made to complete his PhD. Now I understand him more. And my husband is willing to stay all Sunday long at home because I have to complete my projects, read, or study,
and he says, “It’s okay, no problem at all.” He’s very supportive! I couldn’t do it without their support.

For Verónica, understanding the PhD process through her son’s own experience as a PhD student is illustrative of having a strong support system in the family, including her husband and daughter, who were also supportive of her decision to pursue a doctorate. Having that kind of family support was valuable and appreciated by Verónica in order to be resilient and persistent as a native speaker of Spanish in a doctoral program in English rhetoric and composition, which requires an extensive amount of time for reading and writing, as well.

Ana, a participant I the same field of study as Verónica, also felt the strong support from her family. Coming from a well-educated family from Mexico, as she mentioned in the section on the participant’s backgrounds, Ana envisioned herself as an academically successful woman in search of better career opportunities. Ana’s husband was also a significant support for her. She explicated in her testimonio:

My sisters are very supportive! They are proud of me. My dad too, but I think my dad got to a point where he's like, “Aren’t you going to stop studying? That’s enough!” And my mom it’s like, “Well, just take care of yourself, just make sure that you don’t overdo it.” Let me tell you that at first, the first semester was very, very difficult only because my mom was living with me because she started her dialysis treatments; I brought her home, so I had to balance all of that. My husband has always been very supportive, if not, I would have never married him! I always had that in me, that I needed somebody who could let me be because I wasn’t going to stop studying. He’s been very helpful all the time at the house. He doesn’t cook much but he helps with cleaning, and he doesn’t complain. My brother makes fun of my husband when he comes to visit because he
would be cleaning with me. My daughter, she’s very responsible. Now, she helps me, she’s the one who once in a while calls me, and says, “Mom, I’m making food.” And it’s great! My mother decided to go back to her house in Mexico when she was done with the dialysis treatments. Now she’s okay. My parents are happy. I think this support has helped me a lot and I know that not everybody has a supporting family.

As seen in Ana’s testimonio, she also has strong support from her mother, who lived with her during the first semester that Ana started her doctoral program. Although it was a challenging experience, Ana felt she was a team player who did not give up. Luckily, she had the support from her husband and daughter who were helpful and understanding. Ana has strong family ties and a supportive family that “not everybody has,” which was an essential component for her to succeed in the academy as a proud Latina-Mexicana woman and doctoral student.

**DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

It has been noted in the literature that the existing social and cultural capital forms that are inherent in the Latinx people is an aspect of *familismo*, which speaks to the significant value of the family in Latinx/Hispanic culture (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Quijada, & Alvarez, 2006). Additionally, Alvarez (2010) illustrated that Latinxs place a special emphasis on the value of the family when compared to the U.S. population in general, which was also a major characteristic among most of the participants in this research project when they shared the significance of the familial support they received, which also aided in alleviating the stress caused by the demands of pursuing a doctoral degree.

The seven Latina women in this section spoke at length about the various ways in which their families offered valuable support and encouragement before and during their doctoral study and were indeed a strong support for them to continue their educational endeavors. A similar
finding was found in Ceja’s (2004) qualitative study that explored Chicana students’ views on the roles that their parents had taken in the development of their college goals. Thematic analysis indicated that parents were important influences in their educational aspirations based on their experiences. Ceja (2004) concluded that these parents influenced their daughters’ disposition to go to college, a form of the cultural capital influence of family in Latina women’s academic advancement. Such was the case of Julieta whose mother supported her emotionally, financially, and even academically by helping her manage her time and keeping track of her deadlines for exams. Ana, Verónica, and Andrea had parents who pursued a bachelor’s degree in Mexico; thus their parents’ educational experiences inspired them to also continue their education.

As the home culture of Latinxs centers on families, it is an important for Latinas pursuing doctorates because as they are expected to uphold family relationships, responsibilities, and their academic tasks simultaneously, as it was the case for Andrea, whose father expected her to fulfill her duties as a wife and caretaker. Andrea encountered these issues surrounding cultural and social expectations in her higher education pursuits (Gándara, 1995; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Perna, 2000) due to her father’s machismo. In the social organization of Latinxs, family is the most important aspect (Wycoff, 1996). For these seven participants it was no different. They maintained a home culture characterized by strong relationships within the family members through cooperation and respect for parents (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006). For instance, Julieta and Emilia showed a lot of admiration and respect for their mothers who were able to provide unconditional love and support to them since they started their doctorate. Andrea, Socorro, Verónica, and Ana also maintained healthy and respectful relationships with their spouses and children, as their families were able to understand their needs as doctoral students. They became a strong and valuable support system that enabled them to continue their academic endeavors.
A common cultural value among these Latina doctoral students was *familismo*, which conveys the idea of having strong and close relationships to family through collaboration, alliance, and parental authority (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Quijada & Alvarez, 2006). In Latinx culture, individuals experience expectations to begin families instead of achieving personal goals such as higher education, which were also Andrea’s father expectations (Cantrell & Brown-Weltry, 2003). The cultural value of *familismo* refers to the Latina’s responsibility to put her family before herself (Sue & Sue, 2003). These seven participants struggled in balancing the roles of wife and/or mother while also fulfilling their academic responsibilities. However, their families were their greatest cheerleaders and support system during their doctoral journey. For Julieta, Emilia, Andrea, Socorro, Blanca, Verónica and Ana their family also provided the motivation and force behind their higher education aspirations, or what is described as *ganas*. Easley, Bianco, and Leech (2012) postulated that first-generation and immigrant Mexican American college students’ main motivation for success in higher education was the aspiration to be academically successful due to parental sacrifice or *ganas*. They detailed their parents’ struggles, the respect they held for them, and their aspirations to do well so they could give back to their families. Julieta’s was the participant that most resonated with the findings of study, as she specifically mentioned her mother’s (and husband’s) sacrifices, such as moving to the Southwest and getting a large salary reduction, and still being able to provide for Julieta’s education. Julieta expressed her willingness to replicate what her mother had done for her as she wanted to also be a provider for her own family in the future.

Also, Emilia’s *testimonio* illuminated the deep love and respect she felt for her mother whom she described as being her “backbone” for being her daughter’s primary caretaker when she retired, which facilitated Emilia’s academic progress and success. Her mother was also a
solid support when Emilia broke up with her partner and daughter’s father. In the background section, Socorro mentioned that her mother was a source of inspiration for her to continue her education through *echarle ganas* [do things with effort], by working and studying hard in order to have a better life; she recognized that everything that she had accomplished in life was due to her mother’s sacrifices, hard work, and wisdom. Therefore, the findings of Easley et al.’s (2012) study and this current study both indicate the importance of familial influence on Latinx student's motivations to pursue higher education and the important role they play as a support system. Additionally, Espinoza’s (2010) study on doctoral students found that the Latinas in her study fit into the category of being the integrators, those who kept their families in the loop about their academics, or that of the separators, who intentionally separated family and academics. The findings from Espinoza’s study are aligned with what occurred with some of the participants in this study. For instance, Julieta and Andrea, were more aligned with the integrators by both sharing with their families the process of pursuing a PhD. Julieta and Andrea integrated their husbands and mothers including them in conversations about the doctoral process before they even began applying to the program and they always shared their academic experiences with them. For Emilia and Blanca, they fit more into the separator roles. Emilia stated she kept her mother out of her academic life, as she didn’t understand the doctoral process. Also, Blanca decided to separate family and academic life. In relation to family obligations, her family was a strong support for her even though they were concerned for her health and questioned her why she was pursuing a PhD since it was taking more time away from them. In order to spend time with her family and continue the family tradition, Blanca allocated Sundays as a “family day,” which implied dedicating more time to do schoolwork during the week in order to participate in family events and maintain the family tradition of socializing on weekends. Interestingly, her
experience paralleled that of Gloria & Castellanos’s (2006) findings that Latinx students’
tendency to place the needs of family above their own needs and sometimes questioned their
academic undertakings due to required sacrifices, such as being away from family or missing
participation in family life events.

Cuádraz (2006) drew on the life histories of students of Mexican descent enrolled in
doctoral programs at the University of California, Berkley. The purpose of her study was to
explore myths about their academic achievements along with how these myths influenced their
parents’ relationship to their achievements. Cuádraz (2006) found that individual characteristics
of each of the participants, such as family socialization practices and characteristics were most
influential in their educational achievement, rather than structural opportunities or institutional
processes. Hence, Cuadraz’s findings match the experiences of the seven participants in this
current study, as they all explicitly gave credit to their family for their academic advancement
and saw their support as a pivotal aspect in their persistence, determination, and success.
Furthermore, Andrea, Socorro, Verónica, and Ana had drastically changed their family dynamics
since they started their doctoral program; as they also had to negotiate their family roles and their
role as doctoral student, their spouses were extremely supportive prior an during the doctoral
degree and adapted to the new family routines since they were no longer able to spend much
time with the family or attend family events as they used to.

Certainly, these seven women are a counternarrative of the prevalent views in the Latinx
culture as men being the sole income provider while women take care of the home. They
provided a counterstory by sharing the way in which their husbands, parents, and/or children
supported their educational pursuits by helping them dedicate the time that they needed for their
academic success. Blanca, Verónica, Socorro, and Ana had the support of their children, which
made them feel more confident and eager to continue their doctoral journey. Regardless of the family member(s) that they mentioned, the seven participants showcased the significant role that family can play in laying the foundation of support during the doctoral journey despite the challenges that would arise. The findings not only reinforce findings from previous studies on the crucial role of family for Latinxs (Espinoza, 2010; Rudolph et al., 2011), but also challenge the master narratives that portray Latinx families as not being supportive or involved in the educational development and success of their children (Yosso, 2005).

**Theme 2.2: The Importance of Mentoring for Latina Students’ Success**

The vast majority of the literature on the graduate school experience addresses the essential role that faculty, and specifically advisors, plays in the academic advancement and lives of doctoral students. For all the women in this study, this theme was no different. Nevertheless, the way in which these advisors or faculty supported and/or assisted these Latina doctoral students was unique. For some participants, their advisor advised as well as served as a mentor, thus, having two different forms of support. Amongst the topic of faculty and advisors, one similarity that emerged was amongst participants who had Faculty of Color as advisors. Bella and Andrea, specifically, both discussed the importance of having these advisors, as they were more understanding of their unique experiences as Students of Color and the challenges that it usually brought to their lives.

As mentioned in research question one, Bella had to find a new mentor due to feeling that her former mentor did not offer sufficient academic support in order to advance to her research proposal. Luckily, she found a Latino mentor who, according to Bella, is well-known in the department for genuinely supporting and giving advice to his students as a mentor. She explicated the following:
I strongly believe that the fact that my new mentor is Latino has a lot to do with his predisposition to help me unconditionally. I feel that all the sacrifices and multiple challenges were well worth it since he is providing me an opportunity to finish my doctorate, giving me a second chance in a department culture that I think is highly critical and unsupportive during academic presentations. I have no words to express my gratitude to my new mentor! I could not thank him enough! He said, “We accepted you into this program, so we owe it to you.” My new mentor has a different perspective as a Latino; he helps all his students and minority students to get into STEM fields, looking at the mentorship relationship, having resources, and good relationships. He's very different from Dr. Smith [ex-mentor]. We've already met every single week since I started this semester, he gives me the time and, if he's running late, he'll tell me. And the other mentor, it was once a week or bi-weekly, but there was no action; it wasn't a productive meeting. I would go and then, like, he didn't have a sense of direction. I’ve made progress with my new director and mentor. I have drafted out my proposal. I have accomplished a lot more compared to previous semesters. And now, I actually enjoy coming to campus. I’m also feeling less stressed ever since I do not have to deal with my former director and research team. Now, I don't mind being in the office; before, I did mind being in the office to do office hours, when I saw people, I didn’t want to see, my former lab mates; there was this heavy tension! And then, in my new lab, you know, they're very relieved. I can handle it okay.

Indeed, Bella’s new mentor has been a strong support for her, as she felt that he was able to understand her needs as a Latina doctoral student because he was Latino. She is extremely grateful for having found a committed mentor who is helping her advance academically.
Moreover, Bella felt that her new lab peers and her new mentor were giving her the push she needed to continue persevering, which was beneficial for her academic socialization and progress as well as feeling content while doing office hours, as it was one of her job duties.

Andrea is another participant who had a strong relationship with her Latina mentor, who has been a huge support ever since she became her thesis director during her master’s degree. Andrea recognized that her mentor has played a pivotal role in her academic development because she has understood her needs as a Latina doctoral student. She explained at length:

Estaba en la maestría con una Dra. Anglo. Ya tenía mi tesis de la maestría a la mitad para hacer proposal y se fue el verano. Entonces anduve buscando mentora y ella me dijo que sí, pero ella no trabajaba en mi tema y me dijo que tenía que hacer otra tesis. Ella trató de ayudarme, pero cuando vio la propuesta me dijo que cambiara de proyecto. Entonces, hice un proyecto de tesis diferente y duré otro año más para graduarme. Y como trabajé tan agusto con ella en el proyecto, le dije que me gustaría empezar el doctorado y que me gustaría ser su alumna. Me dijo que sí, entonces, cuando apliqué al doctorado, ya sabía que iba a trabajar con ella. Ella es mexicana y habla español e inglés. Ella me ha hecho participar en proyectos de investigación. Tiene un equipo de investigación y me jaló a ese equipo donde trabaja con una psicóloga y una enfermera-partera; y que me invite a mí para ver como publicar y como hacer investigación, como aplicar a un grant; que me invite a sus juntas y que me haya invitado a su equipo, eso me ha dado desarrollo y progreso académico porque mi estudio de disertación es acerca de campañas de intervenciones de vida para prevenir enfermedades crónicas como la diabetes gestacional tipo dos.
I was in my master’s degree with an Anglo professor. I had completed half of my master's thesis with her, and she left in the summer. So, I was looking for a new mentor and I asked her, and she said yes; but she did not specialize on my topic, so she told me that I had to do another thesis. She tried to help me, but when she saw my proposal, she told me to change my project. So, I did a different thesis project and took another year to graduate. And, since I worked so well with her on the project, I told her that I would like to start my doctorate and to be her student. She said yes, so when I applied for the PhD, I already knew that I was going to work with her. She is Mexican, and she speaks Spanish, and English. She has made me participate in research projects. She has a research team and she invited me to that team where she works with a psychologist and a nurse-midwife; and she invited me to learn how to publish and how to do research; how to apply for a grant; she invites me to her meetings and to work with her team. So, that has given me academic development and progress because my dissertation study is about life intervention campaigns to prevent chronic diseases such as gestational diabetes type two.

Certainly, Andrea has had a strong mentor-mentee relationship during her doctoral study, which is something that she valued the most as an international student from Mexico who came to this country to follow in her husband’s footsteps and to have better opportunities. A participant who also had very positive experiences with her advisor and mentor was Emilia. She has been able to maintain a very cordial personal and professional relationship with her mentor ever since she started the doctoral program. Emilia stated the following in her testimonio:

My relationship with my director is great, yeah! She's a woman, a White lady. And she's very supportive. She's definitely very supportive and very knowledgeable. She’s definitely fascinated by my dissertation topic, too. She has told me many times that she
wants me to write articles for like, the *Guardian*. She's very, very supportive! She does believe in me! I feel very loved and appreciated by her ever since I started the program. Well, initially she was one of my professors. I took intro to rhetoric and a research methods class with her, which was when I kind of discovered what I wanted to do with my topic because of the Trump candidacy. So, that's why I picked her. She was great! Her expertise is not necessarily in social justice; it's more in rhetoric and writing studies, so she's very knowledgeable. She speaks Spanish because her dad was a Spanish speaker. So, she did learn it, but for sure, it was an event that really changed her life because, as you can imagine, growing eleven years in California, and then, all of a sudden, they [her mentor and family] had to move to Mexico. And I felt like we had a good personality combination. So, in that sense, I felt supported, like, she understood where I was coming from and the importance to me about my topic.

As shown in this excerpt, Emilia believed that she and her mentor had “a good personality combination,” which had a very positive impact into her academic goals, especially when choosing her dissertation project. The fact that her mentor spoke Spanish and lived in Mexico made Emilia feel more connected to her mentor, as she understood Emilia’s cultural background as well as her strengths and interests as a Latina doctoral student. Verónica was another participant who maintained a good relationship with her advisor who has been a strong support since she got admitted into the program. In addition, her advisor was also a Spanish speaker, which Verónica saw as a great advantage. She mentioned in her *testimonio*:

> My advisor and I have a very good relationship! She’s Latina, from Mexico, too. She did everything to help me get into the program; and she’s been tracking all my progress, everything. I think that being Latina influences my good relationship with her. She is
very professional, as other professors, but in my case, it has helped me a lot that she speaks Spanish. I feel confident with her.

Interestingly, Verónica also had a Latino faculty member who greatly influenced her outlook about doing community service. She shared in her testimonio that his class was the most inspirational course that she had taken in her doctoral program, as she was able to not only learn about the subject matter but also put into practice her expertise in translation to serve the community. She elucidated the following:

My very favorite class was with Dr. Paz called, service learning. And one of the things that I admire the most in others is their commitment to service. For the class, we had to work through an agency and make a commitment to help. We signed a contract to serve in whatever were our strengths, in my case, translation. I had two agencies, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the other was Latinitas, where I was assigned to work with translating their website; and then, for the Chamber of Commerce, I had some forms to translate to Spanish. The class was very interesting! We signed an agreement, and we had a meeting throughout the semester, and then we had a final presentation about what we did. And I really got engaged with the agencies! It kept me busy and my brain growing. And now, as an instructor, I’m working with my students to do service learning with some agencies. For the final project, they had to commit and sign an agreement to do some work in translation for their agencies. So, it was not just a class project anymore, we were serving the community! And that’s what I admire in people, their willingness to help others!

Indeed, for Verónica, her professor had a direct influence in her future teaching approach as she decided to implement what she had learned in his class in her classes; therefore, his teachings
were an inspiration to Verónica, as she also shared that one of her career goals would be to continue doing service learning as an individual and as an instructor. She evidently made sure that her students could also see value in serving their community through their academic strengths and expertise.

Socorro was another participant whose mentor played an important role in her academic journey. Her advisor was also a Latina who had high expectations of her since she started the program. She explained:

So far, I feel that she has been a very good mentor, Dr. Canales, I have worked with her a lot. She’s Mexican and our relationship is very good; but she is very demanding. She doesn’t cuddle me or give me any kind of preference because I’m Latina or anything. Of course, I admire her for being a Latina woman. She is tough with me sometimes, but I feel like that's good for me. She’s very demanding! Our work relationship is good. She is my mentor for the dissertation. But right now, she has a lot of work because she was promoted. I hope that she wants to continue being my mentor because I run the risk that
she will not want to continue with me due to having a lot of work. Even though she is very demanding, I would very much like her to continue being her mentee because she’s a very good mentor.

As seen in this excerpt, Socorro admires her mentor for being a successful Latina professor in the field of engineering. She desired to continue having a mentor like her due to her high expectations and mentorship skills, characteristics that Socorro believed were beneficial for her academic development. Fortunately, Eva also enjoyed having a very good mentee-mentor relationship during her doctoral program. She felt privileged for having a mentor who supported her a hundred percent. She commented:

My mentor, she's a White female. My mentor is a big support system. She provides me perspective because she has gone to a lot of conferences. She meets with me regularly, every week. We talk about academia and my academic progress; but we also talk about personal issues. I'm just very fortunate to have a mentor like her!

The fact that Eva felt “very fortunate” to have a mentor who supports her not only academically but also personally, contributed to Eva’s willingness to continue persisting in the academy, as her future goals after completing her doctorate were to become a professor and researcher. Ana also expressed her contentment with the significant support that she has received from a Latina professor whose assistance and mentorship skills have inspired her to be more confident in her writing abilities. She expressed the following in her testimonio:

Definitely, my professor, Dr. Mora has helped a lot! She has pushed me a lot! She’s the one who encouraged me to publish because I was very unsure about submitting my work for publishing. She’s the one who keeps pushing me and she’s always been very helpful. And what has also motivated me is my own research interest in Latin American writers
because I can connect with something that I’m interested in. And I connect with her because she’s Latina. Of course, it makes a difference to have bicultural professor! And I would you like to have more bilingual and bicultural professors. To me, is very difficult when an Anglo woman or man is telling me about the Aztecs. I don’t know if that would be the experience for other Latinas, but I do see it alike.

In this excerpt, it is evident that Ana is very pleased with the fact that her mentor is not only bilingual but also bicultural, which she views as two significant aspects to consider in the academy. Moreover, her mentor has pushed Ana to thrive as a doctoral student and as a writer in an academically demanding doctoral program.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

It has been extensively noted in the literature that effective mentoring and the cultivation of mentoring relationships between graduate students and their professors are essential to students’ success in completing the PhD and even after graduation (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Moak & Walker, 2014; Ullman et al., 2020, as cited in Berg, 2016; Blockett et al., 2016; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Gardner, 2008; González, 2006; Kumar & Johnson, 2019; Soong, Thi Tran, & Hoa Hiep, 2015). Offering mentoring is one of the most challenging and important tasks that faculty members are confronted with in PhD programs, as many students do not complete the degree due to lack of mentoring relationships (Bair et al., 2004; Gardner, 2009). Fortunately, for the fourteen participants in this study, nine of them received positive support either from their advisors and/or faculty. Anderson and Shannon (1988) defined mentoring as, “a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (p. 40).
As evidenced by the excerpts from seven of the participants, the most successful relationships were those where the advisor and/or faculty member were able to provide support beyond just the academics; they were willing to listen, assist, challenge, and inspire them to validate their students’ experiences and funds of knowledge. Therefore, this research contributes to the existing literature on the importance of fostering mentoring relationships for doctoral students’ academic success (Cavazos, 2015; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; García & Henderson, 2015; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Moak & Walker, 2014; Turner & González, 2015).

In this study, being validated by their advisors/mentors was found to be important for the participants to persist in their programs, in agreement with Torres’s (2006) report that the achievement of a doctoral degree involves many challenging cultural choices that can impact the candidates’ identity. For instance, Emilia reinforced her academic identity as a Latina doctoral student due to the validation she received from her mentor as she understood her cultural background as well as the importance of her dissertation topic, which was linked to her family’s expatriation to Mexico during the Great Depression. A similar thing happened to Andrea, as she was able to strengthen her academic socialization thanks to the professionalization activities that her mentor encouraged her to participate in, such as conducting research, writing grants, and publishing. Through these experiences, Andrea enriched her academic identity as a scholar as well as her ethnic identity since her mentor was from Mexico and spoke Spanish with her, as well. Additionally, Bella also felt that her Latino mentor validated her identity as a Latina, contrary to her ex-mentor’s attitude, as she felt that he did not understand her needs as a first-generation college student and as a Woman of Color, as he agreed to be her new mentor and supported her by allocating time to help her continue with her dissertation research in order for
Bella to earn her PhD. As a result, Bella felt very grateful to her new mentor for believing in her, especially after having difficulties with her previous mentor.

