STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL LATINA COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

A thesis proposal presented

by

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to

The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In the field of

Education

College of Professional Studies

Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

February 2018
Acknowledgments

My parents gave me the greatest gift anyone could ever give another person: They believed in me.

Claudia Arias-Cirinna

As an immigrant from Chile, I was always encouraged to work hard and to value education. These lessons provided by my parents who showed me how two people without parents and support could endure anything that life brings them. To my dearest “Mami” and “Papi”, thank you for your love, support and constant encouragement to fulfill all my dreams, especially the dream of earning my doctoral degree. I dedicate this work to you and my husband David and children Sofia and Rocco. Without your support, I could have never taken on such a journey.

During this journey, I have been blessed to encounter strong women of color to empower me and help me believe in myself. First, I want to start to thank my mentor Jane Fried, your belief in me, as a student, colleague and friend has been instrumental to my success. To my cohort doctoral friends, Jasmine, LaShaune, Rhonda and Dimar – you all taught me that people of color need to always have each other’s back and pick each other up. For my colleagues that became friends, I want to thank Tashika, Dayle, Gail, Maritza and Whitney- you were all a big part of the beginning this journey and are truly my heart. If it were not for you Tashika, I would not have entered the program. In addition, to my husband David, although you already know this, you are the reason that I was able to fulfill this dream, you stepped up and became dad and mom for many years to allow me to succeed at work and in school- you are my lifeline. I also want to recognize my angels Mona (my sister) and Santo (my father in law), I lost you both during this journey but I know you are watching over me and cheering me on. Finally to my beautiful children, Sofia and Rocco who missed seeing their mom at school events, parties, and at bedtime many times- may you both realize how this journey was not only for mommy but for you two understand the value of hard work and determination.

This academic success would not be possible without the expertise of my thesis advisor – Dr. Ronald Brown. I am grateful for your guidance and support especially when I doubted myself repeatedly. Your calm presence and sense of knowledge helped me through this difficult journey. Thank you for believing in me and the need for my research.

Finally, I am grateful and humbled by my three participants who agreed to participate in my study. Your stories of facing many challenges and barriers and persisting have inspired me as a Latina college administrator, and I feel blessed to have learned about your personal journeys.
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Abstract

The number of Latina college students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States is at the highest level on record. As these students enter predominantly White institutions, it is imperative that colleges learn what services and systems support and are required for the academic success of these students. Challenges and barriers continue to rise for this population and it is affecting not only students but the universities they attend and ultimately the economy of the United States. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how Latina college students understand success and how they persist at a Predominately White Institution. Three student participants were able to provide in depth narratives of their individual upbringing, early and undergraduate years of students at a PWI. Participants explained their perceptions of their own identity and described the individuals and services which allowed for their success. Participants also shared that they were greatly influenced by family, peers and staff members who took time out to support and challenge them. Participants also reported major financial challenges that almost affected their success. Participants attributed their success to three major themes, Resiliency, Cultural Values and Support Systems and how these factors played a role in their success. Additional student research is needed from other areas of Latin America who studied at different kinds of campuses in different regions of this country. This research focused on experience at one institution. The more varied the backgrounds and types of universities could have been helpful.

Keywords: Latina college students, predominantly White institutions, persistence, success
Chapter 1: Introduction to Study

Improving Latina persistence is crucial because, as a fast-growing demographic, their educational success will impact the way they perceive themselves, the way they contribute to the well-being of their families, the way they contribute to the community and the way the contribute to the United States economy. It is important also to understand how these Latina students perceived themselves and their sense of belonging as they grow in numbers at these institutions. As the Latino/a college population increases, colleges and universities should determine what affects their success and what allows them to persist until graduation. The purpose of this study is to investigate how high achieving Latina college students make sense of their cultural experiences at a Predominantly White Institution. In this study, academic success is defined as graduating with a 3.0 or higher GPA. The results of this research will better outline what common experiences are shared among Latina college students and how such experiences influence their rate of success. This information may then be used to assist in the retention of future Latina college students. This study will use narrative inquiry to gain stories from individuals to explore this research problem.

This chapter provides the foundation research related to the Latina college student. This will lead into the rationale and significance of this study. Following will be the problem statement that will present the focus of the study. The purpose statement and research questions will illustrate how this study is going be tested and supported. The theoretical framework will acknowledge what this study will measure and determine the factors that assist the Latina college student to persist and succeed.

It is essential that colleges and universities understand the experiences of these students and validate their experiences. This will ensure academic success for both the student and the
university. This study’s findings may have important implications for future research and practice.

**Context and Background**

Improving Latina persistence is crucial because, as a fast-growing demographic, their educational success will impact the United States economy and dramatically influence other areas of their personal lives. In 2010, the total number of Latinos enrolled in colleges and universities was 1.8 million, the highest level on record (Fry, 2011). By 2012, the share of young Latinas enrolled in college immediately after high school had increased to 71% (Pew Research Center, 2014). Although more Latina college students are entering colleges, there are still disparities between Latina and White college students’ degree attainment. To address the educational needs of the rapidly changing demographic shifts, higher education must respond to the growing Latina community. The Latina population has recently increased to 55.4 Million in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This growth will affect the way colleges and university meet the needs of this population of students and address those factors that affect the success of these students. In order to do this, these institutions need to understand the factors and barriers that affect success as well as those factors that attribute to success. Research shows that Latina students have a more negative college-going outcome expectations and greater perceived barriers to college going than students from any other racial or ethnic background (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). The way that they perceived themselves, they way that they fit into the community/society and the way that perceive success may be different than the majority. With that in mind, it is important to not look only at the barriers to success but those factors that allow success to continue supporting these students.
If higher education institutions could establish a program or framework that aims to assist and support these students, it may be assumed that there would be an increase in student success and graduation rate. According to Altbach, Lomotey, and Kyle (1999), the demand for access to higher education is correlated with the continuous growth in the number of students of color on college campuses and institutions are committing themselves to increasing student representation on campus with respect to the changing demographics. Since Latinas are the fastest growing population in higher education, it is essential to focus on these students and their experiences of success. If this were the case, one may also assume that these students would also become participating members of society. If policy makers had a better understanding of Latina experience, the students would have a higher likelihood of success because colleges and universities would have the support systems in place. This is necessary to ensure their success within postsecondary education, especially since their enrollment does not reflect the overall population majority in these universities and colleges (Rooney, 2002). There should be a concerted effort to explore Latino student success as well as an increased consciousness around dimensions of difference. In addition, universities should validate life experiences and academic and personal endeavors of Latino students. Higher education institutions must move beyond the approach to solely recruit the Latino college students but go the additional step of making sure that they are working on connecting to their academic and social experience because this will affect retention and success.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Latina college students understand success, and how they persist at a Predominately White Institution. There is an abundance of research that focuses on barriers that affect success for underserved populations within higher
education (Carter, 2006), but much less that identifies factors that contribute to success of this population. Higher education must move beyond the simple recruitment of the Latina college students and develop and implement new and creative approaches to assure the persistence and degree attainment of these students. More data must be collected to understand how these students transcend and persist in a PWI. By conducting in-depth interviews of graduating seniors, this study will contribute to the research by examining Latina college student success and persistence. This will also focus on what allows these students to succeed academically given all the barriers and factors in their path.

**Rationale and Significance**

This study is extremely important at this point and time because the impact of retaining Latina college students affects our nation’s economy, the students themselves and college and universities nationwide. Latina college students place a high importance on the family, community and their culture, and these factors must be taken into account when designing retention programs. Teranishi (2012) explained that the success of Latina college students in higher education is connected directly to the success of the nation’s economy. According to Wimhurst and Allard (2008), if the current demographic trends continue, the Latino population will eventually exceed any other ethnic population demographic in the U.S. This seems to be a critical time for universities study the effect of resource use and policy implementation are affecting this group. These efforts need to be taken seriously as well as assessed frequently to offer appropriate educational support and resources to these students. In this current climate of accountability, colleges and universities must deliver quality education to all students and prepare them for the workforce.

**Impact on the Economy**
Improving Latinos’ persistence is crucial because, as a fast-growing demographic, the educational success of this specific student population will impact the United States economy. To maintain and sustain the United States economy, it is important to enhance college perseverance and degree attainment of society’s rapid growing population by 2020, as one in six United States residents will be of Latino descent (Council of Economic Advisors, 2000).

Since Latinos have the lowest rates of high school and college degree attainment, their chances for stable employment are hindered. With the number of Latinos growing, improving their college completion rates will enable them to earn higher wages, improve their living standards and increase their financial contribution to state economies. College graduates pay more income and sales taxes and depend less on social service programs such as food stamps and Medicaid. An increase in the number of jobs requiring a college degree ultimately benefits state economies through higher tax revenues.

**Impact on Colleges and Universities**

It is critical to recognize the role that institutions play in contributing to Latinos’ educational success (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). Strategies to improve not only access to college but also success in graduating with a certificate or degree benefit all students, but particularly Latino students, who traditionally have fallen behind other populations in college enrollment and completion rates. The percentage of Latina students enrolling in college immediately after high school is 71 percent, compared with 72 percent of white students (Pew Center Research, 2014). This issue is that Latinas continue to lag more than other groups when it comes to earning a Bachelor’s degree.(US dept. 2011). It is imperative that we find the reasons for non-completion rates to address retention and graduation barriers for these students.
The transition between secondary schools and college is difficult for this population. The rigor of academics and high expectations of college sometimes create a negative experience for these students. It is essential to have pre-collegiate outreach programs to help to counter negative school or community influences. Programs that assist students with acquiring the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment usually provide a series of interventions that emphasize academic preparation as well as the development of attitudes and beliefs about college that will result in a positive outcome (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). When students arrive to the college, they also succeed with preparation classes that allow for the best learning opportunities for these students. For example, the use of small classes that can generate education on academic planning and intentional first year programs to address barriers and assist in transition is crucial (Braxton, 1995).

Nora and Crisp explained that more research is needed to advance our understanding of how Latino students experience college, with a focus toward identifying factors that support student success (2009). For example, learning communities, student success courses, supplemental instruction, and service learning have all been shown to be positively related to student retention and grades (Berson & Younkin, 1998). To give Latina college students an easier transition, it is important to put efforts in place in such areas such as: financial aid, academic support systems, social/ cultural support systems, and campus environment. Academic and student affairs administrators must join and demonstrate a commitment to these students by valuing their contributions, while making an honest effort to improve the services and campus climate (Rodriguez et al., 2000).

Impact on the Student
Understanding the Latina college students’ needs for success and persistence is also critical. Our colleges and universities need to understand how Latina college students understand their experiences, how they perceive themselves and how that contributes to their self-esteem, community and ultimate the economy. The fact that Latino students are expected to have the lowest graduation rates in two and four-year institutions (Solarzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005) should be alarming, and action must be taken to improve these rates. Latino students need financial, academic, familial and social support in order to have solid systems in place.

Financial support directly affects success and access for the Latino college student. Cabrera, Nora and Castenada (1992) found that the ability to pay for college shapes their opportunity to attend, where they attend and how they interact within the college environment. Inadequate financial aid can interfere with the students’ social and academic integration that can affect their determination in continuing their education (Cabrera et al., 1992). If students can gain access to grants, loans and tuition remission, this can drastically change their experiences.

One of the main factors of success is academic integration. The transition between secondary schools and college is somewhat difficult for this population. It is essential to have pre-collegiate outreach programs to help to counter negative school or community influences. Programs that assist students with the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment, usually provide a series of interventions that emphasize academic preparation as well as the development of attitudes and beliefs about college that will result in a positive outcome (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). When students arrive to the college, they also succeed with preparatory classes that allow for the best learning opportunities for these students. Small classes that can generate education on academic planning and intentional first year programs to address barriers and assist
in transition is crucial (Braxton, 1995). College and universities need to integrate these students by providing social and personal support to ensure successful retention efforts and empower students to access support when needed (Muraskin, 1997).

Familial support is also crucial to the success of the Latina college student. Latina college students depend on their families as vital sources of support and encouragement (Early, 2010; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Researchers looked at ways in which parents, particularly mothers and their messages of encouragement, positively impact high school students’ development of college aspirations (Ceja, 2004). Phinney, Dennis, and Osorio (2006) suggested that helping family and proving self-worth are important motivations associated with college persistence and success. Parental involvement is well established as being correlated with student academic achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). In addition, though they recognize limits to the cultural capital their parents could provide, they do not consider this to be a reason for discouragement. Instead, these Latino first-generation college students look to the work ethic and determination exhibited by their parents as a model of strength (Early, 2010).