A significant finding in this study was the presence of Latinx faculty members within their departments from whom the participants obtained the mentorship they needed, which allowed them to feel as if they had an ally who understood their academic needs. Interestingly, out of the seven participants in this section, five had Faculty of Color and two had White women as mentors (Emilia and Eva). The participants saw their mentors as role models and were also able to witness how they navigated academia as Faculty of Color and/or as women. Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) discussed the significance of "role modeling" for underrepresented students, which is essential for their achievement. For instance, participants like Bella believed that having a Latino mentor influenced his predisposition to mentor her in an “unconditional” manner. Andrea’s mentor, a Mexican woman who also spoke Spanish introduced her and guided her through the professionalization aspects of academia, such as the unwritten and unspoken norms, conducting research, publishing, and writing grants, knowledge that Andrea deeply valued and appreciated. Socorro maintained a very good relationship with her mentor and admired her for being a Latina professor with high expectations. Verónica’s role model was a professor whose class inspired her to also incorporate service learning in her teaching. Ana connected to her mentor because she was Latina, bilingual, and bicultural, something that made her feel inspired and committed as a doctoral student and increased her sense of belonging.

These five women enjoyed having Faculty of Color whom they believed understood their cultural background, ethnic, academic, and linguistic identity due to being exposed to the similar sociocultural values and traditions as Latinxs. García and Henderson’s (2015) reported that Students of Color are inclined to Faculty of Color for mentorship purposes, seeing them as a
“cultural insider” (p. 99) as they felt that they not only understood their cultural values but also their struggles and challenges as minority. Furthermore, they valued not only their experiences as doctoral students but their mentors’ own lived experiences as well. This situation agrees with Figueroa and Rodriguez’s (2015) research regarding mentorship for Latinx/Chicano students in that mentor-mentee’s "lived experience matters" (p. 31). Nevertheless, Emilia and Eva, both of whom had a White woman as a mentor, felt they were receiving good mentorship. Eva elucidated that she felt, “very fortunate to have a mentor like her.” Emilia also expressed her content when she stated, “she’s very supportive…she understood where I was coming from and the importance to me about my topic.” Although Garcia and Henderson’s (2015) work on the mentoring experiences of Latina graduate students found that the participants sought a “cultural insider” as a mentor, they eventually just desired culturally competent type of mentor; similarly, Emilia and Eva felt highly supported and confident in their academic abilities as Latina graduate students due to having mentors who were White women and “culturally competent.” This current study adds to the previous literature on the importance of faculty advisors/faculty and mentors being inclusive and willing to appreciate and better comprehend the lived experiences of Latina doctoral students and Students of Color in general (Cavazos, 2015).

The participants were able to find good and experienced mentors among faculty who were Latinxs in their department; thus, seeing other Latinx in the professorate provided them with role models and encouragement regarding their own desire of being in the academy in the future. They described mentorship as “support” and the types of support varied from structural to emotional support. Turner and González (2015) discuss this topic. One central finding in their work is the value of “demystifying the academy” for Scholars of Color, how they are “socialized on the values, unwritten rules, and culture of academe” (Turner & González, 2015, p. 5). The
authors describe this type of demystification as teaching future faculty and scholars the “nuances” of how academia functions from an “insider” perspective (Turner & González, 2015, p. 5). They elucidate that a key point in demystifying the academy is through mentorship. In relation to Latinas in doctoral programs, the notion of being taught how to navigate academia by an “insider” is significant, as Women of Color have traditionally been excluded from these spaces; and, as a result, their position as outsiders is deeply felt and mostly detrimental in their experiences as scholars (Harris, 2020). Having faculty mentors who have successfully become “insiders” can be a key element in Latina students’ advancement. This form of mentorship they were given was structural in nature as they shared information and knowledge needed to meet the academic challenges during their doctorate. The seven participants described how the mentoring they received contributed to their growth and development as apprentice due to their “insider” or faculty advisor and/or faculty, which made them more aware in their roles as doctoral students, as these mentors were able to provide opportunities for a successful academic socialization.

In this study, the participants received two types of support, emotional and instrumental support. Scholars of mentorship, such as Ramírez (2016), differentiate between two different “mentoring functions: career/instrumental and emotional/psychological support” (p.162). Emotional support is defined as consisting of “counseling, friendship, acceptance, and confirmation” and instrumental support can be defined as “mentorship that helps advance a mentee’s career” (Ramirez, 2016, p. 162). Through their testimonios, the seven participants described how being able to receive both instrumental and emotional support contributed to their progress and willingness to persist. Bella, Andrea, Verónica, Socorro, and Ana received unconditional support from their advisors/mentors, and felt that they understood their needs as
Latinas, particularly because they were Latinxs or were culturally responsive. Emotional support through mentoring was a significant theme, which emerged in the testimonios of these seven women. Emotional support was provided in the form of encouragement, unconditional assistance, and generally support beyond teaching and sharing of information. Their mentors took into consideration the participants’ funds of knowledge and potential, but also considered the emotional aspect of their development during the doctorate, particularly as Latinas (and women in general) must confront the White male, middle class dominant values in academe. Turner and González describe this type of mentorship as psychological support (Turner & González, 2001).

The participants mentioned how important emotional support was from faculty advisors or faculty in their doctoral journey. Bella utilized phrases such as “predisposition to help me unconditionally;” Andrea commented, “I worked so well with her on the project that I told her that I would like to start my doctorate and be her student;” Emilia elucidated, “She does believe in me! I feel very loved and appreciated by her ever since I started the program.” Verónica stated, “My very favorite class was with Dr. Casas called, service learning. And one of the things that I admire the most in others is their commitment to service;” Socorro explained, “I have worked with her a lot. She’s Mexican and our relationship is very good;” Eva mentioned, “We talk about academia and my academic progress; but we also talk about personal issues;” Ana shared, “She’s the one who keeps pushing me and she’s always been very helpful…And I connect with her because she’s Latina.” Another form of emotional support cited by Bella was “unconditional support,” or her mentor’s ability to understand her academic and emotional needs, which may include making mistakes as part of the learning process and being able to recover from them without feeling as a failure (as she had felt with her ex-mentor). For these
women, their mentors became more like allies by showing patience, empathy, compassion, and kindness, qualities that were seen as indispensable and valuable in their mentors. Furthermore, having an emotional connection in a form of support to counter the negative emotional experiences the participants had to face as doctoral students was significant for their academic and personal socialization; moreover, the support they received did offer a sense of belonging within their own Communities of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1999).

Indeed, by offering instrumental and emotional support to the participants, these faculty mentors may also have benefited from such constructive mentor-mentee relationship based on Stalker’s (1994) claim that in studies of mentorship of graduate students, faculty also reported their own growth as mentors as a direct outcome of the experience. Eventually, these faculty members provided valuable mentorship for these seven participants. Rendón (1994) affirmed the following when asked about her thoughts for the future as a scholar: “I made a difference in the lives of people who grew up like me having no hope, and I made a difference in folks thinking about the world in a much more connected, humanistic, holistic way” (p. 134). Indeed, the faculty advisors and/or faculty in this current study made a significant impact in the lives of these Latina doctoral students. As institutions of higher education are where knowledge production befalls, “where “legitimate” knowledge is established” (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p.169), therefore, the presence of Latinas in research intensive institutions is vital in order to guarantee they are represented in the forms of scholarly research produced. Moreover, the presence of Latinas in these types of institutions is imperative for undergraduate as well as graduate Students of Color in seeing Women of Color represented as faculty members. Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2000) acknowledged that “if social justice is to become a reality, then we must consider that those sitting behind the desks need the opportunity to see themselves in front of the
classroom,” (p. 58). Overall, the preceding section has stressed the essential role that advisors, mentors, and faculty members play in the academic experiences of these women, especially when they are Latinxs, too. Most importantly, as they guide them and challenge them academically, they also serve as role models for Latinas, especially for those who may want to choose the path of academia after they earn their doctorates.

**THEME 2.3: RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM PEERS AND/OR FRIENDS**

Even though family and some faculty advisors and/or faculty were a strong support for the majority of the Latina doctoral students in this study, many of them also shared about support that they received from friends and peers in and outside of their doctoral program. They often were other Women of Color who were in their cohort and were having similar experiences as themselves. Emilia was one participant who relied on peers in her cohort as they all had commonalities as non-traditional students. She said in her testimonio:

I bonded very well with two other people from my cohort. One of them is a White lady and the other one, her mom is White, and her dad is Mexican. I think she views herself as a Latina, So, we bonded; and we study every Sunday most of the time because one of them has a very demanding job, so she's not able to join us all the time, but most Sundays, we get together in the mornings and we work on whatever we're working on, whether it's research or whether it's a paper or classwork. They’re non-traditional students like me, and I think we really bonded because of that, because we're unique, we're not TAs; and we know that we have different demands than any other students have.

For Emilia, being able to find other peers whom she could rely on to work on assignments or study was a valuable opportunity. As they socialized personally and academically, they not just “bonded” to continue persisting but also created a new support system that served as a form of
validation for them as non-traditional doctoral students who also needed to fulfill the demands of a full-time job. Eva was another participant whose peers were supportive and inspired her to continue her doctoral journey with resilience and persistence. She commented the following:

Most recently, I got to know students who are more advanced in the program, so that has helped me a lot to cope with my stress and in managing my tasks, to learn how they do it; kind of like the mental health validation we need. So, I enjoy having peers and getting together for study groups. I became a very good friend with two other female peers in the program. And we talk about the challenges of being a female, and one of them has kids and is married. The other one has a few jobs to financially support her. One is Hispanic and the other is Native American. But we embrace our femininity, you know, like, we help each other, we reassure each other. We ask each other, “What do you think about this? What would you do in this case? What is our goal? How do we balance this and that or what do we do for the stress?” So, that’s been very helpful!

Interestingly, Eva met some doctoral peers who were more advanced in her cohort to learn from their academic experiences, particularly regarding time management and supportive mental health practices. Fortunately, she found two peers whose friendship she valued, as they provided support and advice. Indeed, they all embraced their various identities as Women of Color.

Another participant who really enjoyed personal and academic support from her peers was Socorro. She shared in her testimonio that she valued their camaraderie as well as their differences, which made her aware of their cultural richness. She explained the following:

Mis experiencias en el trabajo y con compañeros han sido en general positivas. Tenemos clases que son en equipo. Entonces otro chico y yo nos apoyamos mucho y generamos una relación de amistad. Mi grupo es de cinco personas multirraciales, tomamos clases
todos juntos; somos un grupo muy unido. Más que para estudiar, nos juntamos para
platicar y socializar. Eso me da ánimo. Y siempre dice chistes mi amigo nigeriano,
tenemos dos semestres juntos y platicamos mucho, somos camaradas. Y otra es de
Republica Dominicana; y un chico de Arabia Saudita y otro de India. La risa nos saca el
estrés. Y les platico de como convivimos en México. Me da gusto esto porque no sabía si
era racista, pero ahora sé que no lo soy. Yo les tenía mucho miedo a los musulmanes y
decía que eran puros locos. Pues conocí a un iraquí en mi clase anterior y conocí a un
chico de Arabia Saudita y son personas bien decentes. Son gente muy educada y muy
preparada. En el mundo nos hace falta conocernos para que dejemos nuestras diferencias
de lado. Yo no había tenido experiencias con nadie fuera de México. Bueno, con gente
anglosajona, con mis jefes en maquiladora tuve buenas experiencias. La verdad, estoy
muy contenta en mi doctorado por ser una mejor mujer Latina debido a mis nuevas
experiencias.

My experiences at work and with colleagues have been generally positive. We have
classes where we work in teams. Then another boy and I supported each other a lot and
we created a friendship. My group is formed of five multiracial people; we all take
classes together; we are a very united group. More than to study, we get together to talk
and socialize. That gives me encouragement. And my Nigerian friend always says jokes;
we have two semesters together and we talk a lot; we are comrades. And another is from
the Dominican Republic; and a boy from Saudi Arabia and another from India. Laughter
takes the stress out of us. And I tell them about how we live in Mexico. I’m glad of this
experience because I did not know if I was a racist, but now I know that I am not. I was
very afraid of Muslims and said they were just crazy. Well, I met an Iraqi in my previous
class, and a boy from Saudi Arabia, and they are very decent people. They are very polite and well-educated people. In the world, we need to get to know one another, so that we can put our differences aside. I had not had experiences with anyone else outside of Mexico. Well, with Anglo-Saxon people who were my bosses in the maquiladora, I had good experiences. The truth is that I am very happy in my doctorate for being a better Latina woman due to my new experiences.

This excerpt shows how Socorro has found a strong personal and academic support from her culturally diverse peers as an international doctoral student. Through their friendship and camaraderie, she has also gained valuable cultural knowledge that she did not possess before she started her doctoral program. Most importantly, having a group of peers from diverse backgrounds and countries has made her realize the importance of being inclusive and valuing other people regardless of their ethnic, racial, language, and religious identities.

Having support from peers was something that Bella also appreciated during her doctoral study. She received solid support from a post-doctoral peer in the same field who also contributed to her academic growth. She mentioned the following:

A huge support for me has been a post-doctoral student who is extremely helpful and kind to me. She was really helpful. She was a good mentor. She would encourage me and support me if I wanted to submit a poster or manuscript and provided good guidance.

She’s been a great support system and a great mentor! I also have peer support in my new lab, where I feel welcomed.

Evidently, Bella had the opportunity to have the support of her peer, which gave her the confidence to continue persisting in a doctoral program that she described as very competitive and rigorous. Similarly, Sunshine has also received great support from one of her doctoral peers
who helped her in her research as well as from her Bible study group. She explained in her testimonio:

I found support in my study groups and during presentations in my department. Interestingly, my biggest support here has been a student who assists me in anything that I need. She wanted to work with me to help me. She organizes all my data and gives me advice. She’s been the best. In addition, another major personal support in my life has been the Bible group that I’m part of; it gives me motivation! I have plenty of confidence in God. He gives me everything I need to succeed! I have nothing to be afraid of because He is the provider. And if you put your faith in him, you become very confident.

For Sunshine, having someone who offered academic guidance was important. Also, getting support from her Bible study group outside the academic environment was instrumental for providing motivation and confidence in her personal and academic development, as well.

Finding a solid support outside of the doctoral program and/or institution was something that Julieta also experienced, as she relied on a few peers in her program as well as on her best friends from back home. Julieta shared that she has had a limited social circle since she moved to the Southwest. Fortunately, she has a few doctoral peers in the same program who are also from out of town, with whom she shares some commonalities. She elucidated:

Talking to each other and getting each other's perspective is also helpful as most of my doctoral peers are women whom I do not share a lot of commonalities [with], since the environment is very demanding. You need to be competitive; you need to publish, publish, and publish. I noticed that it does come from the feeling of showing off to the professors; maybe to prove that they’re the best and no one is equal to them. I have been given more academic support from peers who are out of state in my doctoral program. I
relate to them since I’m from a different state and can relate to their moving experience. Those are the ones that have given me positive feedback and helped me. My friends are proud of my academic accomplishments and have been a strong source of support as well. I still have my three best friends there. Even from long distance, they help me with as much as they can. Moving hasn't changed my interaction with them.

As seen in Julieta’s excerpt, she relied on a few peers from out of town with whom she shared similar experiences. She felt they gave her the support she needed to succeed in a competitive program that put a high emphasis in publishing academic work. Moreover, her best friends also played an important role in giving her emotional support and encouragement.

Maya was a participant who found a solid system of support in a doctoral peer who provided extensive emotional support while she was experiencing several personal challenges at the same time. She shared the following:

Fue muy duro, la etapa más dura de mi vida. Ella fue mi compañera; tomamos un curso juntas y era mi compañera de dolor en ese tiempo. Formamos una red de apoyo. En los momentos de resiliencia es bien importante formar una red de apoyo y darte cuenta de que está ahí, que es tangible, que siempre te saluda, que alguien te está supervisando. Cuando suceden cosas duras te das cuenta de quién es quién.

It was very hard, the worst time of my life. She was a classmate. We took a course together. She listened to my misfortunes. During times to show resilience, it is very important to create a support system and to know that it is available, tangible; that it’s there; and that someone is making sure that you’re doing well. When tough things happen, you get to know who is who.
As evidenced in this excerpt, Maya’s peer was someone who showed great empathy by listening and giving unconditional support to Maya when she was experiencing personal struggles that affected her well-being at the beginning of her doctoral study. Fortunately, her peer became a huge support for Maya, which helped her continue persisting in her doctoral journey. Fortunately, Maya also found a great support system outside of the institution when she started attending a Buddhist community that she became part of. She declared the following in her *testimonio*:

Te conviertes en una persona diferente cuando un ser querido fallece, hay un propósito, hay una secuencia de eventos. Entonces descubrí el budismo, descubrí esa red de apoyo; nunca había echado mano a esa red de apoyo, pero sí me tomé mi tiempo. Fueron casi dos años para salir de eso del dolor de la muerte de mi mamá, de toda la confusión y después descubro el budismo; y se me aclara más sobre ese tema y entonces ya no quiero seguir con esquemas viejos. Cuando llegan los golpes duros de la vida son las sacudidas que te reestructuran para seguir viviendo; al final de cuentas, es seguir sobreviviendo; el pensamiento quiere sobrevivir, pero también quiere transformarse y transmutar. Casi a la mitad de mis estudios empecé a romper esquemas viejos gracias al budismo. Estoy completa.

You become a different person when a loved one dies; there is a purpose; there is a sequence of events after that. Then, I discovered Buddhism; I discovered that support network. I had never reached out to that support network, but I did take my time to learn. It took almost two years to get me out of the pain due to my mother's death, from all the confusion; and then, I discovered Buddhism and learned more on that subject and at that point, I no longer wanted to continue with my old thinking schemas. When the hard times
in life come, they are the wake-up calls that restructure you to continue living. At the end of the day, it's to continue surviving; our mind wants to survive, but it also wants to transform and to transmute. Almost halfway in the program, I began to break my old paradigms, thanks to Buddhism. I’m fulfilled.

Being able to find additional support from a Buddhist community was also a significant experience for Maya, particularly during a difficult period of her personal life, such as the death of her mother. Finding support also implied reconfiguring her previous views. Thus, opening her mind to a completely new paradigm, such as Buddhism, allowed Maya to see the world around her with different lens. Indeed, through Buddhism, Maya felt more fulfilled and was also able to find the self-awareness and balance that she needed to continue persevering personally as well as academically.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

The preceding section highlights the significant role that peers can play during the doctoral experiences of Latina students. For Students of Color, the transition of beginning a doctoral program can induce stress and anxiety. Tinto (1993) indicated that supportive relationships are important to reduce stress levels due to the demands of higher education. In this study, peers acting as mentors to each other aided the participants to seek advice and assistance comfortably, thus, making them feel that they belonged in their programs and institution. As illustrated by the seven testimonios of the participants, having support in and/or outside the institution was extremely beneficial in reducing their fears and anxiety levels, including validating and reassuring their intersectional identities as Latina women and students.

In academic surroundings, it is common for more experienced students to be vital sources of information to novice students, as it was the case for Bella and Sunshine. They received
valuable peer mentoring from a more experienced student in their program. Bella described her peer as a “good mentor” and as someone who supported her academic growth. Sunshine also experienced having a peer mentor who became her “biggest support” and gave her advice that she greatly appreciated, especially that Sunshine did not have any experience in research because she transitioned to the doctoral program after completing her bachelor’s degree. Peer mentoring occurs when more qualified students assist in guiding and supporting less experienced students in efforts to ensure educational outcomes (Johnson, 2002; McLean, 2004; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002), which was precisely what Bella and Sunshine experienced as doctoral students.

Terrion and Leonard (2007) conducted a literature review of 54 articles on the topic of peer mentoring. They determined the following prerequisites for a student peer mentor: 1) convenience to commit time, race, and gender matches; b) experience in and knowledge of the university; and c) academic achievement and knowledge, and previous mentoring experience. In my study, Bella’s and Sunshine’s peers who served as mentors helped them feel more confident. Certainly, these two participants were able to receive the professional assistance of a qualified student-peer mentor who offered the “career-related” as well as the “psychosocial needs” for these two women or mentees (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Terrion and Leonard (2007) noted characteristics of the student peer mentor fulfilling the psychosocial function such as empathy, supportiveness, communication skills, trustworthiness, enthusiasm, flexibility, and similarities in personalities. In this current study, these seven participants were provided psychosocial support, which was significant for their academic success and persistence. For instance, Emilia found solid support in two peers from her cohort. They met every Sunday to write or to work on assignments. Indeed, Emilia and her peers were a vivid example that “when students work with their fellow students in writing groups, they are helping each other research and write their way
into their academic discipline by creating and contributing knowledge and mutual support” (Ullman et al., 2020, p. 32). According to Emilia, they bonded because they were “non-traditional students” and were able to fulfill the typical challenges of non-traditional students, such as self-regulation, finding time for assignments due to working full-time, and keeping the motivation to continue persisting (Naidoo, 2015).

In this study, social support from peers contributed to these participants’ persistence to continue despite the several challenges they faced during their doctoral journey, which is consistent with Tinto’s (1997) mixed-methods study that found that embracing support networks among students and collaborative learning environments contributed to students’ ability to persist in school. Eva had doctoral peers who were more advanced in her cohort from whom she learned how to better deal with time management and mental health practices, both of which reduced her stress and anxiety. Moreover, she found great support in two peers who provided personal and academic support and advice. Eva, Socorro, Bella, and Julieta found valuable support in peers through friendships with people who understood their struggles as doctoral students. For Socorro, Julieta, and Maya, having the support of peers and friends contributed to their social capital, a point that aligns with Gloria’s (1997) research on support from friends and family that contributed to the positive experiences of Chicana undergraduate students. For instance, Socorro mentioned that she socialized not only academically but also personally with her four peers who were also international students. Being surrounded by people from other countries offered Socorro the opportunity to realize that she was not “a racist” but rather more accepting of other cultures and ways of being, as two of her peers were Muslim and she was able to discover that they were educated and valuable people. Certainly, being racist is not a yes-no question and Socorro was experiencing a deeper process of unlearning racist beliefs and
behaviors as a doctoral student, as clearly described when she said: “The truth is that I’m very happy in my doctorate for being a better Latina woman due to my new experiences.” Julieta was able to find support from peers who were from out of town just like her as well as from her three best friends living in the East Coast. Maya also felt highly supported by a female peer and friend who offered a nurturing friendship, especially after her mother’s death.

As for Sunshine and Maya, they received strong support not only from peers, but also from the religious communities they were part of, which provided the strength and faith they needed to continue their personal and academic journeys with resilience and confidence. These findings align with Dorn and Papalewis’ (1997) study, in which they found that groups of students who shared similar goals and were committed to each other, in this case, completing a doctorate, were more likely to reach their objectives than those who did not have these supports. The seven women in this current study were motivated individually and by others, as well as committed to persisting against all odds in their efforts to contribute to the betterment of society through their research and scholarly work. This study is consistent with previous research that examined the significant role that peers and social networking play in graduate student development and persistence (Greene, 2015), as these women relied on their peers and/or friends to find ways to cope with the multiple exigencies and stressors of graduate school. Regardless of who offered support, it was instrumental in giving these doctoral women the encouragement they needed to overcome the diverse difficulties and challenges that they experienced in their doctoral programs.