By understanding the successful experiences of Latina females, researchers and practitioners may then be able to effectively promote and implement strategies that can positively impact Latina students’ ability to remain in school and ultimately graduate. The purpose of this study is to explore the stories from the students who have been successful and use this information to reframe research to assist those who would otherwise not succeed. Examining those stories may allow for a better understanding of serving the needs of the Latina college student and supporting them to their fullest potential.

**Research Question**

This qualitative research study will be guided by the following overarching question:
What are the cultural experiences and stories of Latina college students or recent graduates who maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher while attending a Predominantly White Institution?

This question will allow space for these students to focus on any internal or external factors that assisted them to remain persistent and succeed in school. Their culture may also impact the way they see their barriers and how they persist, despite the barriers. The familial, academic and financial practices will also justify how those influences affected their success in attaining a 3.0 GPA.

Additionally, three sub-questions are:

1. How do the participants understand internal/external factors that afforded them to opportunity to persist in a PWI?

2. How did the participants feel that race played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution? (Race was defined as physical characteristics, ethnic background, and geographical roots).

3. How did the participants feel that culture played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution? (Culture was defined as thoughts, customs, traditions, beliefs and values that define a person).

Defining the Latina College Student

The term Latino/Latina is an identity that collectively includes the rich, ancestral diversity of the indigenous people of Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.
Islands that were assimilated with Spanish, African and/or Portuguese ancestry (Arbona & Novy, 1991). The term Latino emerged as a direct counterpoint to Hispanic and to open to multiple lineages and histories of Spanish-speaking people in the United States (Zambrano & Thornton, 2006). Counterpoint is important concept because it is used to primarily involve all people who trace their origin back to Spanish/Latino/Hispanic.

Currently in 23 out of 50 states, Latina/os outnumber Asian American and African American communities as the largest Non-White group (Tornatzky, Pachon, & Torres, 2002). This population represents the 20% in the Eastern part of the United States (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The diversity of this community is extensive and includes various social classes, as well as nationalities and ethnicities. Since this will population will continue to grow, the educational success of these citizens will determine the strength of a state’s workforce and economy.

**Theoretical Framework**

For this research study, Latcrit (Latino Critical Race Theory) was used. Latcrit is derived from Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is concerned with empowering human beings to rise above the restraints placed on them by race, gender, and sexuality (Fay, 1987). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT was developed by legal scholars to highlight the importance of race in disadvantaged communities. CRT has been used to identify race as the center of the debate concerning inequities in education and has been utilized in educational settings to examine the issues faced by members of disadvantaged communities of color. CRT provides a lens that allows the ability to examine multiple forms of oppression in our everyday life in education. In research, the use of CRT means that the investigator foregrounds race and racism.
in all facets of the research process and confronts conventional research texts and worldviews (Creswell, 2007).

**Historical and Contemporary Foundations of the Framework**

CRT is a framework that allows understanding of racial inequality. CRT questions “the ideologies, narratives, institutions, and structures of society through a critical conceptual lens,” encouraging the thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of people of color to add to the literature and share their points of view through oral histories and cultural epistemologies (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 11). Critical legal scholars developed the CRT movement with interest in transforming the awareness of marginalized experiences of people of color (Delgado & Stephanic, 2001). “Critical race theory draws from and extends a broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women’s studies” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). During the 1980s, legal scholars felt limited by the conversations involving critical theory, race, and racism because of the traditional legal systems and oppressive social structures. CRT emerged from the Critical Legal studies (CLS) movement to foreground race and emphasize issues that affect non-dominant groups in the United States. CRT scholarship initially focused on the civil rights legislation and progressed from the limits of the Black/White binary to include the histories of other people of color that have also been shaped by racism and subordination (Yosso, 2005). In education, CRT centers on the experiences of people of color and challenges middle class values as the norm. This framework recognizes the importance of authentic knowledge as a resource to understanding the lives of people of color (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). CRT acknowledges that information can be shared through storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos (folktales), testimonios (testimonies), chronicles, and narratives (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005).
Critical Race Theory

Major figures in the CRT movement worked together in studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power to include the ethnic representation of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. Marie Matsuda, among those scholars, views Critical Race Theory as, “the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) extended Matsuda’s view of CRT and described five tenets of CRT in education that can be used to inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy collectively as another lens to existing scholarship. Although these areas stemmed from CRT, they also present the tenets for Latcrit as this theory derived specifically from Critical Race Theory. These tenets in education are as follows (pp. 25-27):

1. Intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination acknowledge that race and racism are a fundamental part of defining how U.S. society functions.

2. The challenge to the dominant ideology challenges the notions that research is objective or neutral that does not include the epistemologies of people of color.

3. The commitment to social justice offers liberation from class oppression.

4. The centrality of experiential knowledge recognizes that the lived experiences of people of color, including storytelling, family histories, cuentos (folk tales), testimonies, and narratives, are critical and legitimate.

5. The transdisciplinary perspective analyzes race and racism in historical and contemporary contexts using “scholarship from ethnic studies, women’s studies,
sociology, history, law, and other fields to guide research.”

According to Yosso (2005), Anzaldua asserted that the development of critical theories allows one to understand the lives of minorities whose voices are not represented in the majority scholarship. Yosso (2005) defined CRT as a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices and discourses” (p. 74). This study used LatCrit, a branch of the broader CRT framework lens, to listen to the stories of Latinas who have attained an undergraduate degree with a GPA of 3.0 or better. The CRT lens nurtures, empowers, and gives Latinas the opportunity to share their insight and. Their experiences, based on their perceptions, constructed their reality of the factors that contribute to their success.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) uses stories and counter stories from the voices of the oppressed to provide the perspectives of the minority to offset the perspective of majority accounts. CRT provides a mechanism to understand and broaden the experiences of people of color. Accordingly, Latina voices are a “move away from silence, giving voice to our experience” (Delgado, 2001, p. 626). In Delgado’s study, Latinas shared their opinions of what elements contributed to their degree completion. This study further investigated, through the LatCrit lens, if and how Latinas home life experiences impacted how they navigated educational obstacles (Delgado, 2001).

**LatCrit**

In the 1990s, the application of CRT to the issues of Latina educational attainment provided another school of thought to examine the issue of educational inequity (Yosso, 2005). LatCrit theory, a branch of the broader CRT framework, extends the discussion to
address the layers that comprise Latina experiences (Yosso, 2005). According to Yosso (2005),
cultural wealth is the “total extent of an individual’s accumulated assets and resources” (p. 77).
LatCrit is the accumulation of at least these six forms of cultural capital working together as a
dynamic process. These accumulated assets and resources include, but are not exclusive to,
aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital is
the ability to hold on to hope through hardship and inequality, often without the resources to
bring hopes to fruition. This is understood by Latinas who dream and believe in a better and
brighter future, regardless of circumstances or ways to achieve these goals. “Con el favor de Dios (In God’s favor) is often the guide that all is possible if a higher power is acknowledged”
(Delgado, 2001, p. 628). According to Yosso (2005), Gandara’s work with Latinas has shown
that although Latinas experience the lowest educational attainment, they maintain consistently
high aspirations for their children.

In this study, it is important that LatCrit theory be used to investigate the specific ways Latina college students view their college experiences. This theory focuses on a broader scope unraveling the various layers of racism experienced by the Latino college student. Storytelling from participants through their own experiences within their culture is important because participants express and affirm their unique value as members of a minority culture. Through counter-storytelling, participants’ cultural identities are asserted to counter the entrenched system and resist injustices. These counter-stories further reveal the histories and strengths that communities of color possess and the ways in which they continue to persevere. LatCrit examines the specific Latina/a experiences that are unique to its culture (Delgado, 2002).
Critical Race Theory Race permeates our belief systems and ideologies. Oppressed groups learn to value the Western canon and subtle beliefs, while disparaging contributions of their traditions (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that allows understanding of racial inequality. It allows for traditions of storytelling and listening and recounting oral histories, parables, and proverbs. This repertoire may include memorization, attention to detail, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme, among other nuances of language and the ability to communicate through art, music, or poetry. Bilingual individuals put multiple social skills into place when translating for adults. The increase in vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, metalinguistic awareness, and civic and familial responsibility contribute to social maturity.

Familial capital refers to the knowledge cultivated by the familia (family) that reveals community history, memory, and cultural intuition. The immediate and extended family, possibly including close friends and Godparents nurtures this form of capital. The ties cultivated through these relationships teach the value of maintaining a healthy community relationship. Those family ties also teach lessons that inform consciousness and recognize pedagogical practices learned through consejos (experiential guidance) that contributes to the educational context.

Navigational capital is the ability to negotiate the path not built with the community of color in mind. Examples include strategies necessary for Latinas to navigate through university campuses in the presence of stressful situations or conditions that put them at risk of academic failure.

Social capital is comprised of the supports and networks of people that provide instrumental and emotional help to navigate society’s institutions. Scholars note, “people of
color utilized their social capital to attain education, legal justice, employment and health care and returned the information gained to their community” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Delgado’s (2001) ethnographer’s research further confirmed, “families transcend the adversity in their lives by uniting with supportive social networks” (p. 105).

Resistant capital is nurtured through the oppositional behaviors that challenge inequalities. It is grounded in resistance to unequal conditions of the marginalized. According to Yosso (2005), African American mothers raise their daughters as “resistors.” They teach their daughters to believe in themselves and ignore the barrage of societal messages that devalue and belittle Black women. Latina mothers also consciously instruct their daughter’s to valerse por si mismas (value themselves) and conserve an attitude that challenges the status quo (p. 81). According to Yosso (2005), scholars refer to pedagogies of the home and transformational resistance as feminist and culturally based knowledge that extend ways of knowing beyond formal schooling and allow some Latinas to adhere to resistant capital.

These six forms of capital are not static but overlap and build on each other to form community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). “As with the principles of a kaleidoscope, the dynamics of these forms of capital contribute to the intricate changing arrays of cultural wealth which refer to behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people” (p. 75). Delgado Bernal (2001) posited that Latinas have assets that they bring to higher education. Latinas balance, negotiate, and draw from their bilingualism, biculturalism, and commitment to communities as they navigate educational obstacles. The LatCrit lens allows for stories and counter stories from the voices of the oppressed to provide the perspectives of the minority to counter the perspective of the majority narratives. CRT and LatCrit provide a mechanism to understand and broaden the experiences of people of color.
In this study, it is best to utilize LatCrit theory to examine the particular ways Latina college students see their educational experiences and how culture plays a role in their success. This theory focuses on a broader scope and affords the researcher an opportunity to examine the various layers of racism within the Latino experience. For example, storytelling is a way that participants share experiences within their culture. Through this technique, participants express and affirm their value as members of their minority culture. Through counter-storytelling, participants’ cultural identities are asserted to counter the entrenched system and resist injustices. These counter-stories further reveal the histories and strength that communities of color possess and the ways in which they continue to persevere. LatCrit examines the specific Latina/a experiences that are unique to its culture (Delgado, 2002).

**Critics of Theory**

There are many critics of the LatCrit theory because its function is to disrupt. Two major critiques of CRT and LatCrit that have been offered in the legal scholarship and are relevant to the field of education. The first critique alleged that CRT essentializes the racial/ethnic identity of people of color (Kennedy, 1989), while the second major critique challenged the reliability and validity of CRT and LatCrit counterstories (Farber & Sherry, 1997; Posner, 1997). Kennedy (1989) argued that CRT scholars engage in identity politics by reducing racial and ethnic identity into a single identifying characteristic. He claimed that CRT assumes that there is a monolithic African-American, Chicana/o, or American Indian experience that does not leave room for the complexity of identities that exist within society. However, in the field of education, Sleeter and Delgado (2003) pointed out that while most CRT scholars do indeed forefront race, “it is viewed as a fluid and dynamic concept and as one of the many components that are woven together to form one’s positionality in a shifting set of social relationships” (p. 26). Indeed, Valdes (1996)
and other LatCrit scholars were particularly explicit about defining LatCrit as an anti-essentialist project to ensure that race is not viewed as the only important dimension of social oppression.

The use of counterstories represents the second major critique of CRT and LatCrit. Posner (1997) contended that scholars of color do not tell stories that are any more different than the stories told by white scholars, and questions the methodological rigor of the raced composite characters and biographical narratives. Farber and Sherry (1997) argued that CRT counterstories lack methodological validity and reliability because they cannot be generalized as representative experiences of people of color. At the same time, they suggested that people of color cannot be generalized, and Sleeter and Delgado Bernal (2003) disagreed that counterstories are not generalizable, indicating that they derive their generalizability “through their resonance with lived experiences of oppressed peoples, rather than through parametric statistics . . .” (p. 249). Moreover, as the following section illustrates, counterstories are more than a methodological tool; they are a way to ground the real-life experiences of marginalized peoples within educational theory, policy, and praxis.

**Rationale**

When examining Latino college student success, the initial thought can be that they are experiencing barriers as a cultural entity that differs from others because their experiences in their lives affect the way they perceive their culture and how it relates to racism. LatCrit theory includes the various layers of racism within the Latino experience. The technique of counter-storytelling utilized in theory is foundational, allowing students to both express and affirm their unique value as members of this minority culture. Through counter-storytelling, participants’ cultural identities are asserted to offset the deep-rooted system and challenge inequalities. These
counter-stories further reveal the histories and strength that communities of color possess and the ways in which they continue to persevere and succeed.

LatCrit educational studies view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of the students of color by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles and narratives (Bell, 1987). To comprehend academic resilience, racial challenges are identified as risk factors perceived by Latinas in college. When learning of the experiences of the Latina college student, it is important to focus on how their cultural background affects their experiences and perceptions. These insights are specific to their race and differ from the White college student. This theory will acknowledge the Latina college student’s resilience in an academic environment while also addressing the racial challenges perceived by the student.

**Summary**

As the Latina college student population increases, colleges and universities need to implement techniques to ensure that these students remain in school until they graduate. This study is focused on the experiences of the Latina college student and how they have overcome barriers which would have otherwise impeded their academic success. It clarifies that although there are many influences that affect success, higher education institutions still need to examine elements that attribute to determination and success.

The literature review in Chapter Two will represent the elements that affect success, with particular emphasis on race. Chapter Three will describe the research design. Chapter Four presents the Findings of the study. Chapter Five addresses the study's Summary and Conclusions, and includes a discussion of limitations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Ensuring Success of Latina College Students

One of the greatest challenges of the American higher education system in the 21st century is to improve the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of the Latina college student population. At this time, Latina students are not represented in higher education at levels proportional to their rate of representation in the entire population of the United States. Improving Latina student persistence is critical because the educational success of these students will provide them opportunity for social and economic mobility. To affirm and strengthen the United States’ longstanding value of diverse perspectives and opinions, it is critical to improve college persistence and completion rates of the nation’s fastest growing population – by 2020, one in six U.S. residents will be Latino (Council of Economic Advisors, 2000). Access and equity continue to be an issue in the nation and specifically in predominantly White institutions (PWI). Educating and retaining Latina citizens will help to contribute to the overall economic and social prosperity of this country. Incorporating this knowledge into institutional policy is critical. Incorporation would also deepen understanding of issues that Latina college students cope with and may aid in their recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. It is also imperative to study what enables these students, specifically Latina college students, to succeed. Many students of color confront many barriers because of conflicts between their culture and the dominant culture. The focus on how they overcome these barriers and persist is essential in this study.

The purpose of this literature review is to review the research that has been presented on the barriers that these students experience in college and what support systems needed for Latina college students to be successful. There is much research on the barriers that affect success but
gathering on how these students can persist is really important. This data is important since educating the Latina college student will be important and valuable not only to the student but the future economy. Additional research is needed to find out what the barriers are that are facing Latino college students and what programs and services are being used to recruit and retain these students and to promote their success. For those who succeed, there is a need to figure out what contributes to persistence and success. Literature shows that social and academic integration are key factors to success, while financial assistance and familial/social integration also assist recruitment and retention for these students (Bean, 1983). Specifically, the lack of financial aid really affects recruitment and retention since Latina college students that receive aid are more likely to persist than those that do not (Hu & St. John, 2001).

The following section explains the historical aspects of Latino college student retention, the barriers that affect success and persistence and the support systems needed to allow these students to succeed academically.

**Background Information**

It is important to understand the historical aspect of student retention and how retention is influenced by various social, cultural, and institutional factors. Lang (2002) pointed to the 1970s and early 1980s as a critical point for student retention programming, especially programs designed for students of color. Organizations such as American College Test (ACT) and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) were two of the first to study student retention across campuses. Lang (2002) provided a conceptual background, which outlines student characteristics, socioeconomics, and cultural influences, to illustrate past and current retention trends. As the Latino population grows, the number of Latino students entering college is also expected to increase. Although the number of well-prepared Latino students has also increased in the last 30 years, Latino students continue to underperform, compared to other
student groups once they enroll in college (Miller & Garcia, 2004). The growing Latino population has contributed to the larger representation of Latino students in college, and the trend is expected to continue until 2050; but Miller and Garcia (2004) explain that the number of Latino students who achieve a college degree have the lowest college GPA, when compared to Whites and Asian Americans.

Latina student’s withdrawal decisions are contingent on a variety of institutional support structures and college experiences, not restricted to financial considerations alone (Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003). However, other factors external to an institution have also been found to contribute to a student’s resolve to stay in college or, in a far more negative sense, to consider nonacademic options in their lives (dropping out of college). A recent publication of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA) identified nine propositions found in the literature that influence student college success including co-curricular activities, a rigorous academic curriculum, academic, college, and career counseling, mentoring, peer support, family and community engagement, culturally appropriate intervention efforts, funding priorities, and the timing of interventions (Tierney et al., 2004).

Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the United States, but they have the poorest educational transition and college completion rates (Solórzano et al., 2005). Without adequate retention strategies, Latinos are expected to have the lowest college graduation rates in two and four-year institutions (Solórzano et al., 2005). For example, among 100 Latino students who begin elementary school, slightly more than half will graduate from high school, and ten will complete a college degree (Solórzano et al., 2005). Institutions should tap into various types of areas that have assisted successful Latino students graduate from college (Cerna, Pérez, & Sáenz, 2009). Institutions must prepare all students to compete in a global economy, but if the largest
ethnic population continues to be uneducated, the nation as a whole will not be able to move forward. Latinos are productive members of society and higher education is key to the future of America.

**Barriers Affecting Latina College Student Success**

Latina college students have been found to be different from their White student counterparts in terms of success and persistence. They are more likely to come from low socio-economic backgrounds, to be first-generation college students (Saenz et al., 2007), and to come from academically disadvantaged backgrounds. Other obstacles that these student facing are the lack of college readiness, lack of familial support and financial instability. These factors may limit their view of the ability to succeed and their ability to see solution to their problem. This can thereby affect their entrance into college, their experience, and their ability to persist. All these barriers are at the forefront of challenges for the Latina college student (Tinto, 1988). They can affect recruitment, retention and graduate rates among this population. The cultural aspects of their identity and their values really come into play when attending college. Tinto has done much research on college persistence for the Latina college student and explains that colleges must understand the factors that affect these students in order to integrate programs that will allow student to have goals and integrate academically and socially in college (Tinto, 1988).

**Personal Barriers.** Many personal barriers affect Latina college students in their success in college. Some of these barriers are attributed to the lack of self-confidence. For this reason, Latina students are prone to deficit thinking, the assumption that they are not qualified to complete a project. They are capable and committed to achieving higher education, and it is important to dispel deficit thinking to not allow another factor to affect their self-confidence. Deficit thinking is a focus on blaming the person and positions them to fail (Valencia, 1997).
College administrators and faculty must understand this phenomenon and assist students in feeling confident and that they can achieve.

Another personal challenge is a sense of belonging. Latina students in higher education are also looking for a home away from home. Students want to feel comfortable in their environment and surroundings. Research has found that college environments influence the student’s sense of belonging, especially among non-white racial/ethnic groups (Johnson et al., 2007). Latina students are not the exception when it comes to needing to feel a sense of belonging but it has been found that Latino students are more likely to perceive less sense of belonging than White students (Nora and Cabrera, 1996). In addition, Latina students are the only group that perceives interactions with diverse peers to have a significant impact on sense of belonging (Johnson et al., 2007). The ability to connect academically is important but it is also important for these students to socially connect with their peers on campus. Research also finds that having a sense of belonging in residence halls is important to all students, but it is particularly important to students of color (Nora and Cabrera, 1996).

The transition to college is also a major factor in persistence and success. When Latina college students decide to enroll and are accepted, the next barrier is the transition. Many students do not have an easy transition into college or throughout their college experience. A successful transition bridges the student’s home environment with the college environment and is most important in the student’s first year of college (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2006). This can really offer the basic information that a student needs to understand what the expectation of college is and how they may need to adjust for the future. More transition programs are needed to assist these students in the process and during their collegiate experience. They especially need to be able to feel that they belong. Latina college students in higher
education are looking for a home away from home. Students want to feel comfortable in their environment and surroundings. Looking at the experiences of students of color, Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that academic and social involvement and engagement were predictive of stronger senses of belonging and countered the negative influences of perceptions of prejudice and discrimination on campus and in the classroom. The work of both Hurtado and Carter (1997) and of Nuñez (2009) seems to substantiate these findings particularly for Latino students. Individual-level interactions, including participation in social-community organizations, community service activities, religious clubs, student government, sports teams, tutoring programs, in-class discussions, as well as informal, out-of-class discussions with peers and faculty, were all found to contribute to higher senses of belonging for Hispanic students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009). Studies have explored multiple factors impacting students in college, but in many occasions, institutions struggle to understand the experiences of Latina students. These student struggle with academic integration, which can be measured by grade performance and intellectual development, and lacks social integration, which might involve social interactions and relationship development with peers and faculty, the student will be more likely to develop a low institutional commitment and, subsequently, to choose to dropout from the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Latina college students also lack adequate mentorship before and during their college experience. Torres (2004) argues that the more institutions understand cultural socialization processes, the more they can assist Latina students in college. Moreover, institutions must understand how Latina students make meaning of their college experiences. Torres (2004) explains that there are Latina students who may seem acculturated to the American culture, but they experience conflict in the educational environment. The lack of Latino faculty and staff
who may serve as mentors and advisors makes the college experience more difficult. Students need to see faculty and administrators that look like them, they need to see real-life examples of Latinos in higher education to recognize the full range of their academic and career possibilities. In addition, institutions need to have the experience of Hispanic educators who understand the culture and background of the students, and who can help the institution broaden its own understanding of its mission and methods. It is important to incorporate the experiences of Latina college students when creating policies and programs. Latino students in general face conflict as they try to attain a college degree, and institutions must understand that these issues are just as important as any other student development issue (Torres, 2004).

**Familial Barriers.** Latina college students may also have familial barriers. They may be discouraged from going to college due to the cost or obligation, and this can lead to alienation from family support. These students may already have doubts about their academic and motivational abilities. Any lack of support can sway them to stay away from the college environment. Overcoming these familial challenges is crucial to a successful transfer to a four-year college (Striplin, 1999). While going to college may be seen as a rite of passage for any student, it marks a significant separation from the past for those who are the first in their families to do so. Latina college students are often more likely to enroll in associates-level or non-degree granting programs that are located close to home (Benitez, 1998), which are often more accessible and more accommodating toward the maintenance of family life and responsibilities.

The lack of college knowledge from their parents and families can also affect these students. Their parents often do not have the knowledge or skills to understand the college experience and it affects how much support or assistance they will receive. Choy (2001), because of this lack of support, this in turn can affect Latino students from applying or meet
admissions requirements due to lack of familiarity with the application process. When Latina college students decide to apply to college, they may also realize they do not have the necessary finances to pay for college. When they realize that they may not be able to pay for college this may discourage them from continuing with the application process altogether.

Ceja (2004) examined the importance of the role that parents play in the development of the educational aspirations of Latina students. Interviews with 20 Latina students revealed that each of the students indicated a belief that they were provided parental support to seek a college education. Although the majority of the Latino parents in the study had no previous formal college experience, Chicana students indicated their parents had still found unique ways of influencing their thoughts and college aspirations. Using a multiple case study design, Cejda et al. (2002) investigated those factors that influence Hispanic students’ decisions to attend and persist in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Familial support and encouragement as well as a motivation to “not repeat” or “not be like” other family members that did not attend college were found as primary influences on students’ college-going decisions.

**Financial Barriers.** Financial barriers are also significant for Latina students. Cabrera, Nora and Castenada (1992) found that the ability to pay for college influences opportunities to attend, choice of college and modes of interaction with the college environment. They also may feel that their priorities should be to take care of issues at home and begin to think of college as a luxury and not a necessity when they do not have funding. They explain that inadequate financial aid can interfere with the students’ social and academic integration which can affect persistence. Latina college students are likely to lack knowledge of time commitment, financial expectations and budget management necessary for success. They may find bureaucratic operations of higher education difficult to understand (Thayer, 2000). They also don’t have the
knowledge or the skills to specifically understand how to navigate college finances and financial aid and may be the first people in their family to attend college. This population will not enroll or enroll on a part time basis so they can work part time or full time (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Since they may not understand the process they may not apply for financial assistance and may only be able to pay for their first year of college and then drop out to work. For example, Richardson and Skinner (1992) found that Latina college students who attended community colleges typically attended part-time and were more likely than their classmates to have significant work and family responsibilities (Hsiao, 1992). This is one reason why these students may choose vocational and technical school instead a four-year program (Striplin, 1999).