**Theme 2.4: Providing Support through Department and Institutional Resources**

One of the final types of support systems that emerged from the findings was distinctive to some participants. The five participants whose testimonios are highlighted in this section
received significant resources and support from their programs and/or departments, as well as from the institution. The support they received was usually financial; however, it also included programs/departments providing academic events, as they were cognizant of the needs of doctoral students. In the case of these participants, these events created a sense of belonging and a more inclusive environment. Andrea was one participant who felt she had received significant support at the institutional level. She was one of the few participants who shared in detail about her institution’s willingness to provide the financial support that she needed before being admitted into the doctoral program in health sciences. Andrea shared in her testimonio:

El día que me entrevistaron para el doctorado me preguntaron si tenía dinero para pagar la colegiatura. Les dije que no. Fui muy clara, si no me dan ayuda económica como un RA o TA, no tengo para pagarlo. Les dije que sí a mí no me daban con qué pagarlo, que no iba a tomarlo porque yo no tenía visa para trabajar en Estados Unidos y de estarme yendo a México para trabajar 20 horas, no podía. Fui muy clara, si no me dan ayuda, no puedo entrar al doctorado, tengo muchas ganas, pero necesito que me den ayuda económica. Y mi primer año me dieron ayuda por primera vez. Creo que fue lo que dije y mi CV y pensaron, “vale la pena invertir en ella”.

The day I was interviewed to enter the doctoral program, they asked me if I had money to pay for tuition. I told them that I didn’t. I was very clear in that if they didn't provide any financial support for me, like an RA or TA position, that I didn't have money to pay for it. I told them that if they didn't give me financial support to pay for it, that I wasn't going to do it because I didn't have a visa to work in the United States and that I was not going to Mexico to work just for 20 hours, that I couldn't do that. I was very sincere, if they didn't give me financial support, I couldn't pursue the doctorate; that I really wanted to, but that
I really needed financial assistance. And my first year, they provided financial assistance for the first time. I think it was what I said and my resume; they thought, “It’s worth investing in her.”

As mentioned in Andrea’s background, she was a medical doctor in Mexico, which made her a very attractive applicant due to her background experience combined with health sciences.

Certainly, Andre was very honest with the admissions committee in that she would not enter the program if they did not offer her an assistantship position due to not having the financial resources to pay for her doctorate. Fortunately, they not only accepted her into the program but also offered her a research assistant position. Indeed, she was a highly qualified applicant for the program, mostly due to her professional experience in the medical field in Mexico and her master’s degree in health sciences. However, Andrea’s experience was unique in that she continued applying and receiving institutional support, which she really needed as an international student. She discussed this at length in her testimonio:

Como apoyo institucional es el que puedas pagar la colegiatura en mensualidades. Eso se me hace fabuloso porque si no, como paga uno. Te cobran de 15 a 20 dólares por prestarte y eso en ningún lado lo hacen. Y el conseguir trabajo que me pague para poder pagarla porque si no trabajo, mi marido no puede darme para pagar la universidad. Son ventajas que me hacen sentir bien y me ayudan a seguir adelante en mis estudios. Tengo la beca de graduate research assistant. En mi programa es por competencia y te la ganas en base a tus méritos y compiten todos los estudiantes del departamento que quieren el dinero. Este año dieron 8 mil dólares. Conforme vas avanzando en el programa más posibilidades tenemos; lo malo es que solo te lo dan por tres años. Me lo acabo de ganar este año. Apoyo para conferencias casi no he tenido, es lo que me falta, salir a más
conferencias. He presentado aquí localmente pero no hay mucho dinero disponible para eso. Hay a una beca que me mandaron de la Oficina del Decano. Te dan dos mil dólares. Es por medio de American Public Health Association y es mi sueño ir a esa conferencia. Mandé mi propuesta y si me la dan me dan para comer, para pagar boletos de avión, la membresía y el hotel. También hay becas para cuando presentas trabajo de investigación. The Graduate School y el Departamento de Becas te dan apoyo también.

An institutional support is allowing us to pay the tuition in monthly installments. That is fabulous because, if not, how could we pay it all in one payment? They charge you from 15 to 20 dollars to lend you the money and they do not do that anywhere else. And, getting a job that pays me to pay for the tuition, because if I don't work, my husband can't give me money to pay for college; they are advantages that make me feel good and help me to continue my studies. I have the Graduate Research Assistant scholarship. In my program, it is a competition, and you win based on your merits and all the students in the department who want the money compete. This year they gave eight thousand dollars. As we progress in the program, the more possibilities we have; the bad thing is that they only give it to you for three years. I just got it this year. I have hardly had [financial] support for conferences; I need to go to more conferences. I have presented here locally, but there is not much money available for that. There is a scholarship they sent me from the Dean’s Office. They give you two thousand dollars. It’s through the American Public Health Association and my dream is to attend this conference. I sent my proposal and if they accept it, they will pay for the food, plane tickets, the membership, and the hotel. There are also scholarships when you present your research work. The Graduate School and the Scholarships Office provide support, too.
The impact of having a graduate research assistantship and other financial resources, such as scholarships for conferences, has permitted Andrea to be a successful doctoral student. She has received departmental and institutional support since she started her doctoral program, which I something that she greatly appreciates as an international student at Southwest University. Furthermore, providing funding for international students like Andrea broadens the possibility of recruiting more Latin American students who may be interested in pursuing a doctorate.

Fortunately, other participants also received the same kind of departmental/program and institutional support. For some participants, such as Eva, the program/department offered strong financial support that she took advantage of as a doctoral student in the health sciences. She elucidated the following:

I've published two articles and I've gone to several conferences. I have done presentations and posters; the conferences have been local and national. I went to one in San Diego, California. It was the American Public Health Association Conference. So, I got exposed to different research experiences. I just got accepted into a national competitive program to learn how as a scientist you have a role in society, how to be part of that civic engagement, and build that capacity at your institution and your community. I did all this thanks to my graduate research assistantship position and scholarships. I feel very accomplished! We also have to present our work to other peers in the program and department. In our classes, we also present the type of work that we're working on. So, we have a lot of support and opportunities to get some feedback. The professors and peers always want to know how the research is going and how it can be improved. I think their intentions are very good. I've been very fortunate that we're at the border. And that is, you know, our professors, when they come to this institution, they understand the
culture, or at least their group of students. I think that's very important, that they like the culture; that they like the people here, because then they can connect better with the students.

For Eva, having this financial support was essential for her academic development and success. She understood the importance of applying and utilizing the financial resources that her program/department and institution offered to doctoral students. Her academic success has been possible not only due to her own agency and resilience, but also for the financial support she has received from the department and institution. Moreover, feeling that the faculty members in her program understand their students’ cultural background is important to Eva, especially in a Hispanic-Serving institution in the US-Mexico border where more than 80 percent of students are Latinxs.

Another participant, Mari, a doctoral student in biology, affirmed that she has progressed academically mostly by attending conferences which have given her a clearer idea of what the necessary skills are to reach her professional goals. She has been given substantial financial support from her program/department and institution. Moreover, she has formed study groups and created a journal club in her program. She shared in her testimonio:

In our journal club we pick up a scientific paper to discuss. We were going over one last week about angiogenesis, more growth of blood vessels and how that helps a tumor grow. We had a student present a paper on that [and] we all went over it and gave him suggestions. Next time it'll be my turn. I'm going to present a paper on angiogenesis as well, something that we're trying to incorporate in our lab, as well. I’ve attended conferences through graduate grants and the support of my department as well. I received a ten-thousand-dollar stipend to mentor one of the undergraduate students in my lab and a
fellowship of a thousand dollars that allows me to pay for all my travel expenses to conferences. I’ve had more opportunities to develop my academic skills compared to my undergraduate years. I think I was being too scared to fail; too scared to try. And, in the PhD program, they give us opportunities.

Julieta, another student in psychology, shared that her doctoral program was excellent and offered a lot of classes that are necessary for her to build the knowledge needed to conduct research. As a research assistant, Julieta has gained valuable experience teaching undergraduate students. Additionally, getting funds for conferences, having experienced faculty members, and the reasonable cost for attending the doctoral program; all these forms of support have significantly contributed to her academic socialization and success. She stated the following:

Not only it is an affordable university, but it also has high quality education. I was given the opportunity! It’s a great institution, so I don't regret coming here. One of my favorite classes in the program prepared me for the job market once I complete my doctorate. It offered me the tools to learn to develop the proper academic socialization skills and abilities that the professoriate requires of doctoral students. The professor explained from her our own experiences what to do and what not to do and I think that's very important. Part of what people leave behind is what not to do. There are unspoken rules; so, I think the program made clearer when they have the PhD students, what the rules are. The professors are resourceful and that’s another good characteristic of the program.

Certainly, Julieta received solid support at the departmental/program level that influenced her doctoral experience in a positive way. She was content being a doctoral student in an institution that offered affordable tuition as well as excellent academic opportunities. Moreover, having
“resourceful” faculty, an RA position, and classes that prepared her for the professoriate were pivotal for her academic success in a demanding and competitive doctoral program.

Emilia was another student who enjoyed having an inclusive and diverse department/program. Emilia shared that she felt that her department was doing a fine job in recruiting more Latinx faculty members, which she believed was beneficial, particularly when students attend a Hispanic-Serving institution. She explicated in her testimonio:

In my department, they have been hiring a lot more Latinxs. There’s plenty of Latinx faculty or adjuncts; they make a point of doing a lot. I’m grateful that other people will have that experience, but in my experience, I didn’t have a lot of them except for one. It would have been nice to see myself reflected, you know, in authority figures like administrators and professors. Faculty and administrators are doing a lot to support Latinx students. So, I applaud them for what they’re doing!

The preceding except shows that Emilia feels welcome and enjoys her doctoral program. She admitted that her program/department offered many opportunities to attend presentations that promoted academic socialization and a positive learning environment. She further added:

My department supports TAs, and they get stipends. As far as non-traditional students like me, I feel like this university is very committed to helping Hispanics. I really believe that! I feel that a lot of Latinxs are having a lot of access to education, including me. My department always tries to be very inclusive; they do a lot of things. We do have symposiums and a lot of presentations. We have clubs. We have a club called Frontera Retórica. We get a lot of speakers from everywhere. I’m not too involved in the club because their leadership people are TAs and the times and days for the meetings don’t work for me. So, I’m not in the organization as much as I probably should have been, as a
person that works full-time. Sometimes they need to plan for eight to five, so maybe they could improve that. But they have all that available. We are invited to everything. My department is very inclusive. They make a point to be very inclusive and I appreciate that. To me, Southwest University has been a great source of upward mobility from the start!

As a first-generation college student, Emilia felt that her institution provided the academic environment that she needed in order to thrive as a Latina and first-generation college student. Having an enriching and inclusive environment allowed her to take advantage of the different forms of support systems that the program/department offered to students. Unfortunately, being a full-time employee did not allow her to attend some of the club activities that took place during the day, something that Emilia acknowledged that could be improved, so that other non-traditional students liker her could benefit from in the future.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

The *testimonios* from Andrea, Eva, Mari, Juliana, and Emilia showcase how program/departmental and institutional support can make a difference in doctoral student success, particularly when the rate of doctoral completion has remained in the 50% or more since the 1920s (Berelson, 1960; Gardner, 2008; Lovitts, 2001; Rigler et al., 2017; Ullman et al., 2020). It is crucial to note that from 2013 to 2019, the percentage of doctoral degrees attained by minority women was very small when compared to their White counterparts. In 2019, just 8.8% of Latinas were conferred a doctoral degree compared to 63.6% of their White counterparts. These statistics are indeed staggering, as Latina doctoral degree recipients increased just 1.8% in a period of six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).
Unfortunately, higher education institutions have not adopted practices and cultures to fully enable all students to succeed (Kezar, 2011). Therefore, at the departmental and/or institutional level, providing resources in the form of fellowships and/or scholarships, and/or assistantships was critical for the participants in this study, as it allowed them to obtain financial resources that they needed to complete their degrees. Andrea, Eva, Mari, and Julieta worked either as research assistants (as well as Socorro, Sally, Sunshine, and Bella), which was a form of departmental and institutional support that contributed to their academic development and persistence. It has been reported in the literature that student attributes and program characteristics (Franco-Zamudio, 2009; Gittings, 2010), as well as both institutional and non-institutionally based support (Boulder, 2010; Williams-Tolliver, 2010) has revealed to influence graduate student persistence and degree completion. At the departmental/program level, such support also included having faculty advisors, faculty, and staff who were willing to share their experiences and be inclusive, thus, created a supportive and welcoming academic climate. In addition, having more Latinx faculty, as it was the case in Emilia’s program, made a significant difference in her doctoral experience and perhaps for other Latina doctoral students in her program (Garcia & Henderson, 2015).

Overall findings from this research study suggest a high level of knowledge and awareness about support services that were available to the participants. Participants such as Andrea, Eva, and Mari implied that they were familiar with the array of supports available to them and the role of specific programs that provided financial and academic opportunities. For instance, prior to entering the doctorate, Andrea was offered a research assistantship in order to pay for her tuition and obtained the Graduate Research Assistant scholarship, which is granted to students based on their academic merits. She also applied to a scholarship through the Dean’s
Office in order to attend a conference and was well-informed about the financial resources available through the Graduate School, the Scholarships Office, and the tuition installment plan program that Southwest University offered to students. Eva also received valuable financial support from the institution, which was crucial for her academic progress and achievement. She was cognizant of the importance of applying for financial assistance and using the financial resources that her program/department and institution offered. As a research assistant, Mari had had the opportunity to participate in conferences and publish her research due to the substantial financial support she received from her program/department and institution. Moreover, she has formed study groups and created the Journal Club in her program that has given her the opportunity to gain social capital through networking with peers and faculty in the program. As a research assistant, Julieta has not only gained teaching experience, but obtained funds for conferences. Also, having an affordable cost for tuition along with receiving an excellent education was of great advantage for her, including having financial support from her department and institution.

Tinto (2011) suggested that graduate student attrition may be less amenable to institutional support than undergraduate attrition, which is congruent with the finding of this current study. These participants were aware of the various forms of support that their department/program and intuition had at their disposal. For these women, having financial support was found to be the foundation of their academic success. As the crucial role of financial support in graduate student retention and attrition has already been discussed (Strayhorn, 2010), participants specifically valued being employed by the institution as a major source of income to finance their education and to continue persisting (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, this study is congruent with the findings in Ehrenberg et al.’s (2009) work that found that graduate students
who obtain assistantships and are provided opportunities to engage in research have increased levels of general productivity and progress more quickly academically than peers with jobs outside the academy. Indeed, Andrea, Eva, Mari, and Julieta and some other participants who had graduate assistantships were productive in doing research and publishing as they advanced in their academic endeavors. Ultimately, these women never lost hope and were able to obtain the financial support that they needed to pursue their education, which also played an important role in strengthening their navigational, cultural, and social capital (Twale et al., 2016).

**RQ3: Latina Doctoral Students Coping with Challenges or Conflicts in their Doctoral Program**

In the previous sections, many of the participants shared instances of microaggressions or biases, imposter syndrome, and feeling marginalized due to the oppressive systems that impacted their intersectional identities. For many, their ethnic, racial, and language identities played an important role in their doctoral journeys, as they were cognizant of the necessity to validate and enact their cultural practices as Latina women and doctoral students. Moreover, they were able to utilize different types of support systems to help guide them through their program, which shaped the way they socialized personally and academically. The following section will focus on the final research question of this study, which is: How do Latina doctoral students cope with challenges or conflicts, if any, in their doctoral programs? I will highlight four major themes in the next section: (a) the need for better support from mentors and/or faculty advisors; (b) conflict with professors and/or peers; (c) heartbreak during the PhD; and, (d) confronting challenges beyond academics.
THEME 3.1: NAVIGATING THE NEED OF BETTER MENTORSHIP FROM FACULTY ADVISORS/MENTORS

The importance of good mentorship in the lives of graduate students has been noted in the literature, and it is particularly the case for Students of Color. For all the participants in this study, having support from faculty advisors and/or mentors was relevant, as it facilitated their academic success and progress in their doctoral study. Unfortunately, seven participants encountered some challenges and/or conflicts with their faculty advisors and/or mentors during their doctoral trajectory. Nevertheless, they remained resilient and continued to persist in achieving their goals. Margarita was one of the participants who felt very disconnected from her dissertation chair/mentor. As the dynamics of their relationship changed, Margarita’s doctoral experience was affected in a negative way. She elucidated at length in her testimonio:

My doctoral chair was also my master’s degree thesis director. He was very good to me during the master's program. I highly respected him and saw him eye to eye at every level. I really connected with him. My master's thesis project was very successful to the point that it was implemented at the administrative level in this institution. But I would like to change my current relationship with my dissertation chair and mentor, whom I was once so close to and highly respected. I assumed that things would be the same and that assumption has not made this as rewarding. I wish it could have been! But a few things have happened in my mentor’s professional life regarding not getting his tenure that made him become very disconnected from the students. He has a lot of anger and because of that anger, he's not very helpful. I'm starting to wonder if I'm even going to make it through with him because he's just not there for me; I feel very disconnected from him. Now that I'm ready to turn something in for my proposal, I need to tell him,
“Look, I really worked hard on this, and I know that you're going to tear it apart but understand that I've never done this before.” So, if I could change that, I think I would be a happier doctoral student. I connected with my mentor on a level that I had never done it before; it seemed natural for me to want to work with him for my doctoral studies. I’m not sure if I’m fulfilling my mentor’s expectations due to the deterioration of our relationship. I would have already finished the degree if my mentor and my department had offered more academic support.

Indeed, Margarita’s mentor was someone who she highly respected and connected with during her masters. Unfortunately, Margarita felt that his lack of connection with her affected their mentor-mentee relationship. Thus, not receiving the help and support that she needed for writing her proposal was detrimental to her academic progress mainly due to the deterioration of their relationship, which Margarita felt that it was rooted to the stress generated regarding his tenure. Margarita’s experiences in her department were not conducive to having a sense of belonging as a doctoral student in her program, which added more tension to her personal and academic life, including feeling isolated for being the only woman in her cohort who did not leave the program. She shared in her testimonio her disillusionment regarding the lack of support not only from her mentor and department, but also from her doctoral peers:

The highest challenge that I have encountered as a non-traditional student is the lack of support from my department, my mentor, and my peers. Being in some of the classes and feeling isolated made me wonder why and if it was because I was one of the few female Latinas in the program. I say, “Why are you doing this degree? Because I'm Latina.” I feel kind of isolated. I'm still an isolated student, not invited to participate or not worthy to participate in their activities. I’m the only woman out of three in my cohort that
continued with the degree. I do not feel my cohort was united. We tried to give support, but we have fallen apart as a cohort. And I don't believe that we are offering enough support to each other.

Moreover, Margarita felt that faculty and administrators in her department did not offer the support that she needed to succeed. As she had the opportunity to take some courses in a different doctoral program, she was able to compare it and realized how her department’s faculty and administrators fell short in providing the same academic opportunities for their doctoral students compared to the other program. Margarita elucidated at length in her testimonio:

They [faculty and administrators] all are the problem because I have talked about my misfortunes and they act like they're on your side; but then, they don't offer anything either; so, to me, it's the entire program! They're nice people but they're not very helpful. The program has a lot of flaws because the faculty members do not do enough for their students. I even had to take courses outside of my doctoral program and was able to see how the other program was run; it was saddening for me to see that the professor of that program cared so much for his students. He offered me a lot of assistance in my writing process and considered me as an excellent writer and student; the students in this program had published as co-authors with their professors and attended several conferences together.

Interestingly, Margarita acknowledged that her lack of reaching out to her mentor to express her needs and expectations as a doctoral student was a mistake, or something that she “didn’t negotiate well.” She declared the following about getting support and being determined as a Woman of Color in the academy:
I think that doctoral students, including me, we need to solve any problem with our mentor before it escalates, be in the same page with the advisor, and make sure to let the advisor know what our expectations are as well and what kind of help we will be needing whether or not our program offers those types of support systems. We need to have a thick skin and to get ready for any sort of isolation in terms of race and ethnicity, as it may become a very lonely experience and a lot of the progress is going to depend on our own agency. So, if we can get all those things on the way, we'll be much happier doctoral students. We need to find out what kind of resources the institution has and if they're compatible with our life schedule. All that has to be negotiated upfront and I think that that was my mistake, that I didn't negotiate enough or negotiate well.

In this excerpt, Margarita is fully aware of the challenges that she has had to overcome and the importance of being resilient and persistent. Based on her own teaching experience and as a senior administrator, Margarita shared her expertise on how faculty and administrators could improve the doctoral program. She stated at length in her testimonio:

Faculty members need to understand where their students come from and that most students in this institution are first generation without any kind of guidance. They need to assist students as much as possible for them to finish their studies successfully, which is not only going to enhance the reputation of the university and of the program, but of themselves by offering a little more support for what they're giving; They need to take ownership of their role in helping us and other students! I don't believe that they are putting the time in what they need to. If you share and allow the students to go through these socialization processes, which is offering more support, showing them how things are supposed to be written, and taking us under their wing; until they [faculty] understand
where they’re [students] coming from and what their needs are, nothing will change; and sadly, too many of the students leave because they're not getting this socialization. I’m determined, but some of them aren't! Everybody is different and some of them might get so discouraged. Latinxs might just be a number on the chart; therefore, we have something to contribute. Administrators and faculty members need to change their processes and support systems when they enroll Latinxs into their programs since we are the largest growing minority in the United States. We're going to contribute to the economy and to the workforce of the country. A bachelor's degree may not cut it for every field, so we have to be in positions of power or have higher degrees to take on these positions because these baby boomers are leaving today; and where does that leave us? They need to wake up and that's my final word!

Indeed, Margarita’s final words reflect an individual and collective experience of survival and determination. She strongly emphasized the need for more culturally sensitive and committed faculty members and administrators that can better serve the needs of Students of Color, particularly first-generation students.

As previously mentioned in the first section of research question one, Mari had a conflicted relationship with her mentor due to his offensive remarks against her family and his sexist behavior in the lab. Unfortunately, Mari also experienced other challenges with him. He assigned her to work on his research projects, which unfortunately was taking so much time for Mari to dedicate time to her dissertation research. Mari explained the following:

I feel like I’m never going to fulfill my mentor’s expectations. He has been too demanding and expects me to do several things at once. I’m not only frustrated but burned-out. I was already doing something else in the lab and he's like, “So when are you
going to do this?” I was like, “What do you want me to do first? I can’t do all of them at the same time.” He wants all things done and all of the results, but he doesn’t take into consideration that you still have a lot of other stuff to do; that you still have to train people; you just have so much going on; I feel like I'm never going to meet those expectations because I don’t have eight arms.