Since the Latina college students are most likely helping to support the family, they are expected by their families to learn a trade and start earning money in a shorter period of time (Boden, 2011), more so than students in four-year programs. Boden (2011) explained that these students want to find careers to assist their families, and that is their priority. They must focus on attending to the family needs first, particularly as the female of the family. This is a clear retention issue and difference due to the barriers they face as Latinas. The fact they are responsible to take care of the family increased their departure from college and universities. Tinto’s (1993) review of studies of student departure indicates that among Black and Latino students, as well as White students, issues of social contact or congruence and academic performance are evident. In addition, there is some indication that financial aid and financial status may be more crucial to disadvantaged students from traditionally underrepresented groups than for White students (Tinto, 1993). This impacts the retention rates and graduation rates of the Latina college student since college may not be the first priority.
Academic Barriers. Academic barriers also interfere with success and persistence. Latina college students have difficulty transitioning into college due to academic preparedness, stereotyping, and deficit thinking (Garcia, 2010). The expectation of academic rigor in college is different than high school. The decision to attend college may be made during high school, and these students may not have had the support or grades for college admission requirements. The fact that they may not have been prepared with any AP or Honors classes is also a factor. These classes prepare these students for success in college. The Latina college student may not be ready to understand college level work. The higher the parents’ education level is, the more likely a student is to enroll in college even when other factors such as family income, educational expectations, academic preparation, parental involvement, and peer influence are taken into account (Horn & Nuñez, 2000). These students are less likely to discuss preparation for the SAT or ACT with their parents and less likely to take advanced placement tests if they feel that they cannot understand what the requirements are. This can lead to lack of preparation on meeting admissions requirements, advanced placement and entrance exams, which is what is needed for admission. Latina college students sometimes do not meet admissions requirements and are challenged as they begin classes and realize the difficulty of college academics, as well (Garcia, 2010).

The stereotype that all Latina students are doing poorly academically can certainly affect how they are perceived. Latina/o students as capable and committed to achieving higher education and it is important to dispel deficit thinking to not allow another factor to affect their self-confidence. When Latina students are stereotyped, it gives them deficit thinking about themselves and may in turn cause deficit behavior. Deficit thinking is a focus on blaming the person, and it positions them to fail (Valencia, 1997). This type of thinking comes from the
cultural beliefs of these students. The perception of their abilities and the environment also make a difference. Gloria et al. (2005) state that the academic environment also influences the experiences of Latino students pursuing a college education. Latino students often have to juggle their own cultural values and beliefs and the values and beliefs of the mainstream culture. A student’s perception of the academic environment impacts the student’s social and academic life. Gloria et al. (2005) claim that the impact of perceived prejudice and discrimination and its effects on academic performance is yet to be explored, but racial ethnic minority (REM) students have a significant amount of stress compared to White students. For Latino students, financial stressors seem to be a problem, and it impacts college drop-out rates (Gloria et al., 2005).

According to Choy (2001), Latina college students are more than twice as likely to leave a four-year institution before their second year when compared to white female college students. Leaving before their second year may be the result of low grades, working 35 or more hours per week, and low or moderate participation in campus activities. Even after three years, Latina students are less likely to persist to a Bachelor’s degree. After five years, they are less likely to remain enrolled or attain a Bachelor’s degree (Pascarella et al., 2004). This leads to huge implications on graduation and overall success. With all the personal, familial, academic and financial barriers, the Latina college student is still finding way to break of those challenges and succeed. Since research is showing that these barriers may not be going away, the focus needs to be on those who do succeed and graduate so that college and universities can set up programs and services for success.

**Strategies that Improve Success of the Latina College Students**

To improve success for Latina college students, it is important to put in strategies to focus on social/familial integration, financial and academic support. These support systems will assist college and universities to recruit, prepare and integrate students better into their communities.
All these efforts can also ensure a student has preparation before college and during college while giving them a feeling of being attached to the college. Literature shows that if these efforts are implemented and assessed on a constant basis, institutions may see retention numbers increase and grades improve for these students (Bean, 1983). In the following section, research will explain how social/familial integration, financial and academic support and ensure success of the Latina college student.

**Social Integration.** Although significant research has been conducted on student involvement and success, very little has been conducted specifically on Latina college student involvement leading to their success. Social support systems are important to these students, but those aspects must incorporate sense of belonging, and recognize the importance of feeling part of the whole group. Strayhorn (2008) found that Latina students who do well academically and spend more time studying and feel more connected to campus than those who perform poorly in their academics, while low-performing Latina students feel less connected to campus, and may eventually leave college before completion. Another finding of this study is that Latina students who have frequent and constant interactions with those of diverse backgrounds have a greater sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008). Pascarella et al. (2004) also found that Latina college students who participated in extracurricular involvement experienced stronger positive effects on critical thinking, degree plans, sense of control over their own academic success, and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks.

It is imperative that Latina students engage inside the classroom and outside the classroom to make connections with the community so that they feel welcomed and seek out help when needed. Young Latina students often find themselves at PWI’s and they must adjust to the environment, which results in stress, especially if the student lacks social support. Solberg
and Viliarreal (2007) found that stress is an important factor for Latino students. Students who perceive social support have lower distress levels. College graduation rates can be enhanced if institutions work to enhance social support networks, develop intervention programming, and facilitate self-efficacy expectations (Solberg & Viliarreal, 2007). A recent study conducted by Gloria et al. (2005) assessed the degree to which social support, university comfort, and self-beliefs were interrelated and predictive of undergraduate Hispanic students’ decisions to persist. All three constructs were found to be significantly interrelated as well as predictive of student attrition. Individual variables of perceived mentorship, perceptions of social support from friends, and perceptions of the university environment as comforting to Latino students were found to have the strongest predictive value. Retention strategies have a strong focus on issues impacting students at various levels and colleges and universities continue to observe and monitor their effectiveness. The support can come from specific and organized academic programs. Lang (2002) suggests that pre-college programs, bridge programs, counseling, mentoring, and special services should be used as major retention tools. Living Learning Communities (LLC) that incorporate diversity are also extremely effective (Green, 2007). LLC’s provide students the opportunity to learn about themselves and others living on the same community floor or residence hall and make connections for these students early on.

Mentorship programs for Latina college students are also imperative to make connections. The importance of mentors and role models for Latino/Latina students has been stressed in the literature (Castellanos & Jones, 2004). The authors note that its impact on Latino student persistence should not be overestimated. However, only quite recently have researchers started to examine the nature of this construct prior to testing its influence on student retention or its role in the student persistence process, specifically as it relates to the student’s adjustment to
college. Nora (2004) examined the different dimensions of mentoring, hypothesizing that several subcomponents underlie this much noted factor. The authors believed that extracting the appropriate latent variables underlying a set of items that related to mentoring experiences would uncover or capture the different domains or conceptualization of mentoring. Although the intent of their research focused on establishing the factor structure of mentoring, preliminary results indicated that when introduced within the context of current persistence models, these mentoring components make a contribution in explaining why students drop out of college. College and universities need to integrate these students by providing social and personal support to ensure successful retention efforts and empower students to access support when needed (Muraskin, 1997).

Familial Integration. Institutions typically focus on the type of support systems the university can facilitate, but familial support is extremely important to Latina college students. Schneider and Ward (2003) indicate that Latino/a peer support may not be enough and that students need additional support from their families. The impact of familial support on students may determine how well students adjust to the overall campus, emotionally and academically. Family support is also one of the main factors in ensuring that the Latina student’s emotional and institutional adjustment positively impacts the student’s college experience (Schneider & Ward, 2003). Since Latina students really focus on taking care of family obligations, it is important to provide flexibility and support for them at college. For example, they may not have or be able to create a designated place or time to study at home, and they may be criticized for devoting time to school rather than family responsibilities (Hsiao, 1992). This is why familial education and support is needed to allow these students feel that they can feel supported for study and devote time to college.
Race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and parental education all affect students’ educational aspirations (Hamrick & Stage 2004). Among African American and Latina eighth graders in low-income minority schools, parental college education had a direct positive influence on students’ predisposition to attend college. For Latino females, parental education directly influenced parents’ expectations for their child’s college attendance, which had a significant positive effect on students’ predispositions to college. For White students, parental college education also had a significant positive influence on parents’ expectations for college and composite grades, which positively influenced students’ college aspirations. Thus, parental education is an important variable for predicting college predisposition among all low socioeconomic status students, but the strength of this relationship depends on students’ race and gender, rather than having the same effects for all. One study showed that Latino parents of high school seniors place nearly twice as much emphasis on the necessity of a college education for success compared to African American and White parents. (Immerwahr, 2000). in all parental education levels are related to success of their children.

Much prior work has stressed a tendency for the Latino culture to stress strong family ties (Hernandez, 2000). Family attachment and involvement is very important for these students. Integrating family earlier in education decisions would allow support and understanding of the college experience to better understand their student. Auerbach (2004) noted that reinforcement of educational aspirations and goals must be done often and in a variety of ways. The author suggests that Latino/a students should research and present college information to their parents at public meetings to attract and build interest. CHEPA (2002) concluded that all students, parents, and educators should be provided with timely, accurate information. At the junior high and high school level, resources should be provided to students who are at high risk, not on a college-
bound track with information regarding those courses that help students prepare for college-level coursework. They strongly urge the mandatory advisement of the college application process before the student’s senior year. Furthermore, K–12 should attend to the specialized information needs of Latino/a parents, such as worries surrounding their children’s safety on a higher education campus, undocumented status, and financial aid opportunities and responsibilities. Counselors should also make parents aware of the barriers students may face on campus and the strategies that can be used or overcome them in a sensitive, culturally appropriate way (Auerbach, 2004).

Finally, key players outside colleges and universities have sometimes been critical of among African American and Latina eighth graders in low-income minority schools. Those low expectations may also impact the support mechanisms in place for these students. There is much research that explain that integration of family is important and college must continue to use that factor to assist these students. Since there is mixed research on parental education and how it may be an important variable on predicting college predisposition amongst low economic students (Immerwahr, 2000), colleges and universities still must involve the family earlier and work together to emphasis the importance of college for the Latina college student.

**Academic Support.** To improve college access and success, colleges and universities need to focus on academic preparation for college by giving these student access to college prep programs, college intervention efforts, and financial assistance. These components create student attachment and involvement (Braxton, 1995). These programs assist Latino college students to feel a sense of preparation and attachment to the environment before they attend college. If these efforts are implemented and assessed on a constant basis, institutions may see retention numbers increase. Putting these students in small classes, assisting them with academic
planning and intentional first year programs to address barriers and assist in transition is crucial (Braxton, 1995). According to Volkwein and Cabrera (1998), presenting intellectual challenges to student, helping them learn new information, and the availability of stimulating assignments are the most important influences on student growth and satisfaction. Other beneficial classroom experiences include supportive contact between students and faculty and the degree to which students are engaged and exert effort.

Since Latina college students really need to learn about college before attending, pre-collegiate programs are important for their transition. Services provided by pre-collegiate outreach programs help to counter negative school or community influences such as lack of difficult curriculum, poorly trained teachers, and lack of role models, by providing the missing elements that help students prepare and obtain college enrollment. Programs that assist students with the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment usually provide a series of interventions that emphasize academic preparation as well as the development of attitudes and beliefs about college that will result in a positive outcome (Gullatt and Jan, 2003). These Long-term college access/intervention programs can assist Latina college student in navigating the transition from high school to college while helping them maintain a capacity to access academic and social support while in college, and sustain a college-going identity (Perna, 2000). Some research suggests that there needs to be a concerted effort on college and universities to focus on retention and graduate and not only enrollment and recruitment (Stayhorn, 2008).

Gullat and Juan’s (2003) study explained four common types of pre-collegiate academic development programming include Informational Outreach, Career-Based, Academic Outreach and Academic Support. These instructional services are designed to increase student performance in college preparation classes or to improve students’ opportunities to enroll in such
classes. Academic advising, support, socialization and mentors allow these students the ability to want to stay in school and finish. These types of programs allow these students to integrate and feel that they belong. An example of one of these programs is the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound is a federally-funded program that prepares primarily high school students for college through providing instruction in literature, composition, math, sciences, and study and problems-solving skills. Upward Bound is conducted mainly on college campuses (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). This program gives them a taste of what college is like and the expectations so that the students can thrive instead of have a culture shock.

Other services, such as advising and career services, are also important for the Latina college student. Counselors in secondary schools dedicated to college and career planning, particularly in Latino districts, are important resources for helping students and their families consider and prepare for options after high school graduation. In addition, when college support services such as mentoring, cohort programs, internships, tutoring and advisement are available to them, low-income and first-generation students are more likely to remain in school and complete a degree. It is important to connect with Latina families by targeting parents in the recruitment process and having parent-specific orientations to provide information about the family’s role in supporting their student through graduation. Race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and parental education all affect students’ educational aspirations (Hamrick and Stage, 2004).

Advising is also something that is very important for the Latina college students. Since many times they are first generation and do not have anyone at home to assist, they need to focus on what that college and university can provide. Allowing these student to get advising earlier, to work with staff that understand their needs and to allow these students to ask questions, is
critical to their success. Since these students see mentors as support, advisors can also communicate with their mentors to work together for support. Colleges and universities need to bring more counselors to low-income high-schools, and pair more students with mentors, and early results suggest positive impacts on college outcomes (Ayala and Stiplen, 2002). Counseling and good advising can help these students set academic and career goals and this relates directly to retention (Seidman, 1991). A variety of academic support is also critical for the Latino college student. Colleges should also be creative in the way they offer their courses. Fike and Fike (2013) explain that developmental education programs and internet-based courses have a high impact on student persistence and colleges need to be mindful on how to teach and retain students. The combination of good advising and good courses can lead Latina students down the right path and directly affect retention. Prior work has stressed a tendency for Latino culture to emphasize strong family ties (Hernandez, 2000).

Ultimately, the college student must be able visualize what they may be able to do with a college degree once completed. When these students are exploring careers, they begin to look at the environment around them and realize all the career opportunities they may have. The students learn the relationship between learning and the world of work and become able to understand these terms (Ayala and Striplen, 2002). Since they are dealing with different cultural barriers, the visualization of attaining a job after college is so important for them and their families.

**Financial Support.** Financial support and education is critical for the persistence and success of Latina college students. If students can get access to grants, loans and tuition remission, this can ultimately change their experiences drastically because of the diminished fear of losing funding. Education around aid is also important. This can be done with educational
workshops on how to get loans and assistance, explaining how loans and aid works to the student and family and obtain increased grant aid from institutions/state/federal sources. Their choice of educational institutions by the Latina college student is also heavily influenced by the nature and amount of financial aid awards, perceptions of the amount of homework required, and being able to live at home and to work while going to school. Students are also more likely to delay enrollment after high school, attend 2-year institutions, attend part time and work full time, and live off campus, all of which contribute to their being less likely to get involved with campus organizations and to have more difficulty adjusting to college (Choy, 2001). Need-based grants, in particular, increase college access for underrepresented students and provide an alternative to loans, which must be repaid. There should also be more financial aid scholarship opportunities for minority students. These students need to learn more about options on how to pay for college and how taking out loans can affect them in the long run. Cabrera, Nora and Castenada (1992) found in their study that the ability to pay for college shapes if they attend, where they attend and how interact with the college environment. They explain that inadequate financial aid can interfere with the students’ social and academic integration which can affect persistence.

Latina college students may also need education about work study programs and leadership opportunities. Work-study programs also attract and can help Latina students who must work to support themselves through college. These programs, which allow students to work on campus, increase awareness of support services, inspire more faculty interaction, enhance college engagement, and encourage graduation. Policymakers can supplement state funding for need-based aid and work study programs by supporting matching grants provided by federal programs, private donors and foundations. This can lead to more access for the Latina college student. These on campus opportunities can help the student to become more attached to
the university and become more involved on campus. These experiences can produce positive effects on retention and higher persistence (Cabrera, Nora and Castenada (1992). The ability to apply knowledge and work and make connections with staff on campus, allows integration and an increased comfort and sense of belonging for these students. It is also critical that the Latina college student learn about leadership opportunities that can assist with funding their education (Cabrera, Nora & Castenada, 1992). An example of this would be to for these students can become student leaders (resident assistants) that allow them to gain administrative skills and leadership skills while they get room and board on campus as their compensation. This would allow not only for the student to feel a sense of belonging but a sense of responsibility and connection to the university. Research shows a relationship between a student’s level of involvement and college success (Hudley et al., 2009).

Education and workshops for the Latina student and family are also important. This can be done with educational workshops on how to get loans and assistance, explaining how loans and aid works to the student and family and obtain increased grant aid from the institution, state and federal resources. Cabrera, Nora and Castenada (1992) found that the ability to pay for college shapes if they attend, where they attend and how interact with the college environment. They explain that inadequate financial aid can interfere with the students’ social and academic integration which can affect persistence. This can also shape the way they see themselves and the college experience.

Attitude and beliefs about financial aid can also be a barrier to these students. A study at an urban commuter university found that attitudes associate with financial aid had significant effects on persistence. Cabrera, Nora and Castenada (1992), explain that satisfaction with financial aid can have a direct on academic integration and goal commitments. Students
ultimately feel more committed to an institution that provides them with sufficient aid throughout their college experience. Research on college persistence within the Latino population has found financial aid had a significant, positive effect on college persistence, rivaling or exceeding the importance of other factors commonly included in higher education retention models such as undergraduate academic record and college grades (Nora, 2004). A multiple year study of full-time, Indiana undergraduate students enrolled in public universities found that students receiving aid were more likely to persist than those not receiving aid (Hu & St. John, 2001). Most importantly, the study also found that once receipt of financial assistance was controlled, there were no significant differences across ethnic groups (Latinos, African Americans, and whites) in the probability of persisting among students with otherwise similar characteristics (e.g., student background information, college grades). But since in general other factors are not equivalent across social groups, and Latinas are on average in more financial need, it stands to reason that increases in financial aid would tend to lower the retention gap. They are, for example, more likely to want to be well off financially (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Financial support and programs are a necessary support for Latino students. Latino college students are also more likely to take longer time complete their degree or not complete it altogether. With these financial challenges, they are also more likely to drop out and less likely to persist to a college degree.

**Impact of Retention on College and Universities**

Latina students face unique barriers to college success, and retention rates continue to be a problem (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Retention has been an issue of concern since the 1970s and early 1980s. Latino students will continue to graduate from high school and continue to have the
highest attrition rates compared to other student groups (Miller & Garcia, 2004). On average they arrive on campus with less academic preparation, less social capital, and more fiscal challenges. As a result of these factors, colleges and universities need to be aware of retention so that can they understand what is affecting these students entering and staying in college. They can then implement strategies to promote academic enhancement and success. To really teach these students effectively, college and universities need to understand barriers they face and help students learn to overcome them (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The more that is learned about these students the better off colleges are to teach and retain. This is an amazing feat is college and universities they need to understand the impact on the students, institutions and the economy. Institutions need to change the learning environments for these students and be more effective to promote student success.

The issue of college retention in the United States is of major importance, as evidenced by the enormous amount of academic research that has been devoted to this topic. At the institutional level, retention is a crucial economic and political issue because it represents a direct loss of tuition and income and a failure to accomplish their educational mission. (Bean, 1990). Watts (2001) explains national benefits of retention include decreased reliance on public assistance, increased tax revenues, lower demands on the criminal justice system, greater civic participation, better health status through improved lifestyle choices, improved parenting skills, increased entrepreneurial activity, and increased access to and use of computers and the Internet. The reasons for this attention are readily apparent. Numerous reports have shown that the portion of adults completing higher education is important to economic competitiveness (Shulock, Moore 2007). Enhanced college completion rates may have other social benefits as well such as enhancing worker productivity, increasing tax revenues, enhancing the workforce’s ability to
adapt to and use technology, increasing community service, and reducing dependence on public services (Vernez and Mizell 2001). Also, the cost of retaining is cheaper than recruiting and this has significant implications for the budget at large. Universities around the nation must understand the impact of the growing Latino population on society. The United States must compete in a global economy, but the largest population, the largest racial/ethnic group, continues to be the least educated in the country.

Summary

This review of the literature suggests that many of the factors responsible for the barriers will take additional resources to address to make Latina students successful. With social, familial, academic and financial support mechanisms, the Latina college student can persist and succeed. The Latina college student numbers will continue to increase and support services must be in alignment with the growth in order to support the student as it can impact the way they perceived themselves and how that contributes to their self-esteem, their community, and ultimate the economy.
Chapter 3- Methodology

The focus of this study was to investigate the academic persistence and success of Latina college students. This research sought to understand persistence and success of Latina college students as the population has been increasing and the impact on the economy has been tremendous (Ennis et al., 2011). Given the intention of the study, the researcher deemed qualitative research as the most appropriate method for this investigation. Qualitative research can be used when there is a study of a group or population that cannot be measured by identified variables (Creswell, 2007). It is an effective methodology because the data can be collected in a person’s natural environment, which can incorporate the layers of culture information, behaviors, opinions, social norms and status, ethnicity, religion and gender roles (Creswell, 2007).

The research methodology used was narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to collect stories from the participants which allowed narratives to emerge within their cultural experiences. The theoretical framework that was used was LATcrit theory. LATcrit theory has been derived from Critical Race Theory, and it allowed the researcher to investigate how the participants’ cultural experiences at a PWI affected their perceptions of success. This section will explain the role as of the researcher, research traditions, participant selection, data collection, data storage and data analysis.

Positionality Statement

My personal experiences as a Latina college student have given me many beliefs, biases and opinions about the issues or retention and success among Latino college students. As explained by Machi and McEvoy (2009), introspection can bring views and attachments to the forefront; and, since this study stems from both personal and professional experiences, I must be
clear what my biases are. One of the many challenges I experienced as a Latina college student was the lack of services and programs needed to support my success. Although I did graduate from college and succeed, as a college administrator I am fully aware that I should have had more academic support, familial support and financial support.

Since I attended a PWI institution and currently work at one, I do see that attention must be given to these students, and services and programs need to be added. My belief is that there should be programs and services that cater to all types of students because each student carries their own values and experiences. When I was a college student, I did not understand much about the college process or the qualifications needed to attend college. I never believed that I could attend an Ivy League school or a school that was too expensive because of my economic situation. Because of my upbringing and experiences, I had already diminished my own potential and understood my financial struggle. I think that there are many students that feel the same way and attend local state schools or community colleges for that reason. But there are many Latino first generation, low income students who do believe they can attend these colleges and succeed. What is the difference in that mindset? Is it upbringing, financial stability or another factor? That is what I want to gain more insight into in my study.

In my research and in my data collection, I needed to separate my personal biases and prejudices from the data I was collecting and analyzing. Beyea & Slattery (2006) explained that whether you are researching your own race or culture or a different one, we all have preconceived attitudes/beliefs and biases toward our research. It was important to draw from those beliefs but not allow them to interfere with our research. Although I had an opinion about what I think the Latino culture may think and experience, I needed to allow the research to speak for itself.
Finally, it was important for me to understand my research and the culture by minimizing my own biases into my research. The way to do this was positioning my beliefs in a way to study the subjects and their roles at a university setting. I needed to acknowledge what I have experienced and use that experience as a guide but not impose my views onto my research. I also needed to listen to the experiences of my interviewees without trying to analyze or changes their point of view. A researcher needs to understand that the role is to focus on research, gather date and present findings, whether they agree with those findings or not.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study was guided by the following overarching question:

What were the cultural experiences and stories of Latina college students or recent graduates who maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher while they attended a Predominately White Institution?

This question allowed space for the students to focus on any internal or external factors that assisted them to remain persistent and succeed in school. Their culture may also have impacted the way they saw their barriers and how they persisted, despite those barriers. The familial, academic and financial practices also justified how those influences affected success in attaining a 3.0 GPA.

Additionally, three sub-questions were:

1. How did the participants understand internal/external factors that afforded them the opportunity to persist in a PWI?
2. How did the participants feel that race played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution? (Race was defined as physical characteristics, ethnic background, and geographical roots).

3. How did the participants feel that culture played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution? (Culture was defined as thoughts, customs, traditions, beliefs and values that define a person).

Research Design

Qualitative research methodology was used to analyze the success and persistence of Latina college students. The selection of this qualitative approach was beneficial because it relayed ideas through narrative, the human stories of the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that when qualitative methods were used, the researcher became the instrument of research because she explored the human activities of the subjects in their natural setting.

Qualitative research provided the ability to incorporate participants’ own words to communicate their experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, a qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study, since its overall objective was to learn through the direct personal accounts of Latina college students and their ability to persist in a Predominately White Institution. According to Bogdan and Biklen, (2003) understanding lived experience was multifaceted and based on meaning making relative to unique perceptions which sets qualitative approaches apart from quantitative approaches.