Certainly, training other students besides working on her research was challenging. This situation made Mari to feel stressed-out and, as consequence, during her proposal defense, Mari struggled to present her proposal because her mentor made her work on other research that was not related to her research project. She stated:

He blames me for not successfully presenting my proposal to other faculty members. He said, “It's because you need to learn how to sell it to people.” In my proposal defense, one of my committee members, an African American woman, asked him, “Why are you making her do a lot of work? She’s never going to graduate; she's going to be here for seven years. Why do you want her to do that?” I really appreciated what she did because I feel like a lot of the faculty knows that things are run in my lab, by all the guys, and she came and gave me a voice. My chair was not happy! He told me, “What's your relationship with her? What's going on?” I would like to change my mentor/chair; however, due to the complexity of my dissertation project, I will have to remain working with him until I complete my doctorate; if it wouldn't have a negative impact on my career, I would change my mind. I’m exhausted! I just want to finish! I just want to write my dissertation, which I keep prolonging. It's a lot of work! I think that it comes down to me as a student. I also need to put in more from my part. I really have persevered!
Fortunately, Mari was able to pass her proposal event though she struggled to present it to her committee in a more effective way. Indeed, Mari’s doctoral experience has been filled with several challenges due to her mentor’s lack of support for her dissertation research project and excessive exigencies that do not relate to her own research. Moreover, not being able to present her proposal successfully was in part due to having an excessive load in the lab. Luckily, having a Woman of Color questioning him gave Mari the opportunity to feel supported and validated.

Another student who had some conflict with her ex-mentor was Bella. She mentioned that he did not offer the academic support that she needed for her research project. She explicated the following:

He would not really provide any guidance on my research project even though I needed his guidance about statistics. But I think he didn't know what to do either, essentially, and he would make it seem like I should have known my stats during the presentation, as if I was the dumb one, when actually, I'm pretty sure, he was just incompetent in his statistics. But it’s hard for faculty to admit it. There have been several mental obstacles, obviously, but also mentor obstacles. I felt less confident when he expected me to know things I did not know or acted like he was talking down to me. It seemed he knew more than I did without really explaining to me what exactly he wanted from me. I like to do things in a timely manner, and I noticed that I just needed structure to write and organization. He made me feel less confident.

While Bella recognized the need for structure and organization, she also admitted that her ex-mentor’s lack of guidance made her feel less confident in her academic abilities. Not being explicit in his expectations made Bella feel disoriented, especially after realizing that the
statistical data she presented was incorrect. Moreover, Bella had to confront him as she felt that he was not offering advise on how to improve her research. She shared the following:

I had to endure tough conversations with my mentor, telling him what was wrong, giving him possible solutions, basically directing at him his lack of mentorship and competency and his lack of being able to train other mentees. So, having those conversations kind of standing up to bullies like him gave me confidence. He didn’t know what he was doing as a mentor; and I got a sense that he was not a good fit for me at the end of my first semester; and I wanted to change mentors from the beginning. I just didn't know how; there's limited faculty, so I just brushed it off; he's just incompetent and he was putting his priorities above anybody else's because he wants to get tenure and to focus on his publications. As doctoral women, we will have struggles; you just need to know who you are; be strong and don't let them [faculty] get you down. Get up and get going! In a very overt way or in a very covert way, they're going to tell you that you can't do it, or the system is going to have obstacles for you. So, you need to prepare for that. Find a good mentor and just pull resources.

Interestingly, Bella felt that her former mentor had not been “a good fit” since she started her program. Therefore, as she advanced in her doctoral study, she decided to express her discontentment to see if their mentor-mentee relationship could improve. Additionally, the fact that her mentor was in the process of earning tenure may have influenced his reduced availability to mentor Bella, as he also had to dedicate an extensive amount of time and effort to conducting research and publishing. Nevertheless, Bella remained strong and found ways to navigate and fulfill her academic needs despite the several obstacles that she encountered, such as finding another mentor.
Sunshine entered the doctoral program right after earning her bachelor’s degree, thus, had a very challenging start with her advisor. At the beginning, Sunshine shared that the doctorate was harder than she had imagined but decided to invest her time and effort in order be successful. She shared:

I would never assume that it was going to require for me to dedicate forty hours even if I was paid for twenty hours. The first semester was very frustrating because I had an assistantship where I had to comply with all the academic expectations. Homework was very hard, very demanding, a lot of use of the computer, which I never did as an undergrad; learning new programs; the homework is double. And a lot of writing, which I always hated when I was an undergrad. I never liked to do essays. Now, in the PhD program, everything is about writing your research, your findings and methods, introductions, and results. Well, the things I hated the most was using the computer and writing and that's what they make me do the most; but that's good, now that I look at it, because the things I hate, it's because I don't do them well.

Unfortunately, not being exposed to the demands of conducting research as an undergraduate may have influenced the way Sunshine socialized personally and academically with her Latino advisor and mentor. In fact, Sunshine attributed that it was mainly due to her cheerful and outspoken personality that made him perceive her as someone who was immature and not being serious in her doctoral study. In addition, Sunshine said that he treated her differently compared to the other Latina peers in the research lab. She stated in her testimonio:

When I entered the PhD program, my advisor did not like that I laughed and joked with everybody. He blames me for laughing too much! He's really good with the other two Latina students and with me, he isn't the best; when they make an error, he tells them,
“Oh, you made an error, you just need to fix it,” but when I don't do something right, he tells me, “How could you not have seen it?” He makes a big deal with me, but when he speaks to the other students, he’s calmer. My second semester as a doctoral student, I think that my mentor considered me too immature to be in the program. It escalated to the point that he was going to terminate me. He spoke with the program coordinator to see [about] the possibility of terminating my contract and with a professor that highly recommended me when I applied to the program. I had a strong relationship with the coordinator and the professor, so my advisor desisted by giving me a second chance because the professor he asked knew how committed I was and gave excellent recommendations of me, like, that I always helped other students in their work. After speaking with the professor, he apologized to me saying that he was wrong and that he would keep me.

Fortunately, Sunshine was able to continue working as a RA as her advisor decided to consult with the professor and the program coordinator before terminating her contract. Therefore, Sunshine had the opportunity to restructure the way she was doing her work to prove him wrong and to keep her job as an RA. She further explained:

I decided that I was going to be more committed, to make a schedule, and make sure that I was going to produce results. And I’ve been faithful to my schedule. I have turned in more results than what he expected. He even said, “I didn't even expect you to do so much.” He has the pressure to publish and when something does not go the way he wants, he will explode. He’s quite demanding because he expects results on time in order to publish and he gets upset when the results are delayed. I admire myself for being able to overcome a temporal depression when I was an undergraduate student, and now in my
doctorate, it’s a journey that includes God’s presence as well even though I’ve had personality conflicts with my mentor.

This excerpt indicates how Sunshine was able to cope with a “temporal depression” due to feeling isolated for terminating some relationships with college friends who thought that she was antisocial due to her religious beliefs and practices when she was pursuing her bachelor’s degree. Fortunately, as a doctoral student, Sunshine realized the importance of becoming a more committed and structured in her work as an RA, as she knew that having an advisor who needed to publish his research would require her to “produce more results.” Fortunately, Sunshine’s own agency invigorated her with the determination and resilience that she needed to become a more productive and successful doctoral student.

A student whose relationship with her Latino advisor and mentor deteriorated towards the end of her doctoral study was Maya. She shared that she had a strong relationship with him before he decided to not continue being her dissertation chair in part because she depicted him as an oppressive character in a short story that she wrote. Maya never expected him to make such a radical decision, especially after taking several classes with him and having a good relationship since she started her master’s degree. Maya elucidated this in her testimonio:

Soy una libre pensadora. Entonces usé el psicoanálisis para deconstruir mi opresión e hice un registro de mis sueños durante el semestre con un enfoque en el profesor. No fue fácil expresarme porque vi al Dr. Cadena como el opresor y le hice una historia desde niño porque tengo esa capacidad como escritora, puedo entrar a esa realidad paralela que está en la ficción. Entonces lo voy describiendo en un papel sobre la opresión del psicoanálisis y no es fácil para el leer lo que escribí porque al final le tuve que decir que era él el personaje y claro que no le cayó nada bien. ¡Tenía que ser una persona evolucionada! Llegó
un momento en que le llené el hígado de piedritas. No dijo nada, pero me respondió en el último comentario que me mandó que se sentía maltratado por mí porque falté a una cita; era el día festivo de Martin Luther King; se me olvidó y no le cancelé y me di cuenta hasta en la tarde. Y ese mensaje que me manda mi exadvisor donde pone, “Me siento humillado por ti y por tu poor writing. I’m tired of your poor writing and I have a witness to show this.” Lo recibí como que ya no quería formar parte de mis estudios doctorales. ¡Y dije hasta aquí, ya estuvo, gracias! Estaba pidiendo esa liberación de los misóginos; medio le batallé, pero aprendí y dije, okay, ya. Y eso es tomar la vida con responsabilidad. Cuando te sales del papel de oprimida empiezas a liberar al opresor también. Entonces, yo ya lo liberé, él era mi opresor y dejé de ser la víctima. Dejar de ser víctima es algo que cuesta mucho trabajo. Y le escribí un email para disculparme y me dijo que ya estuvo; lo cogí en un mal momento. Es activista, pero es hombre y no puede evitar ser hombre; entonces, dentro de esta tragedia de división de géneros y del patriarcado, porque es una verdadera tragedia que nos violenta a todos, todos somos víctimas. Era mejor separarnos para conservar la amistad sana porque lo conozco desde la maestría.

I’m a free thinker. So, I used psychoanalysis to deconstruct my oppression and I made a record of my dreams during the semester focusing on the professor. It was not easy to express myself because I saw Dr. Cadena as the oppressor, and I made up a story starting from his childhood because I have that ability as a writer; I can access a parallel reality that exists in fiction. So, as I described him in the story, it was not easy for him to read what I wrote because, at the end, I had to tell him that he was the character, and of course, he did not like that at all! It was meant for an evolved person! At that time, he was fed up with me. He didn't say anything, but he replied in the last comment that he
sent me that he felt mistreated by me because I missed an appointment; it was Martin
Luther King's holiday; I forgot about it. I didn't cancel it and I remembered that
afternoon. My ex-advisor sent me a message where he wrote, “I feel humiliated by you
and by your poor writing. I’m tired of your poor writing and I have a witness to show it.”
And I received the message as a way of telling me that he no longer wanted to be my
doctoral advisor. And I said to myself, enough, that’s it, thank you! I was asking for that
liberation from misogynists; it wasn’t easy, but I learned, and decided to move on. And
this was taking life with responsibility. When you leave the role of being oppressed, you
start liberating the oppressor, too. So, I already liberated him; he was my oppressor and I
ceased to be the victim. Stop being a victim is something that takes a lot of courage. I
wrote him an email to apologize, and he told me that he was done with me. It was bad
timing. He's an activist, but he's a man and he can't avoid being a man; so within this
tragedy of gender division and patriarchy, because it is a real tragedy that affects us all,
we are all the victims. It was better to have some distance to maintain a healthy
relationship because I have known him since I was in my masters.

In this excerpt, Maya revealed how she deconstructed her oppression as a Latina doctoral student
when having a professor who she described as “the oppressor,” which was perhaps the main
reason why he did not want to continue working with Maya. While Maya recognized that she
made a mistake for not rescheduling an appointment with him, it was enough reason for her
advisor to terminate their academic relationship. For Maya, using her creative writing skills to
express her thoughts was a form of being a “free thinker” but, interestingly, Maya attributed his
lack of understanding to his patriarchal way of thinking that has pervaded not only the Latino
culture, but also the academy. Despite this challenging situation, Maya was able to find a chair
that was able to help her. She worked on her writing proposal, which consisted in writing the first three chapters of her dissertation project in order to obtain her doctoral candidacy. She added:

Entonces estaba lista para tener mi portafolio con todos los requisitos del lit review, pero ya no tenía chair porque era cuando él iba a ser oficialmente mi chair. Y reflexioné y no sé en qué momento me enredé con el profesor para sentirme protegida, ¿pero de qué? Si el mundo violento patriarcal está dentro de ellos, no dentro de mí. Ya encontré otro chair, le mandé mi trabajo, se tomó el tiempo para leerlo, platicamos en una entrevista y listo. Es bueno cuando académicamente respetas a tu asesor. Y sabes, a mí no me gustaba el hecho de que yo hiciera toda mi investigación y que el doctor se fuera a poner su nombre porque es muy dado de que dice que vamos a colaborar y pone su nombre en la publicación. Está dentro de un sistema de poder y desafortunadamente está reproduciendo ese sistemita.

So, I was ready to have my portfolio with all the lit review requirements, but I no longer had a chair because that happened when he was officially going to be my chair. And I reflected on what happened and, I don't know how I got involved with the professor just to feel protected. But the violent patriarchal world is within men, not within me! I already found another chair. I sent him my work and he took the time to read it; we talked in an interview and that was it. It's good when you respect your advisor academically speaking. And, you know, I didn’t like the fact that I would do all my research and that he [ex-advisor/chair] was going to put his name because he tends to say that we’re going to collaborate, and then, he puts his name on the publication. He’s within a power system, and unfortunately, he’s reproducing that system.
Indeed, Maya reflected on the need to feel emotionally “protected” or supported by her ex-advisor/chair when she was facing difficulties in her personal life at the time, he was her advisor; however, she finally realized that she no longer needed to continue being under his protection, especially when she felt that his mentoring style was patriarchal and oppressive. She also understood that it was important not to allow him to publish her research.

Another participant who had a challenging situation with her mentor was Julieta. She respected her mentor, but she felt disappointed that he was not giving her the support she needed, especially during a presentation to her department. Julieta attributed this to his lack of experience in mentoring students. She explicated in her testimonio:

We have a good relationship. However, I feel stressed out when he’s not giving me the academic support that I need. For instance, in one of my presentations to faculty and peers, I was attacked by a rude comment by a Latino professor and my mentor did not defend my stance, which made me feel disappointed in him. There is financial struggle every once in a while, but the stress is less about it. I think it's more of an academic experience issue, where he is a great researcher and professor, but he is new to mentoring. And I think that's one of the reasons that lack of support happened. It's a learning process on both sides. He's inexperienced in mentoring students.

I don’t like the way he approaches things. I don’t understand [him]! I would like him to be more straightforward and apply himself more when mentoring me. It is politics; but then, if you mean something, you should stick to what you mean. It is not trying to manage the numbers of students but focusing more on the quality of mentoring; put more effort into those people!

Despite this difficult situation, Julieta kept a cordial and respectful relationship with her mentor,
feeling stress out for not having her mentor’s support in front of faculty and peers, which was a significant experience for her. Furthermore, she felt that her mentor needed to “apply himself more” when mentoring her and other students. Indeed, for Julieta, receiving good mentoring was more important than the quantity of students being mentored, particularly for Students of Color.

The last participant in this section who had a conflictive relationship with her advisor was Blanca. She took several courses with her Latino mentor and maintained a good relationship. However, one day he decided not to continue grading her work on blackboard because, according to him, Blanca was not present the entire duration of the online class even though she had asked him for permission to be absent since it was a hybrid course. Blanca shared that it was just an excuse that her mentor used because she did not provide him with an article that she wrote for a conference and that he asked her to send it to him to publish it. She explained in her *testimonio*:

He didn’t grade half of the work that I turned in on Blackboard. He didn’t count it as work. I notified him that I was going out of town with my family. I was absent one day in a face-to-face and I was absent online a few times due to my travel. He wanted us to be connected for the entire duration of the class, as it was usually done in person. So, he counted me absent for several classes. Also, a peer and I wrote a paper in Spanish and then translated into English; and he wanted me to send it to him to publish it as the first author. A peer and I reflected on this, and we decided that we were not going to send it to him because we did all the work, not him. I think that the fact that he gave me a low grade for the course was a form of retaliation because I didn’t send him the paper that he wanted. And he was the one who suggested me to be my dissertation chair. He sent me a derogatory email telling me that I was irresponsible; and he wrote that I actually deserved
a D and since he was a, “good person,” that he gave me a C for the course; I submitted my case for grievance but nothing happened. He even accused me for affecting his relationship with a professor in the program, which was something that he made up and absolutely ridiculous! I also wrote him an email defending my points of view regarding his negative behavior towards me. I think that the program, not the faculty, should be more involved in helping students choose their advisors or chairs based on their research interests, personality, and academic paths. He has too much power! And it seems to me that he does what he wants without taking into consideration the doctoral program policies.

Unfortunately, Blanca had no option but to find an advisor/mentor who could continue guiding and mentoring her in a respectful and dignified manner. Certainly, through this experience Blanca gained a better understanding of the abuse of power by her ex-advisors, which also contributed to strengthening her academic voice, as she submitted her case for grievance and defended her point of view. Unfortunately, Blanca’s ex-advisor may have taken advantage of his position of power as faculty to gain academic advancement. Fortunately, Blanca found a very committed and professional dissertation chair, a Latina professor, who took her under her wing.

**Discussion of Findings Related to the Literature**

There is scholarly evidence that unsatisfactory advising is correlated with many students’ decisions to leave their doctoral programs (Zhao et al., 2007, as cited in Jacks et al., 1983; Lovitts, 2001; Golde, 2005). As such, the six participants highlighted in this section experienced an unsatisfactory relationship with their male mentors and/or advisors, but due to their own agency they confronted adversity with dignity by remaining strong, resilient, and determined to continue their doctoral trajectories. As Chesney-Lind et al. (2006) elucidated, “…discussing
everyday problems among women and members of other marginalized groups… can reveal the hidden oppressive relations resting below the surface of everyday interactions” (p.14). For instance, Margarita had to deal with her mentor’s disinterest in providing assistance for her writing proposal due to his lack of connection with her as he was also experiencing a difficult time in earning tenure, and, as a result, it made Margarita’s doctoral experience even more challenging. When she shared that she was ready to turn in her proposal to her mentor, she added that she would tell him, “Look, I really worked hard on this, and I know that you're going to tear it apart but understand that I've never done this before.” Indeed, writing her research proposal made her feel worried and anxious. Moreover, she felt very disconnected from her mentor. Interestingly, Margarita recognizing that she should have “negotiated better” with her mentor about her expectations and needs. Moreover, Margarita felt alienated not only because she was the only Latina in her cohort, but also because her peers were unsupportive and made her feel “not invited” or “unworthy” of participating in their activities. Margarita described her dissatisfaction and isolation as, “the highest challenge that I have encountered.” She went on to say that as a non-traditional student, the worst part was “the lack of support from my department, my mentor, and my peers.”

Espino’s (2014) study on Latinx doctoral students also documented similar findings such as feeling as an imposter, mostly due to isolation and being one of the few Latinx students in the program. Additionally, Margarita had to take some courses in a different doctoral program where she found academic support from a professor who considered her an excellent writer, which gave her confidence in her abilities as a doctoral student. In these classes, Margarita realized the lack of support that she was receiving from faculty in her program. She was able to witness that one of the professors and his students created a caring and productive Community of Practice (Lave
& Wenger, 1991), such as co-authoring and attending conferences together. Margarita’s experience is comparable to that described in the work of Zambrana et al. (2015), regarding underrepresented minority faculty at research intensive institutions. The authors found that the minority faculty members encountered difficulties in finding mentorship and had to look for it elsewhere.

Bella’s ex-mentor, a White male, did not offer support, particularly in the statistical part of her research project. He made her feel “less confident,” as he expected her to know what to do without providing the guidance that she had needed since the first semester in the program. Bella attributed his lack of support to being in the process of earning tenure. Interestingly, Bella’s former mentor was also Julieta’s mentor at the time they were interviewed for this research study. Juliana admitted that he was “a great researcher and professor,” but that he was “inexperienced in mentoring students.” She would have liked him to have been more direct and to have applied himself more when providing mentorship. According to Bella and Juliana, he lacked effective mentorship skills. He disregarded the importance of improving his mentoring skills, instead of just focusing on his publications and career success. This is problematic, as advisors/mentors need to guide doctoral students toward the knowledge and skills that are deemed necessary for succeeding in the professoriate (Moak & Walker, 2014).

Bloomberg & Volpe (2015) elucidated: “Remember that your advisor or dissertation chair will hopefully be your mentor, principal guide, and primary resource…but he or she may be so busy that it makes getting advisement time and feedback difficult and even frustrating” (p. 24). This may as well correlate to what was happening to the mentors/advisors of these three participants. Furthermore, some scholars have claimed that providing support and mentorship within the department does not relate to preparing faculty and that doing so is often not valued
for faculty, particularly for professional advancement or tenure, thus, exacerbating the problem. Usually this means that faculty members mentor their doctoral students with limited professional and institutional support, in addition to a heavy workload (e.g., Chesney-Lind et al., 2006; Fairweather, 1996; Zambrana et al., 2015).

In higher education institutions, women and Faculty of Color experience many of the exclusions that Latinas also face in their graduate programs. Certainly, Margarita, Bella, and Julieta felt excluded from their mentors’ list of academic priorities, mainly due to the complex quest for having tenure, legitimacy, and institutional support in addition to fulfilling the role of advisors or mentors. Regarding this advising burden, Chesney-Lind et al. (2006) noted that, “it is especially troublesome for faculty of color who often find themselves with many mentees and no mentors to guide their own professional development” (p. 12). As discussed in research question one, Mari had to tolerate and resist her mentor’s microaggressions and sexist behavior toward her. Additionally, he also assigned her more work than she could handle in the lab, which in turn prolonged the time for the completion of her doctorate and affected her preparation when she presented her dissertation proposal to her committee members. Luckily, Mari felt very supported by one of her committee members who happened to be an African American woman who questioned her mentor the reasons behind extending Mari’s dissertation timeline. Mari wished that she could change her misogynistic mentor, but unfortunately, that decision would have been difficult, as she was rather advanced in her research. Mari was under a lot of pressure and anxiety, which was reflected in her academic performance and lack of confidence, due to her mentor’s abuse of power and patriarchal approach of mentoring.

Sunshine’s young age (24), cheerful disposition, and lack of experience in conducting academic research contributed to her mentor’s negative attitude toward her. His impulsive
decision to try to terminate her contract the second semester was indeed a very challenging experience for Sunshine. He failed to provide her with the academic support that she needed in order to thrive and completely disregarded the fact that she was so young and didn’t have any experience as a researcher. Luckily, due to this incident, Sunshine became more conscious of the need to have more structure and manage her academic life more efficiently. This included implementing self-regulation and time management, which are essential qualities needed to succeed academically. Maya’s advisor felt offended for her openness in expressing her feelings about his patriarchal approaches in his teaching through her short story. Her mentor’s response was that he felt humiliated because Maya forgot their appointment. Additionally, telling her “I’m tired of your poor writing” was a tacit example of his insensitiveness, patriarchal behavior, and contemptuous mentoring style.

These findings regarding poor mentorship are analogous to Benishek’s (2004) work in that there are multiple models of mentorship, but many are based on a model that is directive and hierarchical. According to Benishek (2004), this model can be problematic for People of Color and women, as it is based on “paternalistic ideologies and male models of development and perpetuate the view that one style of mentoring will meet the majority of mentees’ professional development needs” (Benishek, 2004, p. 432). As higher education institutions are products of a long-established academic apprenticeship system, based on White masculinist, middle-class attitudes and values, faculty mentors may sometimes, unconsciously or consciously, be reproducing a patriarchal, one-size-fits all style of mentorship, which does not serve marginalized graduate students, specifically the Latina women in this study. Indeed, Margarita, Mari, Bella, Sunshine, Maya, Julieta, and Blanca would have benefited from a multicultural feminist model of mentorship, as it is relational in nature, based on open communication and
collaboration between mentee and mentor. Moreover, it doesn’t negate the existence of a power relationship, but instead attempts to acknowledge that power disparity in multiple relational ways to create a more fruitful relationship and to empower the mentee (Benishek, 2004). Feminist mentorship in the form of emotional support not only provides relief for the mentee, but it is also a form of political action by empowering mentees, particularly Women of Color Latinas, in order to navigate and succeed in academe (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006).

It is of utmost importance to mention that the problem of obtaining direct, effective, consistent mentorship is also an institutional issue that directly affects mentors, advisor, and faculty members, specifically Faculty of Color and women. That is, it may be easier to blame poor mentoring and lack of support on individuals than on the institution for not offering training in mentorship training for faculty members, even though “minority and women faculty are often sought out by students looking for a mentor who understands racism and sexism…and they see faculty who understand these pressures as essential to their survival on campus” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006, p. 7). In this study, Mari, Maya, and Blanca were participants who evidently described their mentors as being sexist and/or insensitive to their needs as doctoral students, which unfortunately affected their doctoral experience in a detrimental manner.

Fortunately, a large body of literature has focused its attention on culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995). For instance, Ladson-Billings (1995) acknowledged three criteria deemed essential of culturally relevant pedagogy on classroom teaching: “(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). Certainly, advising and mentorship can also be considered a form of teaching; thus, these strategies may also be utilized in advisee-advisor or
mentee-mentor relationships by developing a culturally relevant advising/mentoring program that could always use and recognize the culture of the students as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In sum, these six Latina doctoral students did not have the opportunity to experience culturally relevant mentoring and/or advising. They did not receive a feminist style of mentorship that may have contributed to a more fulfilling doctoral experience. Therefore, this study provided an opportunity for participants to share the multiple challenges they experienced, which had nothing to do with their academic talents or abilities. Regardless of the diverse challenges or conflicts these Latina women experienced, they were able to cope by confronting their mentors with dignity, strong determination, and resilience.

**Theme 3.2: Overcoming Challenges with Faculty Members and/or Peers**

In this study, all the participants concurred that good mentorship was crucial in their academic development, research experience, and outcomes. As it was discussed in the previous section, five participants expressed their concerns about the need of receiving better mentorship, which implied more commitment and time from their advisors and/or mentors as well as an open channel of communication to avoid misunderstandings and further conflicts.

Emilia was one of the participants who shared her challenging experience in her first class in the program due to her professor’s lack of structure regarding honoring her course syllabus and assignments deadlines. Therefore, due to Emilia’s full-time job, she had difficulties coping with the professor’s changes, which made her first-year experience less enjoyable. Emilia explicated in her testimonio:

> My first class I didn't like it because of the professor. I was coming from my master's, which was in education. So that class was a composition studies class, and it was a lot of new material that I was not familiar with. The professor didn't take the time to explain;
she didn't explain how the field of rhetoric and writing work. In my department most of the PhD students have aspirations of becoming English professors and I didn't. That class was geared towards people that are planning on teaching composition. The content of the class was not the thing that I disliked about it because content is content that you will understand if you apply yourself to it. The professor was very difficult. She was always very moody. She had a lot of running with other students, not with me personally, but I know of at least three other students that were very against her and that made her class very hostile. They didn't like the way she was teaching the class. She's not a people person, you know, she was very dry! And that wasn't necessarily my issue with her. My issue with her was that I was very new to the subject, and it was difficult to grasp my passion for the degree because of the way she was teaching the class. It was difficult to understand what she wanted. There were days where she would tell us to submit certain things online; and then, there were days where she would change it the day before class, which was in the morning. I work full time, so for me it was very difficult to have these sudden changes because I don't have all the time in the world like other people. The majority of the class work as TAs in our program, so they had the advantage of having more time and I didn't have that advantage, that flexibility, and that luxury! So, for me, the fact that she kept changing things with any prior notice, I didn't think that was professional; dealing with a person that was constantly changing things without prior notice, or so suddenly, was very difficult to deal with.

This excerpt shows how Emilia had to deal with a professor who expected that the students could adapt to the abrupt changes she made without prior notice. Emilia’s inconformity was rooted on the professor’s failure to teach the content well and that as a full-time employee, she didn’t have
“the luxury” to make sudden changes to her assignments, compared to her peers who held TA positions. Moreover, having students that were not content with the professor made the class less enjoyable for Emilia. She described the class as “very difficult to deal with,” particularly that she had several other academic commitments in addition to her full-time job.

Unfortunately, Emilia also shared that her White male peer who considered Anzaldúa's work unworthy for the rigor of a PhD made things even more challenging not only for her, but for her cohort. She further explained:

There were initially nine of us in my cohort, eight women and one White male. Well, he was very difficult. He had a very difficult personality from the start. He was the one who didn’t like Anzaldúa. He always wanted to be right. Our personalities did not match because he was kind of bossy. I feel like he was very Eurocentric, pretentious, elitist, and arrogant. He's brilliant, don’t get me wrong! But he had character traits and personality traits that were not in agreement with my own. Not only with me, but he had difficulty with a lot of other students. From the nine of us, he had conflict with at least five, not including the professor that was always changing things. He made our cohort very hostile! I feel like he contributed to making our cohort very separated. We're not a very united cohort. It was definitely a cohort that had a lot of clicks and he made it even more difficult because of his arrogant personality. My cohort was not very supportive! It really wasn't! There were five Latinas, but not all of them were from here. There were only three Latinas from here, including me. It was very cliquey, and I always felt like I was on my own. I did get along with all of them, but I was never, you know, per se, part of their group. They were all TA’s.

Certainly, Emilia had a challenging class as well as a male peer who made things more
challenging for her. She described her cohort as, “not supportive, cliquey, and separated,” which made her feel that she did not belong to the group even though there were other four Latina doctoral students. Unfortunately, having a peer whose bossy and elitist personality made things harder and a professor who constantly changed deadlines may have contributed to the lack of camaraderie and unity in her cohort.

Another participant who had a difficult experience with a professor was Andrea. She shared in her testimonio that the professor did not fulfill the description and objectives of the course, particularly those related to health issues in the community. As a woman with a background in medicine, Andrea expected to learn more in a core class that was required in her degree plan, such as illnesses and health statistics in a border region in order to utilize that knowledge in her dissertation. She stated the following:

Fue un curso obligatorio pero el profesor nunca se enfocó en darnos algo de aprendizaje sobre los problemas de salud en la frontera. El la enfoco más bien en técnicas de relajación, como quitar el estrés, como hace mejor conexión con otras personas. Yo quería aprender sobre los hispanos en la frontera, las enfermedades más frecuentes, qué servicios médicos hay. O sea, herramientas que me sirvan, no para mí, sino para ayudar en un futuro. Pero más que nada lo que me molestaba es que era obligatoria y que el curso no era apropiado para lo que estábamos aprendiendo. Sentía que él no me estaba dando lo que necesitaba aprender. El maestro iba preparado y sabía presentar. Creo que era la segunda vez que la daba. Es buena persona, pero vienes a este mundo a aprender y estás pagando por la clase y vas a salir a competir. Me hubiera gustado aprender sobre la frontera, como los porcentajes, las enfermedades comunes, o planes de salud establecidos en las escuelas. Conocimiento que para mí como estudiante de doctorado pueda ver las
estadísticas de enfermedades y desarrollar ese conocimiento en mi disertación. Lo que le afecta a la salud del individuo en la frontera, eso es bien importante. Puse en mi evaluación todo eso. No era la única inconforme; había cuatro de siete estudiantes que no estábamos contentos con su clase. Encargaba trabajos buenos basados en hispanos, pero hubiera sido más importante que nos enseñara lo que él había visto y lo que sabía de enfermedades. Los tres trabajos del semestre fueron importantes, pero no hubo una retroalimentación del maestro de su experiencia en la frontera que creo que hubiera reforzado el conocimiento.

It was a course that was required; but the professor never focused on giving us some learning about health problems in a border region. He focused more on relaxation techniques, such as removing stress, and how to make a better connection with other people. I wanted to learn about Hispanics on the border, the most frequent diseases, what medical services were available. Like tools that could have been useful, not for me, but to be able to help in the future. But what bothered me the most is that it was a required and the course was not appropriate for what we were learning. I felt like he wasn't giving me what I needed to learn. The teacher was prepared and knew how to present. I think it was the second time he taught the course. He’s Anglo and he doesn’t speak Spanish. He's a good person, but you come to this world to learn, you are paying for the class, and you are going to go out to compete. I would have liked to learn about the border region, like the percentages, common illnesses, or health plans established in the schools; knowledge that for me as a PhD student included seeing the statistics of diseases to use that knowledge in my dissertation. What affects the health of individuals at the border; that is very important! I included all this in his evaluation. I was not the only one dissatisfied;
there were four out of seven students who weren't happy with his class. He assigned good papers on Hispanics, but it would have been more important that he could teach us what he had seen and knew about diseases. The three assignments of the semester were important, but there was no feedback from the professor regarding his experience at the border that I think would have reinforced my knowledge.

However, Andrea was not the only student who had a challenging class. Eva also had a White male professor who contributed to making her feel out of place due to his teaching style. She felt that he delivered the content in a way that was difficult to understand, which amplified her fear of failing the class. She explicated in her testimonio:

I felt that there was some retaliation or bias in his grading for what I told him. One day, he asked us, “How did you think the class is going? Be open about it.” It happened like in the third week of class. And I said, “I hate it. I hate coming to your class.” I said that and I told him that I was not getting what I needed from the class. And I felt comfortable saying it to him because I had a feeling that I wasn't the only one who was feeling like me; the rest of the students weren’t happy either. I was brave enough to say it! He said, “Does everyone else think the same way? And most of them said yes. So, he decided to change the syllabus and help us by improving the course, and so forth. But I think that I should have said it in a different way because usually, I'm very professional, but [at] that time, I was just stressed because I didn't know anything about his subject. But I did see that no matter what I did, I couldn't please him, my grades were the lowest in the class. I wondered if it was related to what I told him. But at the same time, I already had too much stress in my personal life due to my partner’s separation. I didn’t need more of that! My quality of work was good. I didn’t have to prove it to him. I
didn't need his validation. The only thing that worried me was my GPA. But then, I was like, it's not worth getting sick over it, like stressing out, and getting upset. At the end, I got an A. I don't know why he made us go through so much hell. I learned not to say too many things or be too honest with him, you know, but I needed to speak my mind. And I've learned to control my emotions. I'm a little bit more stable.

For Eva, taking a course where she was learning new content by a professor who made it more complex was indeed a challenging experience for her. Additionally, she said that having the lowest grades may have been a form of retaliation for being “too direct” when expressing her discontentment with the way he was teaching the course. Fortunately, by voicing her concerns she was able to benefit the entire class, too, as the professor decided to change the syllabus and improve his teaching strategies. It is important to note that when she incident happened, Eva was recovering from heartbreak, as this unfortunate event may have greatly contributed to the way she reacted when the professor asked Eva and other students to provide their feedback. Luckily, Eva finished the course successfully and found the emotional balance that she needed to continue her academic journey.

Having a professor who publicly criticized her was a difficult experience for Julieta. Although she considered that staying strong when receiving harsh criticism was an accomplishment, Julieta felt that the professor’s attitude was inappropriate when she shared her views about the detrimental effects of machismo and marianismo in the Latinx culture. Julieta explained in her testimonio:

Among one of my academic accomplishments is being able to stand up in front of a crowd of doctoral peers and faculty members who tend to be highly critical. I admit being completely vulnerable without taking things personal. So, being able to stand in front of
people who can criticize you, I think that's an accomplishment because of the experience that I had when one of my projects was criticized by the professor because it touched cultural values that some people don't believe in, such as *machismo* and *marianismo* in the Latino culture. I had that negative experience with one of the faculty members in my program. He showed lack of respect towards me by scorning me during the presentation. He didn't like what I said. I think transparency is also a good thing, what the faculty member said to me in front of my face, but maybe without everyone in the room being present; and to say it publicly, in front of everyone, that was a humiliation to me. It’s all about respect! There are also people who have helped me through that process. It's not like all is negative. I think it’s being able to take the bad and deal with it, you know, and how to take positive feedback, too.

Certainly, confronting faculty and peers who usually gave overt criticism in an unprofessional manner was something that Julieta had to deal with as a doctoral student, which made her socialization experiences more difficult. Nevertheless, Julieta was able to endure the blatant criticism that she received. Mari was another participant who had not only a challenging class, but also a professor who did not offer any academic support even though she asked for his assistance to better understand the content. Mari stated the following in her *testimonio*:

One of the most difficult classes was immunology and the professor was always unwilling to help me when I had questions related to the course. I was kind of shot down by the professor and when I went to ask him for help during class, he was kind of like, “Don't come to ask me.” So, when I went to his office and asked him, he told me, “I don't have time.” In my experience, some faculty needs to be more supportive and sensitive to the students’ needs. They need to remember when they were doctoral students. I think
they forgot that they went through a lot of stuff. I guess they didn't have good mentors or were not supportive. They forget that they were in our shoes at some point and that we have to struggle, too. It's been hard!

Fortunately, Mari’s agency and resilience enabled her to continue progressing in her doctoral degree despite all the challenging experiences that she had to overcome. Mari was cognizant that her White male professor was not only insensitive to her academic needs but also reproducing the historical marginalization against Women of Color in academia.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

This section highlighted some of the most challenging experiences for five of the participants in this study. Although these experiences were unique to each participant, the doctoral students were able to navigate the difficulties that were presented to them as they advanced in their doctoral programs. Emilia, Andrea, Eva, Julieta, and Mari experienced having professors who did not fulfill their academic expectations that directly or indirectly affected their doctoral experience. For instance, Emilia had a White woman professor who had the tendency to change the deadlines for the assignments. Notwithstanding, she had to cope not only with the professor’s tendency to change deadlines, but also with the negative classroom environment that some of her peers triggered by a White male peer that she described as “arrogant,” “elitist,” and “bossy.” According to Emilia, He did not get along with most of the people, including the professor, which led to a “separated” and “very hostile” cohort. Furthermore, as a non-traditional doctoral student, Emilia always felt that she was mostly “on her own” in a cohort that was cliquish and where most people were TA’s. Unfortunately, she did not socialize personally or academically with most of the members of her cohort. As previously mentioned, Emilia’s strongest support was her mother. This issue also emerged in Gardner and Gopaul’s (2012)
research study, which illustrated that non-traditional doctoral student’s main source of support were their families, not their fellow peers or faculty advisors.

Furthermore, Emilia’s experience with a complicated professor made her lose motivation in her own work. There is an extensive amount of literature on student evaluations of the teaching performance of college and university faculty (Wachtel, 1998). The specific aspect of faculty personality has been examined by Murray et al., (1990), and they found that to some degree, teaching effectiveness could be predicted from students’ perceptions of the instructors’ personalities, and they concluded that the relationship of having a charismatic personality highly influenced student rating. Abrami et al. (1982a) conducted a review of studies on educational evaluations and found that student evaluations of college faculty were much more sensitive to expressiveness than to lecture content and argued that the instructors’ expressiveness in teaching positively affected the student ratings on teaching effectiveness more than student learning. A similar finding was found in this current study, as Emilia described her professor as, “very difficult,” “always very moody,” “very dry personality,” and “not a people person” and these personality traits may have significantly impacted Emilia’s lack of motivation and connection with the professor. Unfortunately, this experience made her first year of less enjoyable.

Andrea had a professor who, in her point of view, did not teach the content that she was expecting; in this class, four out of seven students were unhappy with the class. Andrea shared that he did not provide statistical data related to common illnesses and school health programs in the borderland region nor shared his experiential knowledge and expertise as a health science researcher and professor. Nevertheless, she expressed her inconformity on the course evaluation. A participant who felt disrespected by a professor was Julieta. He scorned her during a presentation she gave on marianismo and familismo; nevertheless, she remained strong and
resilient and was “able to take the bad and deal with it,” instead of taking his hostility personal. Mari experienced being neglected by a White male professor who denied her assistance in class as well as during his office hours, which clearly indicated a lack of empathy and commitment to help her succeed in his class. Of all the participants in this section, Eva was the only participant who confronted her professor in a very overt manner by expressing her concerns, as she was struggling with learning the course content. Eva said that she was “brave enough” for expressing her opinion in the class. Fortunately, her complaint brought positive change, as the professor changed the syllabus and improved the way he was delivering the content after receiving feedback from Eva and other peers. Nevertheless, Eva was getting low grades in the course. She believed was an indication of the professor’s retaliation for her behavior. However, Eva reflected on how she conducted herself and decided to be more politically savvy in the future.

This type of critique of their academic socialization and ways of resisting uncomfortable and unprofessional behaviors and/or expectations from their professors also emerged in the findings of González’s (2006) study, as well. He defined socialization as holding the expectation that all students fit the same mold, and that mold was centered on a White male, heterosexual, middle class institutional model. Indeed, that expectation also emerged in this study, which can be highly disempowering for Students of Color, as these participants were expected to emulate and embrace normative and traditional ways of teaching that were not effective. According to González’s findings (2006), some students resisted academic socialization and remained silent as a navigational tool, and others strengthen their academic voice and felt empowered when they were “politically savvy,” which was also a form of resistance. The participants in this current study didn’t lose their academic voices as Latina doctoral students. Rather, they decided to be “politically savvy” to avoid conflictive relationships with their professors. Moreover, similar to
Gonzalez’s (2006) findings, Eva also resisted against the status quo by not being afraid to speak her mind. This experience not only empowered her as a Latina woman and doctoral student, but also made her reflect on the importance of being political savvy. Although these five participants experienced several academic challenges and/or conflicts with faculty members and/or peers, they remained focused, resilient, and persistent, and above all, “politically savvy” in order to continue their academic pursuits.

**THEME 3.3: ENDURING HEARTBREAK DURING THE PhD**

Research on the impact of *machismo* and *marianismo* (e.g., the gender socialization within Latino communities) remains limited in the psychological and behavioral sciences, as researchers have briefly explored these topics (Valenciano, 2014). Moreover, the scope of investigation on *machismo* has focused primarily on Latino men even though it is an intricate part of the culture and the home that directly affects Latina women’s personal, academic, and professional development (Valenciano, 2014). The final theme in this section that emerged from the findings was very particular to some of the participants. Although the topics of *machismo* and *marianismo* have not been extensively researched in academia, this study found how these high achieving women terminated their relationship with their Latino partners due to their *machista* behaviors and attitudes toward them and how it affected their emotional and psychological well-being. For the four women in this section, they experienced emotional distress after breaking up with their partners due to their *machismo*, which unfortunately was another stressor that made the doctoral experience more perplexing.

One of the four participants in this section who held strong feelings of desolation and isolation was Emilia. As previously mentioned in the section on family support, Emilia and her partner had a daughter, and her mother was a big support when they broke up. Emilia shared that
their relationship started to decay when she started her doctoral coursework. She elucidated at length in her testimonio:

It was at the beginning of my coursework when we separated in 2015. He was not supportive because he understood the importance of education, but he didn't understand that it was a very important goal for me. He was very insecure because he never finished college and, at the time, I was earning more money than him. He was Mexican and very machista. He was feeling like things were not going in his direction, so we decided to separate. That was very devastating! And that was another obstacle that I had to go through. My ex was unfaithful to me, which was why the relationship dissolved. It was very devastating! I was very sad and very disillusioned! But it never made me question about my degree, whether I should stop or not; it never crossed my mind. It was more like a personal thing. I became very doubtful of myself, not as a student, but as a person, as a woman. He was not supportive of my dream! He didn't understand why I had this dream! So, for him, it was easier to find someone else on their same level of goals or their dreams or somebody that gave him the attention that I couldn't give him because I was busy and working full time. I needed time to do homework and time to read. In my degree, we read a lot; reading is like 80 percent of what we do. We read a lot of articles, we respond to them, and then, we write about those articles. So, reading is essential and in order to fulfill that requirement, I needed a lot of time. Unfortunately, my relationship with him suffered as a result of all the time that was being taken elsewhere. He didn't finish his bachelor and he ended up getting a certification as a fireman; so that's what his dream was, to be a fireman. I think that it made him feel very insecure and intimidated. He did tell me that he was intimidated by me. And I think that it all relates to the Mexican
culture that he was very machista; he wanted to feel like he was the top dog, you know, and since he couldn't feel that way with me, he found someone else. I know her. We all went to high school together. It was devastating! It really was! I don’t know if she has any other type of education, but I know she doesn’t have a bachelor. It was very isolating! But now, I’m in a way better place. It’s been three years that it happened. I don’t feel as devastated. Obviously, I still feel the anger and pain, but I’m definitively over it. At the end of our relationship, it was becoming very painful to be with someone like him because he belittled me and he made offensive things to me that I'm not going to repeat, but they were things that affected me a lot personally.

This excerpt serves as evidence of the deep desolation that Emilia experienced for having a partner who did not understand her academic pursuits. Moreover, Emilia felt that due to his machismo, he was unfaithful and unable to accept that she was more successful than he was, not only academically but also financially. He was resentful that Emilia was spending more time in her academic duties, which aggravated the dynamics of their relationship to the point that he decided to find someone else. Fortunately, Emilia never considered leaving the doctoral program even though their separation affected her emotional and psychological well-being. Certainly, Emilia is an example of personal strength, determination, and resilience.

Unfortunately, Eva was another participant who experienced a painful separation and distress when she separated from her partner. She shared the following:

We lived together for eight years. He was an electrical engineer. He did his masters through the Naval Academy when I was doing mine. And I felt very lucky to have someone who was at the same academic level and that supported me financially by not charging me rent. I paid for my tuition, my vehicle, my braces, my medical insurance,
and my cell phone. And I paid for groceries for both of us because he paid for the house mortgage. It was his house. It was never mine. He paid less than $100 for bills. So, I felt like I contributed to the living expenses by providing the groceries, buying anything for the house, like furniture. I decorated the house and I even invested in that home to remodel it. So, I thought I was lucky! He was six years older than me. Then, when I finished my masters and I went into the PhD, we separated. It happened at the beginning of this semester. The reason was because of an affair he had with someone from work. He said that he did it because I was too busy at school and at work. But I was like, “How could you give it all away? I don't give away something that we built together for eight years.” I saw him every day. We did everything together. We cleaned the house together; we went grocery shopping together; we did every single thing together! And for him, to say that I didn't give him time was so stupid. I was like, no freaking way! I think he really wanted someone who was dependent on him financially and that he could control. I didn’t always do what he wanted, and I think he wanted to have total control of me. As you can imagine, all my future plans changed. My world got disrupted! I wasn’t there emotionally during class, not listening, and I was doing homework when I didn’t even pay attention. It was really hard! It was affecting my academic performance. And then, I started worrying financially because before I didn’t pay for rent. But I still worked hard not to just drop everything, you know, but it still is a constant struggle. It's been hard, but I haven't stopped trying! I keep going! And, after that, I did notice that I started expressing myself very differently. Before I would hold back a lot of what I wanted to say. Now, I say what I want to say whether people like it or not.
For Eva, the separation with her partner was a very difficult situation, which deeply affected her emotionally and academically after living with him for eight years. Nevertheless, Eva remained strong and did not give up despite feeling emotionally drained due to her ex-partner’s infidelity. This was an additional obstacle that Eva faced due to her ex-partner’s *machismo*; nonetheless, this experience made her more assertive when expressing her feelings or emotions.