This method was also chosen for this study because it focused on the individual point of view, in this case, successful academic persistence of Latina college students. This study was focused on the desire to view a phenomenon holistically and in its natural setting. It also focused
on utilizing the human instrument to serve as the primary research tool (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

**Research Tradition**

To reflect on the participants’ experiences and stories, narrative inquiry was used. This type of research design was influenced by philosophers, anthropologists, and psychotherapists such as Dewey, Johnson, Geertz, Bateson, Czarniawska, Coles, and Polkinghorne (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). The theoretical reasoning of narrative inquiry was the belief that telling a story about oneself involves telling a story about choice and action, which have integrally moral and ethical dimensions (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). The process of telling the narrative was believed to have the potential to transform the participant’s experiences. This form of research represented a change in focus from individual meanings to cultural narratives and their influence on people’s lives (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001). The aim of narrative inquiry was therefore not to find one generalizable truth but to bring up many truths/narratives (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001). Narrative inquiry methodology provided the opportunity to go beyond the search for the one grand narrative (Grbich, 1999) and examined the transformative process of storytelling in this field.

In their article, Clandinin and Connelly suggested that individuals’ lives were filled with stories and that narrative analysis best addressed how “humans experience the world” (1990, p. 2). Dewey (1938) expressed that narrative analysis was instrumental in understanding an individual’s experience, and to do so effectively, one had to engage in the storytelling of individuals and their social worlds. Given the importance of engaging people to share their stories in narrative approaches, the relationship between the researcher and the participant was very important (Hogan, 1988).
Narrative inquiry was one of the best ways to reflect upon experiences. This method allowed the researcher to get information on the experiences of the Latina college student and how those experiences and perceptions influenced their persistence and success (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry was also used in this study to reveal students’ own spoken experiences about how they were able to successfully navigate the college system despite personal, institutional, and environmental barriers that are ever present in the lives of college students particularly of Latino backgrounds. The researcher’s belief was that these voices were needed to create future well-informed policies and programs to support other Latina college students. The researcher believed that this potentially could motivate also a much-needed paradigm shift in how college and universities set-up Latina college students for success.

Narrative inquiry was grounded in Dewey’s theory of experience, particularly as it related to his thinking about situation, continuity and interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50; Dewey, 1997, p. 51). Dewey’s (1997/1938) criteria of experience included the setting or environment in which the experience was taking place, which was the four-year, public institution in the case of the current study. Secondly, Dewey’s idea of continuity was associated with examining past, present, and future experiences to identify solutions to the issue addressed. Dyson and Genishi (1994) theorized that narratives help transform what takes place currently to shape a future that is much better than what students and communities are experiencing in the present. Narrative analysis, according to Wells (2011), was used to examine the content, structure and context of the narrative to gain meaning of a specific phenomenon.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry as a means toward understanding a specific experience. In this research study, understanding was pursued through the experiences of Latina college students through interviews, and so it built a relationship
between the researcher and selected Latina college student participants. The methodology elicited stories that related to the human experience in a way that this experience was voiced by the participant and re-told by the researcher. The notion was that individuals make sense of themselves and the world through narratives (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Chamberlain and Thompson (2004) offered similar thinking regarding the relationships that evolve from narrative inquiry, given that time, place, the occasion, the researcher and participants become interwoven. Narrative inquiry was therefore most applicable to this research study as it facilitated the researcher’s examination of the college experiences of Latina college students at PWI. The researcher’s analysis of the narratives enabled her to make conclusions and recommendations around programming that inevitably would further the college success of Latina college students. Through one-on-one guided in-depth interviews, the researcher sought to understand the participants’ life experiences in terms of their personal and educational lives. Thus, the researcher attempted to piece together a cogent story of who they were, as well as factors they perceived to be related to their educational attainment and success.

Ultimately, the researcher sought to identify challenges and deficiencies experienced by Latina college students. However, more importantly, the researcher in her study hoped to identify opportunities and assets that had propelled their educational success and persistence. In turn, the researcher recommended solutions that could support other Latina college students in the pursuit of educational attainment.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher when pursuing narrative inquiry was to collect the stories of her participants and use those stories to show what these students truly experienced in the college
experience. The researcher’s role was also to translate those stories into a clear analysis that explained their past and how it affected their present.

As an administrator at an institution, the researcher of this study remained aware of her biases throughout the research study. While Janesick (2000) maintained there was some bias in all research designs, and Morse (1994) made a similar assertion, Creswell (2012) argued for “clarifying researcher bias at the onset of a study” (p. 251). It was important that in the clarification, the researcher was prepared to articulate any pre-conceptions or existing prejudices and preferences that might have implications for the approach of the study. The researcher also needed to be aware of checking in with the participants to make sure that the data that she was collecting was valid and clear. Merriam (2009) noted that the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis and had their human ability to immediately seek clarifications and engage in member check-in for inaccuracies with regard to participants’ responses.

Pragmatically, the researcher conducted individual interviews, and developed transcriptions of the study. Once the researcher had transcribed the recordings, she performed accuracy checks on her own transcription by reviewing the recordings and my transcriptions to ensure she had a verbatim transcription. The researcher also followed Merriam’s advice and employed ‘member checking’ with each participant, by sending them their personal transcription that pertained to their individual interview and sought their confirmation of its accuracy. The researcher also recorded the interviews, kept a notebook so any personal perspectives or beliefs that came to mind as she performed the data collection, analysis and documentation during my analysis of the data. The researcher continued to be genuinely, both personally and professionally, interested in this research study and its potential contributions to social change as
it relates to Latina colleges students and their potential to contribute to, and enjoy the opportunities of mainstream America. The researcher held herself accountable that every precaution against self-bias was taken so the recommendations she made are based on data and findings that were accurate and valid. The researcher was also purposeful in the participant selection process by selecting participants from most information could be learned.

**Participant Selection and Site Location**

The researcher used purposeful sampling to identify and select a sample from which he or she could learn the most (Merriam, 2009). The participants for this study were adult Latina college students with a 3.0 or higher GPA academic standing, between 20-22 years old, enrolled in their last term at a university or having graduated in the most recent term. The university chosen was a large 4 year, Predominately White Institution (PWI). Students were invited to participate for 3 individual interviews 30-60 minutes each. Interviews took place anywhere that the student felt comfortable on the university campus. The student union was offered as an option if participants were comfortable with this location and they chose to be interviewed in an office in a female residence hall. It was indicated in the Recruitment Email (Appendix A), that in an effort to confirm the interest and permission of the participants, they would be provided with an Recruitment Email (Appendix B), which included a brief description of the study, the problem statement and research question that guided the study; and an informed Consent Form (Appendix E), that each participant signed, which assured them full confidentiality of their participation and disclosures during the study. Pseudonyms were used for all research participants to ensure anonymity.

**Recruitment**
To recruit prospective participants and reduce bias, the researcher enlisted the assistance of the Latino Cultural Center, the Registrars and the Honors Department. The researcher met with each of the directors of the departments to familiarize them with the study, including its purpose, criterion, the research questions she needed to answer, and the time commitment required of participants. Given the organization format each of the above-named programs follow, directors were familiar with their student groups and, therefore, equipped to identify potential participants based on the required selection criteria. Each director was asked to invite and identify three students who met the selection criteria. Those students were asked to contact researcher by email if they were interested. Four participants showed interest and researchers contacted them by email to set up a time to explain study and the interview process. At the time of the email notification of the individual interviews, the researcher sent the consent form to the prospective participants, and they signed with her present in their first interview. Participants then were provided with the date and time of their individual interview with advanced notice. The researcher contacted the remaining student and thanked her for offering to participate and indicated that she had not been selected to participate, but could be at a future time.

**Data Collection**

For data collection, the researcher selected students who were in their last semester of college. The researcher also focused on getting names from the Latino cultural center since they had a large percentage of Latina student population. The researcher served as the interviewer of the three-five Latina college students. Two participants were recent graduates and one was in her last semester of college. Participants for individual interviews were recruited and selected as outlined in the section entitled, Procedures for Recruitment and Participation. For the individual interviews, each of the three-five participants at their respective meeting times were asked to
read the Study Overview and turn in the signed Consent Form. The interview was conducted and recorded to capture all data accurately.

During the interview process, researcher used narrative inquiry to focus 16 questions to get to know the experiences of these subjects. The steps taken were transcribing the interviews, pulling out themes and turning themes into topics and stories. This helped the researcher to seek out meaning, structure and the essence of lived experiences of each research participant while learning different sets up of points of view. These interviews focused on gathering information on internal and external factors that allowed them to persist and succeed academically. This process also allowed the researcher to implications and recommendations for further study. This following section will be broken up into Individual Participant Profiles, Persistent and Success Themes, Participant Recommendations and a Summary of Qualitative Analysis.

There were two forms of recordings, one from a dictation device and one from my cellular phone (application). Verbatim transcriptions were prepared from each of the recordings, and these transcriptions were subsequently shared with the respective participants to further ensure accuracy of the content. If for some reason, there was an issue with a recording or conflict, additional interviews were scheduled. Additionally, once the verbatim transcriptions were member-checked for accuracy, the data was reconstructed into individual stories to make sense of the transcripts. In narrative inquiry, it was this reconstruction by the researcher that gave voice to the thoughts and perspectives of participants in a comprehensible manner. Participants received a copy of their respective stories and were asked to review and revise them for accuracy. If there was a need for revision, the researcher communicated with the participants and had them review again.

**Data Storage**
Data were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home, and on her personal computer which was password protected. After dissertation defense, all hard copies of data were destroyed and electronic files were deleted from the researcher’s computer, including the ‘Recycle Bin’, Sample Size and Strategy. The sample size for this study was set at three participants. The researcher believed that the interviews of the selected Latina college students generated a rich body of data related to their college experiences and what they perceived contributed to their success as students. Creswell (2012), Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), and Merriam (2009) maintained that sample sizes should be small in qualitative studies as a general rule; however, it was equally critical to the meaningfulness of the study that wide-ranging detail be gathered about the few individuals selected as study participants. With regard to narrative inquiry, in particular, it was commonplace to have one or two research participants (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

The narratives were analyzed through open and axial coding in an effort to identify recurring themes. These themes were further analyzed as a means of answering the three research questions of this study which centered on Latina college students’ experiences and their perceptions of what made them successful students. Merriam (2009) asserted that, in all qualitative approaches, either some or all data are collected through an interview process. In this study, it is the researcher’s opinion that the interviews generated a meaningful body of data which served to assist her in answering the research questions. “Interviewing in qualitative Investigations is usually more open-ended and less structured as this allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas
on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). This was important, as the researcher used an open-ended approach for her questioning to provide flexibility for follow-up questions if necessary.

Creswell (2012) maintained three decisions are necessary when a researcher resolves to engage in purposeful sampling. First, the researcher must decide on which participants will be selected: second, the specific sampling strategy must be identified; and, third, the size of the sample must be decided. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is more concerned with who the participants are, as they will need to exhibit the lived experiences that help the researcher answer the research question (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The development of the interview of this study was informed by Patton’s (2002) question types, which urged the use of experience and behavior questions. The idea was to glean what the respondents had done by exploring how they had acted in certain environments, and what opinion and values addressed what they thought about a particular phenomenon. Interview questions included ‘feeling’ questions aimed at evoking responses relative to the affective domain of respondents, and ‘background’ questions that related to the demographics of the respondents.

The data analysis process for this study included a careful review of each audio recording and subsequent transcription to ensure accuracy. Merriam (2009) asserted one of the most efficient and meaningful ways to analyze data in a qualitative study was to begin analyzing inductively during the data collection process. The rationale was that this approach allowed the researcher to further “focus the study, make important decisions about the study as it progresses such as the need for additional respondents or the enhancement of questions given the responses of previous respondents” (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). During the researcher’s repeated reviews of the transcriptions to hone deep familiarity with the responses, she used inductive analysis to identify narrative areas and search for patterns in the data that she deemed had a direct
correlation to the research questions. The researcher then used the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) data analysis software, to facilitate the retrieval of pertinent data for her development of individual narratives, and the subsequent coding and categorization of themes. It is through this process of inductive analysis that the researcher developed narratives and emailed them to each of her research participants, requesting them to review the narrative and provide comments indicating any areas of inaccuracy or misinterpretation on the researcher’s part. According to Merriam (2009), coding facilitated the process of making sense of the researcher’s qualitative research study. Codes serve as a basis for discussion and comparison as the researcher collected and coded the actual data until the researcher was satisfied the codes summarily explained the phenomenon.

Once the researcher had performed open coding on the data, she used “axial coding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 180) to group the initial codes into categories. Through the researcher’s axial coding process, she grouped experiences that were repetitive. This was the process the researcher employed with all narratives until she reached ‘saturation’, which was described by Merriam (2009) “as the point at which you realize no new information, insights or understandings are forthcoming” (p. 183). Once the researcher was satisfied with the number and essence of categories she had developed, these served as the foundation of the findings and, ultimately, the answers to the research questions. The findings facilitated the researcher’s development of recommendations, as outlined in Chapter Five.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

Member checking of the participants was a process that the researcher followed to make sure that her data collected was valid. Webster and Mertova (2007) indicated; “the trustworthiness of narrative research lies in the confirmation by participants of their reported
stories of experience” (p. 99), that is, member checking. The researcher used “member checks” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229) as a means of engaging the research participants in reviewing, checking and providing feedback on the transcription of their interview, as well as the interpretive narratives that emerge from inductive analysis. Conducting member checking on the interview transcription, and providing feedback on the interpretive narratives constituted the process of “triangulation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 299) which Merriam indicated as strengthening the confirmability of a study given the use of multiple methods to provide corroborating evidence. To facilitate transferability of the study, the researcher provided sufficient “thick descriptive” data, as recommended by Merriam (2009, p. 227) so that the study findings may be applied in other college environments (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In the researcher’s study, there were detailed descriptions of the research design and findings, including quotes from the research participants.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

No part of the actual research for this study was carried out until a full review had been conducted of the research proposal and approval received from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher also completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) Human Subjects Protection Training Module (Appendix E). To ensure research participants had the opportunity to contact the researcher’s Dissertation Chairperson in any regard, the Chairperson’s telephone and email contact information was provided on the Consent Form. The researcher followed the ethical protocols described in Merriam (2009), by ensuring she had not discussed the personal disclosures of any participant with another. Additionally, the researcher used pseudonyms when referring to participants and the institution, respectively, so that full privacy and anonymity were preserved. As noted earlier in this chapter, in an effort to
confirm the interest and permission of the participants, each was provided with a Study Overview/Letter of Participation outlining the study and its process, and a Consent Form which assured them of the anonymity of their disclosures and their prerogative to withdraw from the study at any time, and without penalty.

The process of enlisting the informed consent of research participants was a critical step in attempting to ensure participants fully understood their rights and responsibilities, and the need to be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate (Merriam, 2009). The informed consent associated with this study addressed the overarching purpose of the research and the specific data collection methodology, the means by which participants’ anonymity was preserved, and disclosed of any risks associated with the study (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The above-mentioned requirements and cautions guided the manner by which the researcher conducted her study. Even though the actual names and signatures of the participants appeared on consent forms, those forms, as well as recorded interviews that bear participants’ actual names, were kept separate and apart in a secure cabinet at the researcher’s home. Alias names appeared in the transcriptions and in the report of the dissertation study. A caution Merriam (2009) indicated, was that ethical dilemmas can arise at any time during a research study and that, no matter how established an institution’s code of ethics may be, “actual ethical practice comes down to a researcher’s own values and ethics” (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). In the instance of this study, the researcher was sure to be ethical in her interactions and communications.

Summary

Chapter 3 introduced narrative inquiry as an ideal qualitative approach for this research study. The Chapter also provided an in-depth view of the research design and methodology, data
collection and analysis, participant selection and recruitment, and issues of trustworthiness and ethics. Chapter Four presents the data and in Chapter Five, the researcher’s interpretation of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for interventions and further research.
Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the experiences of successful Latina college students with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Participants provided insight to the following research question and sub questions with:

What are the cultural experiences and stories of Latina college students or recent graduates who maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher while attending a Predominantly White Institution?

Their stories provided insight into what influenced their persistence and success and what opportunities and what barriers they overcame to become successful. They presented how they believed culture and race played a role in their persistence and success and how they achieved success in a predominately White institution. They also shared how specific factors affected their persistence and success.

Three sub-questions were also asked:

1. How do the participants understand internal/external factors that afforded them to opportunity to persist in a PWI?

2. How do the participants feel that race played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution?

3. How do the participants feel that culture played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution?

Internal factors include any institutional factors that the student has experienced and external factors are those factors that impact the student outside of the institution.

Race is defined as physical characteristics, ethnic background and geographical roots.
Culture is defined as thoughts, customs, traditions, beliefs and values that defines a group of people.

To gain a better understanding of the various internal and external factors that affect these students, this chapter is comprised of participant stories, in their own words, that will showcase the commonalities and contrasts of those experiences that contribute to their success. All the stories from the Latina college students showed how different experiences and outcomes arose from the student’s upbringing and what values were instilled in them from their childhood. Finally, each participant shared recommendations they would offer PWI’s in order to support the Latina college student and how it would improve their experiences and impact retention and graduation rates. This information identified how each student believed that different supports are necessary based on the needs of the Latina college student.

The chapter presents the individual profiles and themes based on the stories from three Latina college students. The main and sub themes generated from these interviews include a range of factors that influenced persistence and success. The main themes included the perceptions of being Latina, race vs. culture, internal/external factors and barriers they overcame. The persistence and success themes showed how motivation, resiliency and support systems genuinely affected their success in a predominately-White institution.

**Individual Participant Profiles**

Four potential participants responded to recruitment emails and were interested in the study. Three participants were able to attend the interviews and connected with the researcher in a timely manner. At the time of the interviews, one out of the three participants was still an undergraduate in her last semester and two of them graduated in May 2016. These students all currently attend or have attended the same large, public, predominantly White institution and
have had different experiences depending on the way they perceived themselves, academic success and support on and off campus. The following section will go into detail about who the participants are and how being Latina affected how they perceived themselves and their success.

**Veronica’s Background**

Veronica is of Puerto Rican descent. She is a recent graduate with a 3.0 GPA as a history major. She was born in Springfield, Massachusetts but moved several times because her father was in the military. She lived in Germany, Massachusetts, Virginia, New York and Willimantic, CT. She felt excited about growing up in different places and meeting new people but was jealous of those friends who had friends from childhood because she never had that experience herself. She explains that her childhood was unique in the number of times the family moved, but her family remained supportive of each other. She attended the PWI from 2012-2016.

Veronica came to the first interview explaining that she felt that she was not the typical Latina college student. Her shoulders were down and she looked away from me many times and explained that she felt insecure about how she was going to answer questions and how she may disappoint by not answering in way that would help the researcher. The purpose of the interviews was explained to her so that she could understand the research itself and how important she was to the study. As the interview went on she started looking directly at the researcher and smiling and her posture changed. It seemed that she felt more comfortable as the interviews progressed in the second and third round and it was evident in her body language she getting more relaxed and more confidence showed by her smiles and open body language.

**Sally’s Background**

Sally is currently a senior at the university. She is a Psychology and History major and holds a 3.5 GPA. She is a recent graduate of May 2017. She is of Mexican and Costa Rican
descent and grew up in New Rochelle, NY. She lived there until she attended college and moved to Connecticut. Both her parents care about academics and pushed her to do well in school. Her dad was a big advocate of college but really didn’t understand the admission process. He did not want his daughter to suffer economically like their family has done in the past.

Sally is extremely busy in her last semester working and attending classes. She was very forthright in her interviews and really appreciated telling her story. Her body language showed security as she stood straight up, looked directly at me with confidence and asked questions during the interview. She tended to smile a lot while she explained her experiences in college and really had clear facial expressions. She seemed comfortable and willing to elaborate on questions in all three interviews. She liked to elaborate on her experiences in her childhood as well as in her experience at a college student.

**Stephanie’s Background**

Stephanie is Puerto Rican and a recent PWI graduate (May 2016). She grew up in Puerto Rico and moved to Connecticut and lived with her grandmother when she was in college. She is an Allied Health major and held a 3.3 at the time of graduation. Her grandfather was an English professor in Puerto Rico and he instilled in her the importance of college. Although her parents never attended college, Stephanie knew that she was always going to attend college and that she would find a way to finance it.

Stephanie described her experiences in college and how support systems and staff assisted her. She took advantage of services that the other two participants either did not have or did not want to use and put a lot of emphasis on those and how they contributed to her success. She strongly perceived herself as more of a “typical” Latina and that being more Latina meant that she saw herself differently from the typical White student. She focused on how she
connected with that part of herself and sought out experiences based on her identity. She looked straight at the researcher when answering questions and had a very comfortable seating position with arms and legs resting beside her. She liked to joke in between questions and was really passionate about telling her story.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

**Being Latina.** The question that was asked to the participants was, “What aspects they perceive as being Latina.” Two participants really perceived themselves as Latina first. They know that they are Latina and it is the first thing they think about in regards to describing themselves. One participant (Veronica) explained that she saw herself as American and Latina. She moved around a lot due to her military family. She explained that she felt that she always needed to fit in and transition to her new surroundings. She explained that because of that, when she came to college she wanted to be treated like everyone else. As a freshman, she was put into a student services and support program for students of color because she was Latina and that bothered her because she was had good grades and did not need academic support. She felt as if they only put in that program because she was a minority. Veronica also felt that her race did not play a role in her success at all but her culture (values and traditions) did because her mother instilled the value of getting an education and working hard. She went further to explain that her mother was worried that her daughter would be the “typical” Latina that may get pregnant at a young age and make poor decisions that would ultimately mess up her future. Due to this, Veronica worked hard and stuck to her religious values, always having her mother’s concern in the back of her mind. Veronica explained,

Well, because I’m Puerto Rican I think in my perspective Latina and American they are synonymous which I think a lot of Puerto Ricans might not agree with both, I’m
American as much as I’m Puerto Rican…it is the same thing to me. I understand that I have a different race and that Puerto Rican culture is different than typical American culture but I still consider it an aspect of American culture. But I think sometimes when I see me being Latina, I guess when I feel really Latina would probably be like the way I look compared to other females on the campus. I think that helps me you know stick out, I definitely feel Latina with my physical traits but other than that I think it’s American. I think it’s all American. So, in my opinion I’m not always conscious about that, I’m me, I’m Puerto Rican and American so they are the same thing to me. So anything I do is what a Puerto Rican would do, or anything I do is what an American would do. So I’m not always aware that you know that I don’t so to me what it means to be a Latina college student is what it means to be a college student.

Veronica really emphasized the fact that her physical traits make her look different from the White American but she really felt American. She further explained that she understood she was a minority because she felt and looked different but that that did not create a barrier to success. Intersectionality plays a role as she is seeing herself as a part of two cultures. She believed that Latins American and American were the same. At the same time, she knew she was a minority and explained,

I feel like it was always known that I was a minority group. Before I started at the university I had to go through student support services and they target first generation minority student and low income and I think I was chosen because I was a minority student. I feel like it was always known that “you’re a minority” and being around minorities just made it more pronounced and was like “yeah, we’re minorities” and but I don’t really know, I think it can be a little white washed.
Sally perceives herself as a Latina American and explains that although her heritage is Mexican and Costa Rican, she considers herself Americanized. She had difficulty with just focusing on her Latina identity because of her upbringing and how she has been treated based on her physical presence. She went on to say,

I know that I am Latina, but you know our parents never really raised us with that stereotypical heritage kind of so I was definitely very Americanized from very early on. I know that others see me as Latina but and colleges and universities tend to be more willing to help out (financially) to the Latino student. I understand that my identity as a Latina is mostly my heritage but feel American. I see it when I think about my heritage and my father and so on and mother’s grandparents in Mexico and Costa Rica but I definitely do feel like a very Americanized Hispanic Latina student so I don’t necessarily identify very much with being Latina in that sense.

Sally really expressed her knowledge of her Latina heritage and how important it was to her. However she also feels Americanized and understands that her experience may be different from others based on her upbringing (military family). She knows she is different in a PWI but doesn’t let that affect her determination and persistence. Since she comes from a military family, she has a different sense of values that come directly from her military background. The values include hard work, equality, and being able to make friends across racial lines. That part of her identity if primary to her as oppose of Latina or Puerto Rican.

When Sally was asked what it is like to be a Latina at a Predominantly White Institution and her experience as Latina, she explained,

Typically right off the bat people don’t assume I am Latina by any means, but kinda when I do start telling them or if I just say hey I am Mexican and all that kind of stuff like
I know that they immediately assume that maybe my family is not as well-off or that they are incredibly strict and things of that nature or I know that that there has been a few people, not many, that are like oh you got in here just because you’re Latina and not because you put in the work. Most of the time that does not happen, most of the time people don’t assume anything because once again I kind of know them a little bit before that comes into the conversation, just because they don’t look at me and assume that I’m Latina and I know that one of the things that I get a lot is that when people find out that I’m Latina through things like PRLACC (Puerto Rican Latina American Cultural Center)…they automatically assume that I should be involved in that, but I just have never done that, it was never a particular interest to me because I didn’t feel like I necessarily needed the help that they had offered as a freshman, because I was able to kinda find a good group of people and I never had the need to be around only Hispanics or only people that identified with me in that way cuz I have been able to fit into the larger crowd very easily.