Interestingly, Maya was another participant who lived a similar situation. Maya shared in her *testimonio* that he was a misogynist and arrogant man who tried to control her. Maya explicated:

> La relación terminó hace dos años. Pero me dejó bien embarcada emocionalmente porque se supone que yo entré al doctorado porque él me iba a apoyar económicamente; y resultó que siempre no y él pagaba la casa. Era una persona venenosa, sínica; un hombre misógino, competitivo, machista e inseguro y acaparador todo el tiempo. Y a veces se sentía como que él me estaba enseñando a mí. Y como las mujeres somos bien inteligentes y representamos una amenaza, los hombres buscan caminos para atraparte. Era un control en el romance y en lo económico; como que pensaba que porque me mantenía se hacía más necesario en mi vida. Y hacía sus profecías crueles hacia las personas que consideraba como competencia para mí. Y a la mera hora, me sacó de su casa, sacó mis maletas. Fue una cosa espantosa. Y casi me convence de que hiciera un estudio cuantitativo. Yo de él recibí une violencia intelectual psíquica, era un acosador de estarme controlando y dominando. Hay una cosa bien depredadora en la misoginia y en el machismo. Era el depredador [risa].

Our relationship ended two years ago. But he left me emotionally drained because I entered the doctorate because he was going to support me financially. He paid for the
house, and it turned out that he didn’t support me at all. He was a poisonous, cynical person; a misogynistic, competitive, *macho*, and insecure man; and a possessive one, all the time. And sometimes, he felt like he was teaching me. And since we [women] are very intelligent and represent a threat to them, men look for ways to convince us. He controlled the romance and the money; he thought that he was indispensable in my life because he supported me financially. And he used to make his cruel predictions about people that he considered were competition for me. And, at the end, he kicked me out of his house and took my suitcases out of the house. It was an awful experience! I received from him psychic intellectual violence; he wanted to control me and to dominate me.

There is a very predatory aspect in misogyny and *machismo*. He was the predator!

For Maya, having to overcome such a negative and detrimental relationship with her ex-partner was an additional challenge that she had to endure as a doctoral student. Unfortunately, the financial support that he had promised never turned into a reality. Fortunately, after their separation, Maya was able to continue her doctoral degree even though it was an excruciating experience for her.

The last participant who did not have fruitful relationships with her partners was Sally. She wanted to get married and start a family, but unfortunately, the men she met were intimidated by her academic success. She explained in her *testimonio*:

I don’t know when I’m going to have time to have a family or to meet someone. Maybe I would leave that part of my life and just focus on my research and my career. But some of my friends, they have kids and families, and they are doing PhD’s. I don’t know if I will have the time or the energy to meet someone or if he will understand that I have to work on the weekends, too. I wanted to have kids when I was an undergraduate student. I
think that I could have kids now. Sometimes, I do want kids and sometimes I don’t. I’m alone and I don’t have to take care of anyone. Sometimes I would like to marry and have a family. I’m forty. And, you know, I’ve met two guys here. One was a policeman and the other finished high school. And, when I told the policeman that I was doing a PhD, he got scared. And the other one said that I was too smart for him. And then, he decided to be with a woman who just completed high school to do whatever he wanted with her [chuckles]. He’s American Salvadoran. I’d like someone who is open-minded and not afraid of being alone when I leave to do my research; someone who is very honest and not afraid of me for making more money than him when I start working, and who can follow me if I work in a different place.

Sally’s excerpt illustrates how she felt about dating two Latino men who felt intimidated by her for pursuing a doctoral degree. Furthermore, she felt that she had the possibility to marry someone and have children in the future; however, Sally was cognizant that her field of study required intense field work, thus, she would need to find a partner who could understand her academic goals.

**Discussion of Findings Related to the Literature**

These four participants had something in common: fulfilling their dream of earning a PhD. Indeed, as Women of Color have been historically marginalized in academia and in society, these participants strongly believed in improving their lives and empowering themselves through education. They were not afraid of the implicit and explicit challenges of pursuing a doctoral degree, as they strongly believed in their academic abilities and possessed a strong determination and resilience. They also understood that, in order to have better opportunities for themselves and their families, they would need to sacrifice spending time with their loved ones.
Interestingly, all the participants in this study who were married or had a partner had to make some adjustments in their lives since they started their doctoral programs, especially those who were non-traditional students who worked full-time or had children. One of the big changes in their lives was spending less time with their family, friends, and partners (Giles, 1983; Jones, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that this change impacted their marriages or relationships. For instance, Emilia broke up with her partner because she was unfaithful to her. Emilia shared that he felt disregarded and intimidated by her for pursuing a doctorate. Unfortunately, he belittled her as a woman, which was a “very devastating” and “isolating” experience for Emilia that affected her emotional and psychological well-being. “I became very doubtful of myself, not as a student, but as a person, as a woman.” Emilia attributed his resentment toward to his machismo, as he couldn’t feel that he was the “top dog” in their relationship.

Another participant who had a very similar experience was Eva. After living with her partner for eight years, they broke up because he had had an affair with a woman from work. Unfortunately, her “world got disrupted” due to this difficult and stressful experience. His reason for cheating on her was that she was too busy with her doctoral study and work. This painful experience affected her not only emotionally and academically, but also financially. Eva also commented that she “didn’t always do what he wanted,” and that he wanted a woman who could be controlled. Fortunately, Eva’s distress and disillusionment did not stop her from continuing her degree because she knew what she wanted for herself, “It's been hard, but I haven't stopped trying! I keep going!” For Maya, having a partner who was possessive, cynical, and sexist, and who controlled the “romance and the finances” affected her psychological and emotional well-being. Maya described her ex-partner as a misogynist and a macho man who felt that he was “indispensable in her life,” for taking care of the home finances. Fortunately, Maya felt that she
was liberated from a man that she described as, “the predator.” Fortunately, ending her relationship with him made her financially and emotionally independent. Indeed, Maya’s self-awareness increased after this experience, and she continued to flourish as a woman and as a doctoral student. Sally also experienced having had two Latino boyfriends who didn’t understand her academic goals, either. Her first partner was a policeman who “got scared” because she was pursuing a PhD. Another boyfriend, who was a high-school graduate, told her that she “was too smart for him.” She wants to find someone who could understand her career goals.

Sadly, these findings are not unusual in academia. Hill (2020) conducted a study showing that female doctoral students disproportionately perceived family formation and the pursuit of an academic career to be incompatible. As a result, the women in her study opted for singlehood by intentionally delaying marriage, family formation, and romantic relationships until they met their professional goals. Hill’s study also revealed how expectations and gender beliefs about work and family differentially affect the family aspirations of women and men who have never been married or had children.

Several scholars have reported that there are four common themes that have manifested in the marital relationships of doctoral students: lack of leisure time, financial stress, change of lifestyle, and communication (Hyun, 2009). These four reoccurring themes are found both in symmetric (i.e., both partners are students) and asymmetric (i.e., one partner is a student) relationships. However, several scholars have concurred that marital relationship satisfaction was higher in symmetrical relationships than in asymmetrical ones (Hyun, 2009, as cited in Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Soloski, 1996). Hyun’s (2002) work also found that sometimes the partners/spouses become resentful toward their female partners because of their perceptions that women should not have more education than
men and the power it can afford. These findings are analogous to this current study, as Emilia, Eva, Maya, and Sally had partners who became resentful toward because of their machismo and limited academic success. This type of asymmetrical relationship caused a lower relationship satisfaction was documented in Hyun’s (2009) study on coping strategies among women doctoral students in relation to their marriages. Thus, a similar finding emerged in this current study that revealed that these four women had a lower relationship satisfaction due to having an asymmetrical relationship with their partners. According to Hyun (2009), “financial difficulties, change of lifestyle, lack of time, and communication issues,” (p. 5) are the foremost affected areas in the female students’ marriages during their doctoral study. All participants in my study made comments about the lack of time they had and the limited time they spent with their spouses due to fulfilling their academic responsibilities.

In an old but still relevant study, Wilson and Hasterok (1975) found this resentment was manifested by participants’ partners through their being disloyal with women who were less educated, but more available in terms of time. Interestingly, a similar finding was also revealed in this current study. Emilia, Eva, and Sally had partners who expressed their resentment through their being unfaithful with women who had fewer academic achievements. In another dissertation study that looked at the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students studying in a mental health field, Jones (2017) found two major themes that affected marriage dynamics. The first was lack of time and the second was the need for spending more time together. These two themes also emerged in this current study when the participants spoke about their lack of time they had since they started their doctoral programs and their need for spending more time with their spouses/partners, family, and friends. During the time Jones (2017) was writing her dissertation, three participants got divorced due to marital conflicts. Similarly, in this
current study, one participant got divorced (Julieta) and three other participants broke up with their partners.

Sori, Wetchler, and Ray’s (1996) work reported that graduate school and marriage may influence the gender role expectations. If one partner in the marriage is expected to fulfill specific roles, not undertaking these expected gender roles may also affect the marriage and home dynamics, including intimacy expectations. As such, in this current study, these four Latina doctoral students did not fit the gender role expectations for their Latino partners, which affected their relationships. Unfortunately, for these women, following their academic dream caused them to experience heartbreak due to their partners’ machismo. However, it could have been possible that the participants and their partners needed additional social support from family members, friends, and/or colleagues. Social support theory highlights that, when dealing with stress, having support when needed contributes to peoples’ well-being and emotional balance, especially when they are experiencing the hostile effects of stress (Lackey & Cohen, 2000). Indeed, Eva, Emilia, and Maya were able to overcome heartbreak because they believed in themselves and in being worthy of deserving better personal and academic opportunities.

**THEME 3.4: CONFRONTING ADVERSITIES BEYOND ACADEMICS**

The majority of the participants in this study shared some of their personal challenges beyond their academic endeavors. However, the following four participants highlighted in this section spoke at length about the various struggles and difficulties that they had while pursuing their doctorates. For instance, Mari had personal challenges in her family that affected her emotional as well as her physical well-being. She explained the following in her testimonio:

My father had a stroke and ever since then it has been more difficult for me to focus on my academic endeavors. Also, I’ve gained weight since I started my doctoral studies. I’ve
been working out to lose some pounds! I had been eating a lot, you know, because I'm always being very bad in my eating habits, but it's also not eating. I need to take care of myself because no one else will. Also, I do not prioritize and sometimes procrastinate on my writing obligations. It’s difficult to stay focused when I start writing. I needed to get out of town, so I rented a house, got some food, and started writing. Now, I work around seven hours every day, which is not a lot compared to what I used to work the first two years of my doctoral program. I usually would stay until two in the morning in the lab. I used to be in the mentality that working for long hours would be academically rewarding and eventually pay off. Now, with more time to dedicate to my well-being, I started to exercise and eat a healthier diet. I needed to exercise, make my breakfast, and lunch, go to work for seven hours; and then come home and sleep because the work was never going to end.

Unfortunately, Mari had to cope with her father’s illness, which affected her not only emotionally but also academically. In addition, she gained weight due to the stress of working long hours per week, which impeded her to invest more time in her well-being and nutrition. Despite these additional challenges that Mari experienced, she was able to stay strong and determined to finish.

A participant who had to overcome financial struggles was Andrea. Andrea and her husband were international students who came to the United States to pursue their doctorates. Unfortunately, both depended on their part-time salaries to support themselves and pay for tuition. Therefore, having a limited budget was an additional burden for Andrea. She elucidated in her testimonio:
Terminado mi doctorado ojalá que tengamos residencia mi marido y yo y pueda aplicar a un trabajo. Me gustaría que mi pareja y yo ganáramos más dinero para batallar menos económicamente porque batallamos para pagar la renta, otras cosas y no nos alcanza.

Vivimos bien pero nos medimos en los gastos. Algo bien importante es lo económico, que es mi problema. Ahorita tengo el dinero para estudiar un año más porque ese dinero que me dan lo uso para pagar la escuela, lo invierto en mi educación. Pero si lo limitan a tres años, mi doctorado dura cinco y me faltan dos años. Necesito dinero para dedicarme al cien por ciento como hasta ahorita lo he hecho. La ayuda financiera que te dan te da libertad mental para dedicarte y estudiar. Cuando no tienes ese dinero, ¿cómo le haces? Tengo que pensar este año cómo voy a conseguir el dinero. Tengo mucha confianza en que mi mentora me va a ayudar a encontrar algo ya que llevamos varios años trabajando y me aprecia. Hay una buena relación. Pero nada es seguro hasta que lo tienes, entonces, trato de buscar otras opciones. Me gustaría que en esta universidad hubiera más ayuda para los estudiantes de doctorado como en otros lados donde pagan la colegiatura porque aquí tienes que pagarla.

When I complete my doctorate, I hope that my husband and I will have our residency so that I can apply for a job. I would like my partner and me to earn more money to have less financial difficulties because we struggle to pay for the rent and for other things; we barely make it with our income. We live well, but we limit our expenses. Something that is very important is the finances, which is my problem. Right now, I have the money to study for one more year because I use the money I get to pay for school. I invest it in my education. But if they limit it to three years, my doctorate takes five years, and I have two more years left. I need money to dedicate myself one hundred percent as I’ve done it so
far. The financial aid they give you gives you mental freedom to be dedicated and to study. And when you don't have that money, how do you do it? I have to think this year how I'm going to get the money. I'm very confident that my mentor will help me find something since we have been working for several years and she appreciates me. We have a good relationship. But nothing is certain until you have it, so I try to find other options. I would like this university to give more financial support to doctoral students, like they do in other places, where they pay for tuition, because here, you have to pay for it.

Certainly, for Andrea, having a low household budget implied being cautious in her expenses as she had to use her income to pay for tuition, too. Fortunately, Andrea felt that her mentor would be able to support her, especially that they have a good relationship after several years of working together. As international students, Andrea and her husband are investing in their education, which will pay off in the future after making some sacrifices as doctoral students and immigrants. They are certainly a testimony of strong determination and resilience.

Another participant who had some personal challenges was Blanca. She had difficulties concentrating on her academic work due to her parents’ illnesses. Blanca shared at length in her testimonio:

One of my personal challenges was having illnesses in the family. It was hard having my mother going through cancer and taking the time to be with her and take her to the hospital. It was hard completing my assignments and having my mind in my studies while I was going through that emotional turmoil. With my father, he’s still on dialysis, and his condition is stable. With my mom, it was something more serious, scary. But now, they're going on with their lives. They're getting old and I think about that, you
know. I just try to do the best that I can because working on the doctorate requires a lot of time, effort, and attention. But, at the same time, I don't want to miss being with my parents because I want to help them and give them the company that they need because I know that there’s going to be the time when they're not going to be here. I don't know if they're going to be gone before me, but still, I want to spend time with them. When you face illnesses in the family, it makes you feel that you’re running out of time. I'm just trying to balance providing and caring for them. My brothers help me, too, but I have a very strong relationship with my mom.

Fortunately, Blanca was able to remain focused once her parents’ health improved. She was able to find the balance that she needed to continue her academic pursuits and to spend time with her parents. The love that she bestowed to her parents made her think about the importance of not taking them for granted. Furthermore, Blanca had a demanding full-time job, which made her academic journey even more challenging. She explained:

The other thing is professionally; it's been the load at work; sometimes it’s been difficult to complete the assignments with the quality that I would have liked because there’s not enough time to work on my writing because of my full-time job and the demands I have in the doctorate; sometimes it’s hard to devote time to do the assignments the way I wish. What I like is that I have my job and that I can provide for my family; but we don’t get enough financial help and that’s hard. I’m not a full-time student. That’s a challenge because the program coordinator mentioned to me that I would be able to apply to some scholarships once I pass my writing proposal to be considered a full-time student, but that’s almost at the end of the program, the last year. Providing financial aid would help, especially for the students that work full-time.
Blanca emphasized the need for financial assistance because she was the only provider in her family. Therefore, she had to be very organized in her family expenses and made sure to allocate money to pay for school. Unfortunately, the lack of scholarships for part-time students was an additional challenge that Blanca encountered. Certainly, she would have liked to take advantage of the scholarship opportunities that were only offered to full-time students in her program.

Another student who encountered several personal challenges during her doctoral program was Maya. She shared in her *testimonio* that she had to overcome the pain and the solitude that she felt due to losing her five-week-old baby, her mother’s death, and the separation from her partner, experiences that made her consider leaving the doctoral program. Maya shared at length:

Decidí traerme a mi sobrinita conmigo por salud mental porque me estaba poniendo como muy amargada y necesitaba convivir o dar servicio y por eso me fui a trabajar a una secundaria. Yo que no fui madre sentí esa presión de que me arrancaron algo y viví la vida como la llorona. Fue un proceso muy doloroso. De hecho, en un cuento que escribí fue la única forma que tuve para sacar el dolor. Luego viene la muerte de mi mamá, otro dolor. Y luego fue bien amargada y sínica la relación con mi expareja. Entré a la amargura y mi única forma para desarrollar la dulzura era con los niños y con mi sobrina. Y por mis experiencias personales en el doctorado sentí un punto de que ya estuvo; entonces, cuando empiezo con el budismo, empiezo a comprender la impermanencia, que nada es para siempre, entonces, mi intelecto empieza a construir la evolución del conocimiento y de la consciencia. Quise despojarme de la soberbia y regresar al aula por mi salud mental porque los niños son bien sencillos y te dicen las cosas como son.
I decided to bring my niece with me for mental health reasons because I was becoming very bitter. I needed to live with someone or to be of service; that is why I went to work at a middle school. I couldn’t become a mother and I felt the pressure that something was ripped off from me. I lived my life as the weeping woman. It was a very painful process! In fact, in a short story that I wrote, it was the only way for me to release the pain. My mother's death came, another pain; and then, the bitter and cynical relationship with my ex-partner. I went into bitterness and the only way to develop some sweetness was through children and my niece. And due to these personal experiences, I felt like I didn’t want to continue the doctorate. And when I started with Buddhism, I began to understand the concept of impermanence; that nothing is forever. So, my intellect began to construct the evolution of knowledge and consciousness. I wanted to get rid of all my arrogance and return to the classroom for my own mental health because children are very simple and straightforward.

This excerpt shows how Maya was able to cope with the emotional turmoil due to the various excruciating experiences that she lived, which also affected her interest in completing her doctorate. Fortunately, her young niece and the students that she taught at work provided the valuable companionship that she needed during difficult times in her life. Certainly, their company may have significantly contributed in alleviating Maya’s feelings of loneliness and grief.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

The excerpts from Mari, Andrea, Blanca, and Maya highlighted the personal challenges that they encountered during their doctorate beyond academics, which were pivotal in how they experienced their doctoral journey. For Mari, Blanca, and Maya, having family members who
were ill or passed away was an overwhelming experience. Mari’s father suffered a heart attack which affected her academic performance. Nevertheless, she allocated time to be alone to write, started to exercise, to eat better, and even to work less hours in the lab. Blanca’s parents were affected by serious illnesses, which took time away from her doctoral study to take care of them. Maya considered leaving the program due to losing her unborn baby and her mother and breaking up with her partner. These unfavorable experiences deeply affected her emotionally, academically, and financially.

Without a doubt, these participants had to cope with high levels of stress and anxiety. However, they were able to balance the demands of academia and the overwhelming challenges in their personal lives. Although balance and support are a common concern amid all doctoral students (Gardner, 2007; Gardner 2008b, 2009) the balance that part-time students need to find is significantly more intense than their full-time peers, which was the case for Blanca and Maya as part-time doctoral students and full-time workers. In a study conducted by Gardner and Gopaul (2012) on part-time doctoral students form diverse disciplines, the scholars found three main themes: balance between school and home life, support from family, and fitting the mold of a traditional doctoral student.

Similar themes were found in this current study. For instance, although these four women had a huge support from their families, they still had to persist in balancing their personal and academic life. Blanca’s main support was her family, and she was cognizant that she needed more time to write and that she was not “fitting the mold” of a full-time, traditional doctoral student; in addition, she was not able to get financial assistance as a part-time student. Maya thought about leaving the program due to the several difficulties she experienced. Nevertheless, she found comfort and balance through her little nice and the children she taught at work, and
Buddhism. For Andrea, a non-traditional international student, it was stressful to think about how she would get financial support for two more years. Fortunately, Andrea and Mari were research assistants, which enabled them to have an income to pay for their tuition and other expenses. This finding is consistent with the findings in Lovitt’s (2001) and Strayhorn’s (2010) studies on persistence and retention of doctoral students due to getting assistantships. Fortunately, at the personal level, these four participants found the balance they needed to cope with the multiple adversities that life presented to them. Remarkably, they persisted against all odds and never gave up in order continue their education, as they had a clear idea of what they wanted for themselves.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings somos todos un país. Love swells in your chest and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything…You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label.” Gloria Anzaldúa

The purpose of this study was to explore the doctoral experiences of Latina women at a Hispanic-Serving institution with the following three research questions:

1. In what ways do the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender, amongst other salient identities, shape Latina students’ doctoral socialization experiences?

2. What are the support systems, if any, that Latina doctoral students utilize during the completion of the doctoral degree?

3. How do Latina doctoral students cope with academic challenges or conflicts, if any, in their doctoral programs?

I combined intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Risman, 2004; Romero 2017; Shields, 2008), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000; Delgado Bernal 1998; Calderón et al., 2012), and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) as the conceptual framework (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I framed the research questions from a critical perspective to fit the focus of the study, as I wanted to understand not only how Latina doctoral students navigated their doctoral journeys, but also how the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and race, amongst other salient identities, affected this
experience, what support systems they utilized, and ultimately, how they coped with challenges or conflicts during the completion of their program.

I employed *testimonios* as a methodological and analytical tool (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Pérez Huber, 2009) to counter the master narratives that promote the deficit views of Students of Color, which are those created and perpetuated by the dominant group, which often portray Students of Color in a negative way, something that has been a systemic barrier that has permeated higher education settings (Yosso, 2005, 2013). Therefore, countering the master narratives of People of Color is important for our/their experiences. To be effectively represented and understood through *testimonio* means that “the methodological concerns of *testimonio* are often around giving voice to silences, representing the other, reclaiming authority to narrate, and disentangling questions surrounding legitimate truth” (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 365). In addition, I explored some departmental and/or institutional practices that contributed to participants’ academic success or lack thereof during their doctoral study.

The previous chapter focused on the various inherent complexities of being a Latina doctoral student in a Hispanic-Serving institution (HSI), which are compounded by the strenuous demands of doctoral education. The participants shared their lived experiences with strength, vulnerability, success, determination, resiliency, ingenuity, doubt, inspiration, anger, isolation, and much more through their doctoral journey. The intersection of the participants’ identities was most prevalent when they shared instances of the lack of cultural sensitivity, discrimination and/or biases from advisors, mentors, faculty and/or peers in their doctoral programs. Furthermore, they also had to navigate their new academic roles in conjunction with their cultural roles at home. Despite this, the participants were able to find guidance and support from
family, peers, faculty advisors, other faculty, and, for some, institutional and departmental resources.

Most of the participants’ doctoral experiences shaped their actions and views, leading them to become more vocal as a form of resistance, especially when they encountered discrimination, biases, and oppression in their academic environment. Unfortunately, some of the participants endured serious obstacles, from personal ones to academic and systemic ones. Regardless of these obstacles, all the participants persisted and were successfully completing the academic when they shared their testamento and looked forward to continuing their doctoral study for new possibilities in the future.

In this final chapter, I address the findings aligned with the theoretical perspective used to frame this study, intersectionality and LatCrit, which lead into a discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature. I conclude my dissertation with implications for future research as well as practice. My findings demonstrate that while this study is a contribution to the literature on Latina doctoral students, there is a need for further research to examine the academic socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students and how the intersections of their multiple identities shape their doctoral experiences. Finally, I will remind readers of the limitations of the study and conclude with some final remarks.

**Discussion of the Study Related to Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory**

It is important to note that, over the past twenty years, the field of Critical Race Theory in Education (CRT), as well as Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), has produced emerging research describing the doctoral experiences of Latinas in higher education (González, 2006; Flores & García, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, 2001; Yosso 2013). Even though this area of
study has been slowly growing, the voices of Latinas in doctoral education are gradually being heard. Therefore, this study adds to the emerging literature in this field, as it focuses on the lived experiences of 14 Latina doctoral students in a Hispanic-Serving institution.

In this study, LatCrit was integral to the research design. As discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, LatCrit emphasizes the necessity of taking other identities and aspects of Latinx people into consideration when exploring their lived experiences. LatCrit adds to Critical Race Theory by challenging a binary view of race and racism that is limited to a Black/White experience, as well as by exploring the layers of racialized subordination that comprise Latinx experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). It is noteworthy to emphasize that gender is not a central tenet in the definition of Critical Race Theory; while it is mentioned when CRT discusses the significance of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), there is not a specific enough focus on gender that acknowledges the importance of gender equally with race. This dissertation makes a significant contribution in this area, as gender is a key component of my analysis, and my study directly addresses this gap in the existing literature. In this study, I implemented Solórzano’s and Delgado Bernal (2001) five themes for utilizing a LatCrit framework in education, which I will discuss below and how this current study contributes to LatCrit scholarship.

**The Centrality of Race, Racism, and Intersectionality**

Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality as:

The experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized with both (Crenshaw, 1991, pp.1243-1244).
Additionally, Riesman (2004) views intersectionality in relation to feminist work, which emphasizes that one must always consider the various forms of historical oppression. Therefore, in order to best understand the doctoral experiences of Latinas, the first research question of this study focused on how the intersections of their identities shaped their academic journey. In this study, I wanted to explore how the participants spoke about their experiences in relation to their race, ethnicity, gender, language, amongst other salient identities, always keeping in mind that LatCrit goes well beyond just considerations of race. Through the examination of these Latina women’s testimonios, there were many instances of how the intersections of their identities affected their doctoral experiences, whether the participant acknowledged it or not. As I analyzed the data through the lens of LatCrit, I was able to not only focus on their race, but also their ethnicity, gender, language, age, sexuality, religion, marital status, and immigration status to make sense of their experiences. Therefore, this study contributes to LatCrit scholarship by strengthening the importance of focusing at the intersection of identities to get a better understanding of the participants’ lived experiences and behaviors during their doctoral journey.

**The Challenge to Dominant Ideology**

Solórzano (2002) stated that Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 123). Moreover, Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars have developed ways to counter traditional research paradigms that have led to a more complete understanding of the lived experiences of Students of Color in higher education (Pérez Huber, 2009). Additionally, countering the master narratives became a powerful tool to challenge their exclusion in academia, thus shedding light
on the ways racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other structures of oppression function within educational institutions (Pérez Huber, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

**The Commitment to Social Justice**

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) stated the following (p. 485):

Women of color in the academy are not commonplace; we are an aberration- outliers. We often ask ourselves, how is it that I “arrived” when so many others like me haven’t? Will someone discover that a mistake was made, and I don’t really belong here? How long will it take for “them” to realize that I am an impostor, an “other,” I’m not one of them?

As such, this study focuses on a population that has not been as frequently researched or represented in the academy. Furthermore, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) envision a social justice research agenda that could lead toward “the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and the empowering of underrepresented minority groups” (p. 313). Therefore, I used testimonios, a critical race method, in order to provide the Latina doctoral students in the study the opportunity to share their lived experiences, which they may have never been given the opportunity to share before.

Hence, this study contributes to the research literature by providing further awareness on the personal and academic experiences of Latina doctoral students in a Hispanic-Serving Institution, an important contribution to the literature, as most research on Latinx students has been conducted in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) where there is a scarcity of Students of Color (Bañuelos, 2006; Burciaga, 2007; Espinoza, 2001; Gardner & Holley, 2011; González, 2006; Gusa, 2010; Maton et al., 2011; Moyer et al., 1999; Pecero, 2016; Sue et al., 2007; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Watford et al., 2006).
THE CENTRALITY OF EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

It has been noted in the literature that women occupy lower ranks in the academy than do men, and that Latinas are particularly underrepresented, and that they encounter structural inequities as doctoral students and within the professorate that men do not. According to Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002), Faculty of Color are concentrated in academic departments that usually have fewer resources and are considered less prominent and prestigious, such as education, the social sciences, women’s and gender studies, ethnic studies, and the humanities. Furthermore, Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) argue that this stratification has some substantial repercussions on the forms of knowledge that are produced within the academy and what is considered “legitimate” knowledge within these spaces. Consequently, several scholars have advocated for the need to create more research that acknowledges and validates the knowledge that is produced by People of Color through the use of critical race methods, such as testimonios (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Pérez Huber, 2009).

As LatCrit highlights the importance and value of experiential knowledge from Latinx people, in this study, the experiential knowledge was applied in two ways. First, I used my own cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) by using my own experience as a Latina doctoral student and the participants’ personal experiences, including reading the overarching literature concerning this topic and integrating that into the design and analysis of the study. Therefore, this study adds to the existing literature by elucidating how a researcher’s cultural intuition can facilitate producing research on issues regarding Students of Color and other marginalized populations as well as providing a more nuanced analysis of the data. Second, the experiential knowledge was present in this study through the participants’ testimonios.
This study contributes to the increasing body of literature that has utilized critical race methods, such as testimonios and other forms of counter-narratives. Many of the participants had never done a testimonio before and some mentioned that it was a time of reflection about their past and current experiences, which was a form of therapy and healing when they narrated their experiences. Therefore, this study demonstrates the need to employ LatCrit methods, such as testimonios, in order to gain a better understanding on the experiences of Latinas and other marginalized communities as a valuable opportunity for reflection and healing.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

The literature in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 focused on the historical context of doctoral education for Latinas in the United States, with the purpose of building a foundation to understand some of the systemic barriers they have encountered within the educational system. Sadly, these inequities continue to permeate the academic world. Therefore, using interdisciplinary methods can better help inform research on Students of Color, particularly by engaging in research analysis that includes their voices in a historical as well as contemporary context (Solórzano, 1998). As this study focused on the historical context of Latinas in the educational system (as described in Chapter 1 and 2), the findings illustrate how the participants’ past experiences shape the way they approach their current academic endeavors. Furthermore, the findings of this study also illustrated how the participants shared similar experiences across different STEM and non-STEM fields. Therefore, the study recognizes the value in utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to research. In conclusion, this research study strengthens the significance of the five tenets described above that make up CRT and contributes to LatCrit scholarship and research methods. The findings reveal that the use of testimonios was significant when conducting research on Latina doctoral students.
A Recapitulation of the Most Preponderant Findings

The theoretical framework that was used to guide this study, LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Epistemology and intersectionality helped to shape the type of design that this study would take and informed some of the nuances in the analysis of findings, to emphasize the importance of discussing race, ethnicity, gender, language, amongst other salient identities when examining the lived experiences of the participants. As seen in Chapter 4, there were many themes that emerged when addressing the three research questions of the study. Additionally, most of the literature review in Chapter 2 focused on the importance of academic socialization for Students of Color and other marginalized student populations during the doctorate, as it was essential to build a foundation for the experiences that Latina students face in higher education, and how these experiences may or may not shape their willingness to continue persisting in their educational pursuits.

There were many findings in this study that align with previous research literature on Latinas in graduate studies as well as new themes that have emerged. This section will focus on the areas of the literature that were more pertinent to my findings and explore how they were or were not aligned to the findings in previous research. These sections of the literature will include the most prominent findings identified in Chapter 4, based on the three research questions. In order to better understand the participants’ experiences within their doctoral program in this study, it was crucial to consider how their multiple identities impacted the doctoral experience by not focusing on one aspect of their identity (i.e., not just race, gender, sexuality, or class), thereby ignoring other realities that also played a significant role in how they navigated the doctoral trajectory (Crenshaw, 1991). As such, the first research question in the study focused on the various identities that Latina doctoral students bring with them and how their identities
shaped the doctoral experience. Through the participants’ testimonios four major themes emerged for each research question, which were analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4. In the following section, the most predominant findings will be briefly discussed.

**RACISM, MICRO-AGGRESSIONS, AND OTHER BIASES**

Understanding the effects of racism and other forms of inequality and discrimination that are usually hidden and yet, systemic in nature is of utmost importance when analyzing the educational experiences of marginalized populations. In this study, three participants from STEM fields (Mari, Socorro, and Sally) and five participants from non-STEM fields (Bella, Margarita, Maya, Emilia, and Ana) experienced similar challenges, such as gender discrimination, biases, stereotypes, and racism (Blackburn, 2017; Pierce, 1995; Walton et al., 2015) and/or subtle insults, such as daily microaggressions to overt discouragement (Barthelemy et al., 2016), which increased their feelings of isolation, disappointment, and lack of sense of belonging. This was in addition to the stress already caused by the demands involved in pursuing a doctoral degree (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009).

There is extensive literature that has noted that students’ sense of belonging improves satisfaction, retention, and completion, which is crucial for students to feel safe and valued in order to flourish personally, psychologically, and academically (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Jaekel, 2017; Museus et al., 2017; O'Keefee, 2013; Parker III, 2021; Stebleton et al., 2014). Furthermore, experiences of bias and discrimination are highly detrimental to the sense of belonging of Students of Color (Hussain & Jones, 2021), which was also detrimental for the participants of this current study. Moreover, the intersection of their multiple identities made their doctoral trajectory even more challenging. Nevertheless, they were able to cope with such oppressive behaviors and navigated their doctoral journey with indomitable determination,
resistance, and resilience. Certainly, these women represent the new *mestiza* consciousness (Anzaldúa 1987; Keating, 2006) as they were critically aware of their own marginalized realities and oppression and opted to resist by utilizing their own agency (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) to continue their academic pursuits. Most importantly, they never gave up in spite of the several unfavorable obstacles that they had to endure as Latina doctoral students.

**OVERCOMING CHALLENGES WITH FACULTY MEMBERS AND/OR PEERS**

Five of the participants, Emilia, Andrea, Eva, Julieta, and Mari had challenging experiences with professors that affected their doctoral trajectories in different ways. They resisted their academic socialization and some uncomfortable and unprofessional behaviors and/or expectations from their professors, as well. González (2006) defined socialization as holding the expectation that students fit the same mold, and that mold was centered on a White masculinist middle-class model, which can be highly disempowering for women and Students of Color. These participants were expected to emulate and embrace academic ways of thinking and teaching that inhibited their experiences, perspectives, and academic voices. However, they felt empowered by opting to be “politically savvy” (González, 2006, p. 360) when resisting such academic socialization to avoid further conflictive interactions with their professors and/or peers. Even though each participant had a different experience, they were able to navigate academia by being exceptionally determined, resilient, and focused to continue their educational pursuits, and above all, “politically savvy.”

**RESISTANCE TO EUROCENTRISM THROUGH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

All the participants had a deep connection to their cultural roots, which significantly impacted what it meant for them to be Latina and how it shaped their personal and academic socialization experiences. Bella, Andrea, Maya, Blanca, Verónica, Ana, Eva, Margarita, and
Emilia enacted their *latinidad* through their heritage language and their ethnic/racial identities with conviction and pride. For instance, Verónica, Ana, and Emilia wanted multicultural curricula to balance the Eurocentric curricula in their doctoral program. The *testimonios* of these participants showed how they resisted the dominant ideologies that have historically marginalized and excluded Students of Color in higher education institutions. They were determined to not assimilate into the mainstream American culture by maintaining and using their Spanish language in academic contexts, as they considered it an asset for their academic advancement that also influenced their *orgullo latino*. Indeed, these participants aimed at decolonizing the structures of White power and privilege in academia. Moreover, the intersections of their various identities played a crucial role in how they socialized and navigated their doctoral degree by promoting their native language, culture, and a deep sense of solidarity toward People of Color and other marginalized populations.

**STRESS BETWEEN ACADÉMIA AND THEIR CULTURE AND/OR HOME**

Anzaldúa’s (1990, 2000) concept of “in-betweenness” or *nepantla* can occur when Latina women feel that they do not belong in various spaces or feel as if they are living in a “third space.” For six of the participants in this study, entering a doctoral program enabled these feelings, especially for Sally and Bella, as they had to leave their homes to continue their education. However, for the participants, *nepantla* was also an opportunity for personal growth, greater awareness of the world, and a pathway to positive change (Anzaldua, 1990, 2000); they were also able to learn from the hostile experiences that they encountered in their programs. These women navigated academia and their home culture through their own agency and embraced the “third space.” They maintained and celebrated their cultural values, traditions, and language and felt proud of being Latinas.
Grappling with Imposter Syndrome and Self-Doubt

This section emphasized a major similarity amongst the participants, which encompassed feeling like an imposter or feelings of self-doubt. While all the participants spoke about imposter syndrome at some point, Eva, Margarita, Ana, Sally, Andrea, Verónica, Socorro, Blanca, and Bella exemplify how their various identities, being a woman, Latina, first-generation college student (except Andrea), and an immigrant, were major sources in the manifestation of imposter syndrome. Even though this phenomenon is not new (Clance & Imes, 1978), these findings illustrate how intersecting marginalized identities can cause a higher possibility of experiencing those feelings, particularly when pursuing an academically intense endeavor, such a doctoral degree.

The Importance of Good Mentorship

For seven of the participants, their mentors showed empathy, patience, and compassion, qualities that were seen as indispensable in their mentors for their academic advancement. Indeed, such emotional connection aided to counter the negative experiences and challenges that the participants had to deal with during their doctoral study. Such support also made them feel that they belonged in their programs and within their Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1999). Fortunately, the seven participants received both career/instrumental and emotional and psychological support that contributed to their academic success and persistence (Ramírez & Mirande, 2015). They received unconditional support from their advisors/mentors that were culturally responsive to their needs as Latina doctoral students. Fortunately, several faculty advisors/mentors or faculty in this study made a positive impact in the lives of these Latina students by providing unconditional personal and academic guidance. Most notably, they also
served as role models for these seven women, specifically for those who may wish to continue the path of academia.

**Navigating the Need of Better Mentorship**

The findings of this study are analogous to Benishek’s (2004) work, in that many models of mentorship are directive and hierarchical, which was exactly the style of mentoring that eight of the participants received. This model was problematic for the participates, as it is based on masculinist models of development, paternalistic ideologies, and one-size fits all style of mentorship, which can be problematic and detrimental, particularly for People of Color and women (Benishek, 2004). Indeed, Margarita, Mari, Bella, Sunshine, Maya, Blanca, Julieta, and Sally suffered the consequences of such inefficient model of mentorship, which impeded them to thrive as doctoral students. It is probable that these eight participants could have flourished more as doctoral students if they had received a multicultural feminist model of mentorship, which accentuates building relationships based on collaboration and open communication amongst mentee and mentor, thus, empowering the mentee with the emotional support that is needed to succeed in academia (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006).

**Family and Peers as Major Support Systems**

Family is the most important aspect in the social organization of Latinxs (Macias-Wycoff, 1996). Even though all the participants spoke about the importance of family relationships and support during their doctoral programs, seven of them had very strong ties with their families, as they maintained a home culture characterized by strong relationships within the family members through mutual respect and consideration for their parents (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006). Julieta and Emilia showed a lot of gratitude, respect, and admiration for their mothers due to their continuous support and unconditional love before and during the doctoral journey.
Andrea, Socorro, Verónica, and Ana maintained open and respectful relationships with their spouses and children as well as their extended family members, as they were able to understand their personal and academic needs as doctoral students.

Certainly, these seven women serve as a counternarrative of the stereotypes that permeate the Latinx culture; namely that men are providers and women are homemakers. These participants provided a counterstory by sharing the way in which their husbands, parents, and/or children strongly supported their educational endeavors. Therefore, these findings not only reinforce findings from previous studies on the central role of family for Latinxs (Espinoza, 2010; Rudolph et al., 2011), but these findings also challenge the master narratives that portray Latinx families as not being supportive or involved in the educational pursuits of their children (Yosso, 2013).

**Getting Support from Peers**

In this current study, the seven participants provided psychosocial functions to each other, such as empathy, supportiveness, communication skills, and trustworthiness, which were significant for the participants’ academic socialization, persistence, and success as Students of Color (Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Twale et al., 2016). These seven women created social networks that played an important role in their academic socialization, which contributed to their persistence and intellectual growth (Greene, 2015). They relied on their peers and friends to find ways to cope with the stress, challenges, and the high demands involved in pursuing a doctorate.

**Heartbreak during the PhD**

In Hyun’s (2009) study on coping strategies among women doctoral students in relation to their marriages, the findings revealed that being married and in a doctoral program affected participants’ marriages and marital dynamics. Similar findings were found in this current study.
as Emilia, Eva, Maya, and Sally’s primary relationships deteriorated while they were pursuing their doctorate. In another dissertation study that looked at the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students studying in a mental health field, Jones (2017) found two major themes that affected marriage dynamics. The first was lack of time and the second was the need for more quality time. These two themes also emerged in this current study when participants spoke about their spouses or partners. Unfortunately, having partners who did not understand the participants’ academic goals, as well as their partners’ machismo made these women feel emotionally unstable and disillusioned. Unfortunately, heartbreak was an additional challenge for these Latina women; however, they were able to stay strong and continue the doctoral trajectory with persistence.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE AND POLICY**

The importance of doctoral students’ success has been demonstrated with proper mentorship programs, which provide students with personal, psychological, and professional support during doctoral studies (Lewinski et al., 2017). Doctoral programs need to be more thoughtful about how doctoral students need to navigate the academy successfully besides training them to become educators and researchers, as illustrated through the testimonios of various participants in this study. Doctoral degrees are designed as an apprenticeship process to produce future researchers and professors and students need to be taught how to succeed in academe. Based on the findings of this study, a few recommendations for institutions, graduate programs, faculty, staff, and students emerged. First and foremost, all of the participants spoke about navigating the need of better mentorship experiences with their advisors and/or mentors in their respective programs.

The first recommendation orbits around advising and mentoring of Latina doctoral students. As mentioned in Chapter 4, most research will advocate the need for mentorship
programs for Students of Color, and in this case, for Latina doctoral students (e.g., Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2016; Garcia & Henderson, 2015). While the importance of mentorship was evident for the participants in this study, a major finding was that the advisors/mentors of six of the participants in this study were responsive to their mentees’ unique experiences and needs; however, the other eight participants had advisors and/or mentors who did not provide good mentorship, which unfortunately affected their academic progress and success. Fostering a productive mentor/mentee relationship is indeed more complex than it may seem. As it depends on various factors, such as working styles, personality differences, shared research interests, open and honest communication around expectations from both sides, as well as organizational styles. Therefore, having a better understanding of how to negotiate these relationships is crucial in empowering graduate students to foster respectful and more fruitful relationships with their advisors and/or mentors.

Additionally, doctoral programs need to be more thoughtful about how doctoral students need to navigate the academy successfully besides training them to become educators and researchers, as illustrated by various participants in this study. Doctoral degrees are designed as an apprenticeship process to produce future researchers and professors, students need to be taught how to succeed in academe. They need to understand the importance of developing fruitful relationships with faculty mentors, how to navigate the academic milestones before candidacy, how to obtain funding through fellowships and grants, and how to teach courses effectively. Additionally, doctoral students may also advocate for themselves and be empowered by understanding what kind of support they can realistically ask for from their advisors/mentors in order to meet their academic needs. Interestingly, the problematic advisors/mentors in this study were male White and Latino faculty members, thus, through these recommendations,
faculty members can learn effective skills and strategies that are deemed crucial for successful mentorship experiences with graduate students, particularly underrepresented students, such as Latinas. Therefore, centered on previous literature on mentoring and on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided based on the participants’ need of better mentorship:

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<tr>
<th>Participants’ testimonios (names are pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Department/Doctoral Program Mentorship</th>
<th>Institutional Policy on Mentorship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julieta (psychology):</td>
<td>*Some items are repeated based on the participant’s testimonio.</td>
<td>❖ The Office of Academic Affairs and Graduate School will collaborate with doctoral program directors to ensure that the course, <em>Demystifying Academia for Doctoral Students’ Success</em>, is implemented and included in the degree plan of each doctoral program. Students must take this course during their second or third year in the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“One of my favorite classes in the program prepared me for the job market once I complete my doctorate. It offered me the tools to learn to develop the proper academic socialization skills and abilities that the professoriate requires of doctoral students. The professor explained from her our own experiences what to do and what not to do and I think that's very important. Part of what people leave behind is what not to do. There are unspoken rules; so, I think the program made clearer when they have the PhD students, what the rules are. The professors are resourceful and that’s another good characteristic of the program.”</td>
<td>❖ Each college will be responsible for creating a mandatory course called, <em>Demystifying Academia for Doctoral Students’ Success</em> to ensure students’ academic advancement. This course will be taught by experienced faculty members who have also been successful in mentoring Students of Color.</td>
<td>❖ <strong>Offer First Year Career Exploration Seminars</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think it's more of an academic experience issue, where he is a great researcher and professor, but he is new to mentoring. And I think that's one of the reasons that lack of support happened. It's a learning process on both sides. He's inexperienced in mentoring students. I don’t like the way he approaches things. I don’t understand [him]! I would like him to be more straightforward and apply himself more when mentoring me. It is politics; but then, if you mean something, you should stick to what you mean. It is not trying to manage the numbers of students but focusing more on the quality of mentoring; put more effort into those people!”</td>
<td>❖ Faculty members who have more experience in teaching and mentoring can train students to teach and mentor in order to gain experience in</td>
<td>Graduate School can offer one mandatory professional development workshop per academic year providing informed and strategic choices about future career paths for doctoral students (academia, research, administration, industry, community engagement, etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I think that's an accomplishment because of the experience that I had when one of my projects was criticized by the professor because it touched cultural values that some people don't believe in, such as *machismo* and *marianismo* in the Latino culture. I had that negative experience with one of the faculty members in my program. He showed lack of respect towards me by scorning me during the presentation. He didn't like what I said. I think transparency is also a good thing, what the faculty member said to me in front of my face, but maybe without everyone in the room being present; and to say it publicly, in front of everyone, that was a humiliation to me. It's all about respect!”

**Margarita (education):**

“But I would like to change my current relationship with my dissertation chair and mentor, whom I was once so close to and highly respected. I assumed that things would be the same and that assumption has not made this as rewarding. I wish it could have been! But a few things have happened in my mentor’s professional life regarding not getting his tenure that made him become very disconnected from the students. He has a lot of anger and because of that anger, he's not very helpful. I'm starting to wonder if I'm even going to make it through with him because he's just not there for me. I feel very disconnected from him. Now that I'm ready to turn something in for my proposal, I need to tell him, “Look, I really worked hard on this, and I know that you're going to tear it apart but understand that I've never done this before.” So, if I could change that, I think I would be a happier doctoral student…I'm not sure if I'm fulfilling my mentor’s expectations due to the deterioration of our relationship. I would have already finished the degree if my mentor and my department had offered more academic support…All that has to be negotiated upfront and I think that that was my mistake; that I didn't negotiate enough or negotiate well.”

**Mari – Biology:**

“I feel like I’m never going to fulfill my mentor’s expectations. He has been too demanding and expects me to do several things at once. I’m not only frustrated but burned-out. I was already doing something else in the lab and he's like, “So when are you going to do this?” I was like, “What do you want me to do first? I can’t do all of these two crucial areas.

- Create some guiding principles about the best ways to provide feedback when faculty members, mentors/advisors are not in agreement with the information that students share in class, presentations, or conferences. The principles should emphasize the importance of valuing diverse points of view and respecting students in private as well as public settings. Students will also adhere to these principles when in disagreement with faculty members/mentors.

- Create a Mentor/Mentee contract that stipulates clear expectations for both the Mentor-Mentee, with a clause that will allow both parties to end the mentorship before it becomes toxic for either the Mentor or Mentee.

- Provide seminars and support by Peer Mentors who

- Academic Affairs can implement mandatory Culturally Relevant and Responsive Mentorship workshops targeted at new and less experienced faculty members in mentoring Students of Color.

- Create a handbook of successful best practices in mentorship containing the following topics and implement one annual mandatory workshop to train all faculty members/mentors (experienced and inexperienced) on the following areas in the manual:
  - How a Mentor should engage students in conversations
  - Demystifying graduate school for students
  - Providing constructive and supportive feedback (before and post-candidacy)
  - Providing encouragement
  - Fostering multiple mentors and networks (Peer Mentor, Faculty Mentor, Professional Mentor, and/or Alumni Mentor).
  - Looking out for students’ personal and academic interests
  - Thinking about students’ mentoring needs
  - Treating students with respect and consideration

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of them at the same time... he doesn't take into consideration that you still have a lot of other stuff to do; that you still have to train people. I feel like I'm never going to meet those expectations because I don't have eight arms... I would like to change my mentor; however, due to the complexity of my dissertation project, I will have to remain working with him until I complete my doctorate; if it wouldn't have a negative impact on my career, I would change my mind. I'm exhausted!"

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"One of the most difficult classes was immunology and the professor was always unwilling to help me when I had questions related to the course. I was kind of shot down by the professor and when I went to ask him for help during class, he was kind of like, "Don't come to ask me." So, when I went to his office and asked him, he told me, "I don't have time." In my experience, some faculty needs to be more supportive and sensitive to the students’ needs. They need to remember when they were doctoral students. I think they forgot that they went through a lot of stuff. I guess they didn't have good mentors or were not supportive. They forget that they were in our shoes at some point and that we have to struggle, too. It's been hard!"

Bella (psychology):

“I'm pretty sure [that] he (ex-mentor) was just incompetent in his statistics. But it's hard for faculty to admit it. There have been several mental obstacles, obviously, but also mentor obstacles. I felt less confident when he expected me to know things I did not know or acted like he was talking down to me. It seemed he knew more than I did without really explaining to me what exactly he wanted from me. I like to do things in a timely manner, and I noticed that I just needed structure to write and organization. He made me feel less confident.”

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“I had to endure tough conversations with my ex-mentor, telling him what was wrong, giving him possible solutions, basically directing at him his lack of mentorship and competency and his lack of being able to train other mentees... He didn't know what he was doing as a mentor and I got a sense that he was not a good fit for me at the end of my first semester; and I wanted to change mentors from the beginning. I just didn't know how; there's limited faculty, so I just brushed it off. He's just incompetent and he was putting his

are advanced in their program about how to navigate the doctoral journey successfully.

❖ Create a Mentor/Mentee contract that stipulates clear expectations for both the Mentor-Mentee, with a clause that will allow both parties to end the mentorship before it becomes toxic for either the Mentor or Mentee.

❖ Provide seminars and support by Peer Mentors who are advanced in their program about how to navigate the doctoral journey successfully.

❖ Create a group of faculty members from different disciplines to serve as Faculty Ambassadors with the main goal of providing emotional/psychological and administrative support to faculty members that are experiencing personal and/or professional difficulties (i.e., tenure-track challenges, conflicting relations with colleagues/administrators/ students, divorce, death in the family, etc.).

❖ Provide one annual mandatory workshop for all faculty members/mentors (inexperienced and experienced) led by experienced faculty members who have also been successful in mentoring Students of Color on the following topics:

❖ Providing a personal touch (empathy, understanding, compassion) for the mentee’s well-being and academic success.

❖ Promoting and maintaining cultural sensitivity when dealing with underrepresented
priorities above anybody else's because he wants to get tenure and to focus on his publications.”

**Sunshine (engineering):**

“When I entered the PhD program, my advisor did not like that I laughed and joked with everybody. He blames me for laughing too much! He’s really good with the other two Latina students and with me, he isn’t the best; when they make an error, he tells them, “Oh, you made an error, you just need to fix it,” but when I don’t do something right, he tells me, “How could you not have seen it?” He makes a big deal with me, but when he speaks to the other students, he’s calmer. My second semester as a doctoral student, I think that my mentor considered me too immature to be in the program. It escalated to the point that he was going to terminate me…he apologized to me saying that he was wrong and that he would keep me.”

**Maya (education):**

“…He replied in the last comment that he sent me that he felt mistreated by me because I missed an appointment…My ex-advisor sent me a message where he wrote, “I feel humiliated by you and by your poor writing. I’m tired of your poor writing and I have a witness to show it.” And I received the message as a way of telling me that he no longer wanted to be my doctoral advisor. And I said to myself, enough, that’s it, thank you! …When you leave the role of being oppressed, you start liberating the oppressor, too.”

***********

And, you know, I didn’t like the fact that I would do all my research and that he [ex-advisor] was going to put his name because he tends to say that we’re going to collaborate, and then, he puts his name on the publication. He’s within a power system, and unfortunately, he’s reproducing that system.”

**Blanca (education):**

“Also, a peer and I wrote a paper in Spanish and then translated into English; and he (ex-advisor) wanted me to send it to him and publish it as first author. A peer and I reflected on this and decided that we were not going to send it to him because we did all the work, not him. I think that the fact that he gave me a low grade for the course was a form of retaliation because I didn’t send him the

| Mentor/Mentee (contract included below). | Doctoral Programs will aid students in fostering multiple mentors and networks (Peer Mentor, Faculty Mentor, Professional Mentor, and/or Alumni Mentor). |
| Form a Doctoral Student Council in charge of informing doctoral program chairs and directors about students’ issues with faculty members/faculty advisors and/or mentors to find possible solutions through open dialogue for the benefit of both parties. Each college must nominate a doctoral student to serve for a period of two years and create a contract that stipulates the students’ specific duties as members of the Doctoral Student Council (conduct, integrity, two-year commitment, confidentiality issues, responsibilities, etc.) |
| Create a mandatory student (mentee) training upon acceptance into the program on the following topics: |
| • Working with Faculty - Advisors, Supervisors, Dissertation Chairs, and Mentors |
| • Why You Need Multiple Mentors? |
| • Understanding Faculty/(Mentor) Roles and Responsibilities |
| • Understanding Student/(Mentee) Roles and Responsibilities |
| • Developing Clear Expectations with your Advisor, Mentor, Dissertation Chair |
| students and/or first-generation students. | Create seminars and support by Peer Mentors who are advanced in their program about how to navigate the doctoral journey successfully. |
| Create a Mentor/Mentee contract that stipulates clear expectations for both the Mentor-Mentee, with a clause that will allow either parties to end the mentorship before it becomes toxic for either the Mentor/Mentee (contract included below). |
He was the one who suggested me to be my dissertation chair. I submitted my case for grievance, but nothing happened. He sent me a derogatory email telling me that I was irresponsible and wrote that I actually deserved a D and since he was a “good person,” that he gave me a C for the course. He even accused me of affecting his relationship with a professor in the program, which was something that he made up and was absolutely ridiculous! I also wrote him an email defending my points of view regarding his negative behavior toward me. I think that the program, not the faculty, should be more involved in helping students choose their advisors or dissertation chairs based on their research interests, personality, and academic paths. He has too much power and it seems that he does what he wants without taking into consideration the doctoral program policies.”

Sally (engineering):

“My advisor wanted me to do a topic that I didn’t want to work on for my dissertation and a committee of six members, which to me unnecessary and didn’t make sense at all. The pandemic affected my study as we couldn’t go to Mexico to get our samples. I lost a lot of time trying to get the samples; but we couldn’t, due to the pandemic and the required approvals from the university due to all the issues of insecurity and violence in Mexico. Also, I didn’t like the environment in my program. There was a student who made things more difficult for me and I just was not willing to continue my doctoral program because I was also having personal challenges that made me realize that I just needed to leave the doctoral program for a while for my own mental health and well-being. I left the program in Fall 2019, and I just returned this year. My new mentor is a white man who I know since I was in my master’s degree. I used to talk with him about different topics. He has a lot of experience in his area of study. The fact that he already has tenure makes things less stressful because he’s not obsessed with producing research to publish, which was my ex-mentor’s priority. When he knew that I was moving to North Carolina, he told me if I wanted to work with him. He’s helping me to finish my dissertation on a topic that I’m really interested in. It’s on global warming in urban islands.”

 documentos de la imagen.
Doctoral Programs will aid students in fostering multiple mentors and networks (Peer Mentor, Faculty Mentor, Professional Mentor, and/or Alumni Mentor).

Doctoral programs will work with faculty members to offer professional development early in the doctoral program so that students would be able to make informed and strategic choices about their future career paths (i.e., EL3 Lab Coloquios led by the TLC Doctoral Program in the College of Education).

The colleges will work with the Provost Office to establish training programs for all faculty on mentoring URMs, first-generation, and low socioeconomic students.

Discuss the following Setting Goals and Expectations list. Doctoral students will be required to provide a copy of the topics that were discussed from the list to the doctoral program coordinator to include it on their Annual Progress Reports. The topics are:

- Choosing appropriate courses
- Networking with others in your program or academic community
- Turning research into publications – developing and submitting the manuscript, responding to reviewers, etc.
- Developing a preliminary dissertation topic and proposal
- Developing protocols for the IRB for mentees’ research
- Developing a dissertation topic and proposal
- Developing and practicing research presentation skills
- Forming and communicating with dissertation committee
- Preparing presentations and/or posters for professional meetings
- Finding appropriate TA and RA opportunities
- Discussing job options and preparing for the job market
- Applying for funding, as appropriate
- Brainstorming ideas for time management
- Finding other mentors to help with topics that are their strengths
This research illustrates the impact of mentorship in Research Intensive Institutions. A Holley and Caldwell (2012) study on the effectiveness on the mentor relationship underlined the significance of carefully selecting faculty members that can serve as mentors for doctoral students. Hence, providing guided and effective mentorship to doctoral students and through the use of multiple effective methods, doctoral programs could be better equipped to support Latinas and other minorities thus, ensuring their success in academia. This dissertation adds to the emergent research on the mentorship experiences for Latina doctoral students, as it gives voice to some of the successful as well as detrimental mentorship experiences they came across, as well as various useful recommendations of how effective mentorship practices can be implemented by doctoral programs, departments, and institutions. Indeed, the forms of doctoral socialization directly impact the presence of Latina doctoral students and Latina faculty in the academy, especially in Research Intensive Institutions.

As previously discussed, Latinas are vastly underrepresented within these academic spaces, particularly in graduate programs, which also impacts the experiences of first-generation students, immigrant students, and Students of Color. Certainly, having Latina professors and Latinas as faculty mentors and role models has a positive effect in the doctoral students’ sense of belonging (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Jaekel, 2017; O'Keefie, 2013; Parker, III, 2021; Pascarella &
Terenzini, 2005; Stebleton et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2012). Moreover, having faculty members who can understand their struggles may provide the support they need to navigate their doctoral programs more successfully. As Research Intensive Institutions are sites of knowledge production, the presence of Latinas within these academic spaces highly affects what kind of research is produced, including whose narratives and voices are shared and represented.

By implementing mentorship programs as previously specified in the table of recommendations, faculty mentors who have been successful in mentoring Students of Color can share their perspectives on their mentorship experiences with other faculty mentors to learn how they approach and practice mentorship and how they became effective advisors/mentors. As such, their stories may potentially offer models on strategic mentorship interventions at the institutional level to ensure that these student populations are empowered in order to navigate the challenges or conflicts that may arise and that sometimes turn their academic socialization hostile, as evidenced in the advisor-advisee, or mentor-mentee relationships for eight participants in the study.

This research has made an important contribution in adding to the research literature on the experiences of Latina doctoral students and the importance of mentorship at the doctoral level. Unfortunately, this field is slowly developing in even though it is an essential component for the success of graduate students. During the data collection and writing of this dissertation, the testimonios of my participants inspired me to create the Doctoral Women Organization (DWO) at Southwest University. This organization was a safe space for doctoral women to network and socialize personally and academically as well as to offer support when deemed necessary, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. We invited female faculty/administrators and doctoral graduates to share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences. This organization
was successful in providing support and motivation to doctoral women, which may have influenced their academic persistence and resilience. However, I realized that, in order to make a larger impact, it will be necessary to include people from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, this institution would greatly benefit by establishing a Center for Mindfulness, Persistence, and Resilience (e.g., Center for Mindfulness, Compassion and Resilience at Arizona State University) with the main purpose of building healthier academic communities by assisting and empowering undergraduate and graduate students through support systems that promote and sustain students’ well-being and mental health (e.g., Cash et al., 2021; Huerta et al., 2021; Nita, 2019; Passmore, 2019; Town, 2019).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were several limitations that arose in this study, as with all research. The major limitation was the breakdown of the disciplines of study for the participants. Although I attempted to recruit participants from various STEM disciplines, I was able to recruit only three students from the same field in engineering and one from biology. However, it would have been more informative if I had included Latina students who were enrolled in diverse STEM fields, such as electrical or mechanical engineering, civil engineering, chemistry, physics, and computer science, as I was interested in understanding the experiences of Latina doctoral students in fields where there has been and still there is a low number of women enrolled, particularly Latinas. Therefore, future research should focus on the experiences of Latinas in STEM doctoral programs, as research has found that Latina doctoral students in STEM must demonstrate that they are as capable as their male peers and usually experience isolation and lack of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2015). Due to the scarce number of women in some STEM fields, their gender identity could be more salient in academic settings. Additionally, combined with their other
social identities, they may have different experiences as compared to women in non-STEM fields.

Another limitation was that all the participants were enrolled doctoral students, as I indicated in the recruitment statement. Nevertheless, it would have been useful to have at least two participants who had departed their doctoral program to gain a better understanding of the reasons for leaving their programs. This could have provided a more nuanced explanation of what may be the breaking point for some Latina students to leave their doctorate. Future research should also focus on the entire doctoral journey and how it continues to change throughout the years focusing on how various milestones may or may not shift Latina doctoral students’ experiences, such as finishing coursework, candidacy exams, and the dissertation process. Furthermore, there should also be a focus on those who are in the dissertation phase and how their personal and academic socialization experiences may influence the process of completing the dissertation. As many of them spoke about the critical support their partners provided during the first year and beyond, future research should explore the importance of spouses for Latina doctoral students and the types of support, if any, they provide during the doctoral study.

Another limitation was that only one participant identified as LGBTQ; however, certain social identities within this community were not represented in the study, such as students who identified as lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, pansexual, etc., as these identities could deeply impact the doctoral experience; thus, future research should be conducted to obtain narratives and/or testimonios of Latina students with these identities to better understand their doctoral journey. Another area of future research may want to focus on the identity development of Latina doctoral students. The findings suggest that many of the participants spoke about the strengthening of their voice and their own agency as well as their personal and intellectual
development accompanied by a strong *orgullo* in their Latina identity. Future research should explore more deeply how doctoral study may or may not contribute to developing Latina identity and how this can influence the resilience and persistence of Latina doctoral students.

Lastly, many of the participants also spoke about the positive relationships with their advisors and/or mentors, especially those who had advisors who were White women or Women of Color. The findings indicated the importance of having these advisors and/or mentors as role models. Future research should focus on these unique advisor/advisee and mentor/mentee relationships and how Latina doctoral students make meaning of these relationships not only during their doctoral journey, but also beyond the completion of their degree, including their reasons to pursue or not pursue a faculty career path. Additionally, research should focus on exploring successful and unsuccessful mentorship models, as graduate education has been and still is highly impacted by gendered and racialized dynamics.

Certainly, a great amount of research needs to be developed in order to gain more insight into the experiences of Latinas and other underrepresented students within doctoral education. As emerging research has indicated, the lack of racial minorities in graduate school, particularly in doctoral programs, and within faculty positions across higher education institutions, it is crucial to understand the underlying forces that may be contributing to this issue. By giving voice to Latinas and their experiences within the academy, we can uncover some of the fundamental issues that impact them during their doctoral program. Therefore, this research aims to make higher education more accessible for Latinas by providing an opportunity to learn about their lived experiences and academic socialization processes as doctoral students in a Hispanic-Serving institution.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Unfortunately, some of the participants experienced micro-aggressions, sexism, racism, and other biases, and these negative encounters often resulted in isolation, disappointment, and stress for them. Furthermore, the biases that some of the participants experienced due to their identities as Latina women caused some of them to feel the phenomenon of imposter syndrome. Nevertheless, despite these occurrences, every single one of the participants resisted the oppressive conduct with dignity and resilience. Certainly, these women used these challenging moments to strengthen their voices as well as their identities as Latina doctoral students.

It is essential to better understand how doctoral students experience their programs as doctoral education results in the dissemination of new knowledge that has a direct impact on various sectors in society. Additionally, understanding the lived experiences of doctoral students may as well indicate how they will shape and contribute to the future of education in general. Many of the participants in this study spoke about their desire to help and support Latinxs as well as Students of Color and other marginalized communities. Furthermore, many shared their research interests and future career pathways, which involved voicing the experiences of those who have been in the margins of society. Indeed, these Latina women will continue to be assets to academia and to society, as the following table shows based on their current occupation:
Table 6

Participants’ Current Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Current Occupation/Fall 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Post-Doctoral Fellow at WUSTL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julieta</td>
<td>Assistant Professor at Hastings College in Nebraska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>PhD granted after deceased in fall 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Completed PhD / K-12 teacher / Searching positions in academia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>Dissertation stage / K-12 teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>Completed PhD / Assistant Editor, Department of Science at HSI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Assistant Professor at Chapman University in California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verónica</td>
<td>Proposal Stage / Adjunct Faculty / Director of Translation Services Office &amp; Associate Director of BPWC Program at HSI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>Post-Doctoral Fellow at Maryland National Cancer Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Dissertation Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Post-Doctoral Fellow at Indiana University-Bloomington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine</td>
<td>PhD Student / Coursework Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Left Doctoral Program in fall 2019/Returned to Program in fall 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socorro</td>
<td>Dissertation Stage / RA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the finding of this current study, it is crucial for higher education institutions to take into consideration the needs of Latinas and other Students of Color when recruiting and retaining them; they also need to provide the appropriate resources to make sure that these students feel that they belong and can have enriching experiences within an inclusive and diverse campus and doctoral education environment. The participants in this study were able to overcome any difficulties and/or conflicts that unfortunately made their doctoral trajectory more challenging; nevertheless, they shouldn’t have to endure them. As institutions continue to recruit Latina women who will contribute to the creation of new epistemologies and the advancement of knowledge, doctoral programs and institutions need to increase their awareness of their lived experiences, their cultural background as well as their academic needs to increase the presence of this population in doctoral programs.
I chose to study Latina doctoral students due to my own experiences as Latina, first-generation college student, and immigrant. When I started my doctoral program, I became more conscious that there was not a large amount of research on Latinas, especially at the doctoral level. This dissertation has increased my critical awareness about the positive impact that education has on Latinas and women in general. As a lover of poetry and of the power that language has on the minds and hearts of individuals, I could not agree more with the following excerpt that clearly describes my personal experience during the intense, yet illuminating process of writing this dissertation:

Writing about writing is more about life than it is about writing, that writing mirrors the struggle in your own life, from denial to recognition and change; that writing illumines your fears and dreams. All these insights are precious because you wrestled them out of the granite walls of your creative block (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 258).

Interestingly, I discovered through this research study that I have had many similar experiences that the participants in my study have had, which allowed me to affirm that as Latina doctoral students, we have exceptional commonalities and differences that make us unique as individuals and political actors seeking to decolonize academia from western European dominant ideologies and patriarchal paradigms that have permeated academia and other social institutions and have been and continue to be detrimental to women, Women of Color, and other underrepresented student populations.

Indeed, each participant makes up a piece of the puzzle of my own life story. Moreover, in search of new epistemologies and ontologies, I was able to discover, thorough the testimonios of these 14 extraordinary women, the power that agency and inner work have during the evolving process of becoming scholars and agents of change, which also involved what C.
Wright Mills said, “Making the strange familiar and the familiar strange” a term that was first introduced to me by Dr. Mortimer in her Ethnography of Languages and Literacies course. The participants in this study are a vivid example of ¡Sí Se Puede! And I cannot thank them enough for sharing their stories with me so that I could contribute to the knowledge base, with mi granito de arena in academia. Lastly, I acknowledge that this study is also the product of my own struggles and resistance against the status quo and I wholeheartedly hope that this dissertation may bring courage and inspiration to its readers regardless of their social identities because todos somos parte de una misma familia humana.
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VITA

Rocío Acevedo-Carranza received a Bachelor’s Degree in Spanish, French, and Journalism from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1996 and a Master’s Degree in Spanish/Creative Writing also from The University of Texas at El Paso in 2001. She worked as a language teacher in K-12 private, public schools, and higher education for 22 years. In addition, she taught Spanish and English in the private sector. While in the PhD program at the University of Texas at El Paso, Mrs. Acevedo-Carranza was an active graduate student, working full-time as a Spanish and French secondary school teacher. Mrs. Acevedo-Carranza has presented at local conventions and workshops on issues related to underrepresented minorities in higher education as well as issues on Women of Color and Critical Race Theory (CRT)/Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) research methods.