Sally feels that because her physical appearance doesn’t immediately represent Latina, she had different experience than many Latina students at PWIs. She explained that the only way her peers recognized her as Latina was through her involvement in the Latino cultural center. She feels that her physically characteristics (dark hair, white skin and no accent) and her speech present someone from any culture and could be White, European or other. Because of this, she felt she assimilates and is judged less than other Latina college students. She feels that this may make her feel more accepted at times since she would have to verbally explain that she is Latina because most people do not know based on her first name or characteristics. Since she moved around a lot due to her military background, she always felt like she could blend in and fit in.
She was used to changes and meeting those from different background so it was not a big deal to her.

**Race vs. Cultural Identity.** Participants had a hard time understanding the difference between “culture” and “race” but after they received the definition, they all explained that their culture has lot to do with how they perceive themselves and the environment around them but race or the country they were from really was not a factor of success in their eyes. When asked the question on how culture and race played a role in their success, they replied in different ways. For example, Veronica explained that culture was more of what she attributed to her identity rather than race. She went on to say that her values played a major role in her success. She shared,

> It played a huge role because I was brought up to work hard and when I wasn’t working hard I felt guilty, I felt like I was doing the wrong thing. I was scared in college about to losing myself and it was a concern that both my parents had. I grew up in a Christian home and that there was a lot of values that I took with me from that and I was scared of losing that part of me as well being in a campus that was very liberal, that doesn’t always coincide with all my beliefs and that at least that is what I’ve been taught to think at the campus. So I think my values really did contribute to my success, when I wasn’t following them I didn’t feel successful even if I was on paper maybe I’m doing fine in school but because you know I’m just getting by but I’m still doing fine in school I’m still not putting in one hundred percent so I’m not going to feel as successful…um so they played a huge part. And some values of mine changed because my family life had changed. I learned a lot about myself so I think that my success today has just been a lot of trial and error as well, figuring things out, trying to adapt to changes that I’ve had to just because of events in my life I guess.
Veronica really focused on the fact that her race had nothing to do with her persistence and that it really was her cultural values and religion that helped her stay focused in college. That came from her upbringing and her family support and values. She explained that her focus on her education was from her parents telling her to put school first and she started working hard as early as middle school. In high school she took extra credits to enter college with 20 credits to make sure she began her college experience ahead.

Sally also believed that culture played a bigger role than race to her. She felt the way she was raised was based on those values and morals and that was big in her family. She says,

My culture played a huge role…in how well I succeeded…like I’ve said, once again my family has very much pushed for education being that neither of my parents have the best education and they want what is best for their kids and my friends parents did the same thing for their kids…there is that line that you just want each generation to do a little better and even when I was younger my parents never wanted me to quit on anything even if I didn’t like something they would say to try it for a while and if then you really don’t like it, then it’s fine. But, they never wanted me to say because I had one bad day to say I quit you know…I used to do softball when I was younger and every now and then I would have a bad day or something of that nature and sometimes I would say I want to quit or whatever and my parents were like no you are going to keep trying and then…but always with the conditions that if there was ever a point where I really, really didn’t like it anymore, then that they would be fine with that they just never wanted me to give up, because I was upset with myself or just had an off day so like when it comes to like school and stuff like that I’ve always, I’ve been pretty good at that…um and and I you
know hear my parents in the back of my head say you had a bad day, it’s ok just let it go and then you try again tomorrow.

Sally attributes values like not giving up and hard work to her culture and upbringing and it is these values that she believes helped her to persist in life. This is a theme throughout her life and with her academics. She attributes her persistence to her cultural values and determination.

**Internal/External Factors.** All three participants enjoyed their college experience. Two participants explained that although they worked really hard to keep up with their academics, they also tried to balance their experiences with clubs and organization and attend cultural center events. One of the participants did not get involved at all and explained that her college experience was difficult because her parents went through a divorce during her first year. She was a commuter and had a difficult time concentrating so she tried to live on campus and to separate from the family stress but she still did not do well. Ultimately, she changed her major from Nursing to History and this not only revived her motivation but her grades started to improve and used her professor as a mentor. She did not join any clubs or organizations, as her focus on was pure academics. She explained that her support came from her faculty mentor and her best friend in college. Another participant, Stephanie, explained that she used many of the services and resources on campus and that those experiences helped her persist and be successful. She explained,

So here at the university, I focused on the academics, at first I tried to be open to everything, I went to the Puerto Rican and Latino Cultural center, the Women’s Center, the LGTB center and then I just tried to stay involved, I even did community service, I did the Husky Thon which is a fundraiser for the children’s hospital in Connecticut as well. And after that I mostly focused on my academics because I saw how hard college
was and I cared more about my a’s and b’s then getting c’s with degrees. After my freshman year, I was always at the Puerto Rican Latin American Cultural Center that became my home, especially when I moved off campus, I became very close with the director. I actually made a lot of my friends there too and I went through my ups and downs there to so that helped a lot and there were people to rely on there for academics if I ever needed help.

As for external factors, all three participants explained that they were told since they were children they would be attending college and knew it was something their parents expected. Two participants explained that their parents were pushing for them to choose successful fields like Medicine and Allied Health. Parents always wanted more for their children and did not want their children to struggle financially like them. Two participants explained that their parents started funding their education and tried to help out any way they could to ease the burden. One participant explained that her parents paid for some of her college experience and she took out loans to pay for the remaining amount because they were unable to afford all four years. They all said they were first generation students and only had aunts or grandparents, not parents who attended college. They knew being a college graduate was as important to their family as it was to them and this gave them both pressure and support to succeed. They all explained that it was expected they do well in school and get good grades since they were the first to attend college and needed to be successful. When asked who talked to her about the importance of college, Stephanie explained,

Ok, so I learned about college very early on. My grandfather used to be an English professor in Puerto Rico until we moved over here and he was always on top of me over school and it became second nature for me and in middle school I was already thinking
what I wanted to do with my life and then I started looking ahead on what I wanted to do for college. I paid for it all by myself and still paying for it. I think it was always important to me and I the focus was that I wanted to always have good grades.

Stephanie really focused on making her family proud and how important it was to attend college and succeed, regardless of obstacles that arose. She focused on the fact that nothing in life came easy to her family so she knew that this would not be easy but she would work hard to fund and complete her education.

Each participant explained that their parents or close relatives spoke with them about college. Each participant shared that it was expected that they apply to college, even though little was known about the application process, how financial aid worked or how to assist in preparing to choose a major. They all also had self-motivation to do well academically and held themselves accountable for this in high school and college. They all also explained that college was more difficult than high school and it was a difficult transition for them.

All three participants explained that their support systems were their parents. They all explained that they were expected to do well and always felt that support. One participant explained that she called her mother every week to talk to her to make it through the week. One participant also said that she was her own support and self-drive until she had the faculty mentor and friend to help her. She first thought she did not need support but realized she did and used it later in her college career. Another participant used the services on campus, deans, director of Latino cultural center and friends. She explained that the Director of the Latino Cultural Center even went as far as to allow her to sleep at her house when her car broke down. Though they all
looked to different sources of support on campus, Stephanie really explained how many people and services helped her succeed at the university. Stephanie noted,

I think someone who made big impact on me in college was the Director of Puerto Rican Latin American cultural center. She had a very hectic schedule, she always made a time to help me. I was actually one point when final exams were coming along and my car broke down. I had to figure out how I was going to make it to all my exams and she actually let me sleep at her house and she would bring me on and off campus. She was a complete angel, treating me like I was one of her own. Even before that she would every now and then ask me if everything is ok and if anything has changed. I think just having someone just care how your day is going makes an impact on you when everything feels like its falling down and you’re too busy to breathe, it makes your day just a little better and makes you feel like you can breathe.

Stephanie went on to explain that she was even suffering from depression at one point from personal things in her life and if it were not for the support she gained from this center and the director, she may not have persisted and graduated.

Conversely, Veronica explained that she really didn’t seek assistance from anyone in college as a support until her parents got divorced and she had to focus in a different way and find another support network. She explained,

So right before college my parents were at the forefront of my support and then when college started, they were not and for a lot of my college experience they made things a little difficult for me so that was hard for me to deal with that. Friends, I have a best friend and our friendship grew to what we were then to now. She’s probably one of my top support systems I had. Peers, not so much because there are not very many people
that I connected with in college and I’m ok with that. That’s the type of person I am mentors yes, surprisingly some of them have changed and some have stayed the same. I think it really started when I switched my major from nursing to history, I found mentors in my professors and in employers. I really got close with my uncle after the divorce he’s been very consistent and I’m very grateful for that. I guess I never saw the importance of having a mentor because I had my parents in high school, because what can beat that I guess. But in college I see the need to have a mentor who has the level of understanding of you and who has the same interest as you and sees you in a different atmosphere than like your parents maybe and family so I definitely have seen the importance of having a mentor in different areas of your life and seeing that that’s ok, so yeah.

Veronica explained further that she really didn’t understand the need for mentors or support systems outside of her family until she found herself without the ability to gain it from her parents. Since they were going through so much during their divorce, she found herself reaching out to faculty and friends who were a great help to her.

Sally explained that her family and her friends were a big support system for her in college. She depended on them for her whole college career and believed they were a big part of her success. Sally says,

I call my parents once a week and we talk for hours, I have always been very open with them, especially with my mom, I kind of go over the layout of the whole week and that runs back and forth, every now and then if I have a bad day or my mom has a bad day, we kind of call each other even if we weren’t planning on calling each other that day. My dad is somewhat the same way, probably not as often but I talk to them about
anything, whether it’s school, whether it’s friendships, relationships work that I worried about and that nature. The same things with my friends, specifically my friends on campus because they would know every day of what I was going through, we would talk at the end of the night and sometimes it’s just a very nice thing to just relax at the end of the day and I feel like I go to them for anything, which is really important because you just need someone who is there and would listen to you no matter what was going on. I really didn’t really have a mentor specifically there wasn’t one person that I would go to, I feel like anything it would be Jenn (dean) from work however even that is when needed more than something constant.

All three students focused on their family first and peers, faculty and staff members second. Some used support services on campus but not all chose to use these services based on their own needs as students. Some found their support by mistake and others were with the sole intention of seeking support.

**Barriers.** All three participants said that their biggest barrier was financial because they all came from families that were struggling, and they needed to assist in paying their tuition and living expenses. Stephanie said she had many barriers, but the most difficult was financial. She shared,

I had financial barriers because once I moved from on campus to off campus, I had to take care of the costs so I couldn’t afford a brand new or 2 year old car so my car had a lot of problems and I also had a lot of family problems with my grandmother being an alcoholic and suffering from dementia it had a lot to do with a lot of battling in the family to get that under control and all of that took a little bit of toll on my academics but it
wasn’t anything that was noticed because I always managed to rise above it and make sure to stay on track.

Sally explained that she had a bigger financial burden because she was an out-of-state student and depending on her family to help her. When asked what the biggest barrier during college was, she said,

Um I would say that the biggest one would probably be financial…and…just cuz…being out of state the tuition is kind of crazy…I mean luckily we were given some help from the university and we were also able to take things out in loans, but heaven forbid that something ever happened to my dad or mom and we weren’t getting a certain income anymore…that would definitely have been a lot harder to keep up with all the loan payments and things like that…and then…the only other thing that I could potentially think of would have been like…I know about like two years ago my aunt passed away…and it was…she ended up passing away over the summer before junior year however…it was…we were not sure if she was going to make it into the school year so that would have been a really big thing if something like that had happened, if she did end up making it into the school year and then I would have had to go home and everything like that…and then also the grieving process, like I had enough time to grieve before I got back to school but if something like that were to have happened during the school year I could definitely see that as…a barrier to me being able to succeed mostly just because the emotional state that I would have been in.

These students emphasized how the financial stress pushed them to get jobs and also focus on graduating on time so that they would not have prolong student payments and loans. Their parents financed their education but some participants put money in to help pay for college as
well. Barriers arose but these students persevered and found another way to fund their education.

The three participants also spoke about familial barriers. Veronica specifically spoke about how the divorce of her parents affected her concentration in school and how that impacted her academics. She found internal support systems at the college that assisted her in her academic and her personal life. Stephanie explained,

I had a lot of problems and I also had a lot of family problems with my grandmother being an alcoholic and suffering from dementia it had a lot to do with a lot of battling in the family to get that under control and all of that took a little bit of toll on my academics but it wasn’t anything that was noticed because I always managed to rise above it and make sure to stay on track.

Although the family expectations were for her to assist and go home to help the family, she balanced that with her academics and still persisted. Veronica spoke about how her parents wanted a lucrative career for her and she felt some backlash from her father when she switched her major. She said,

I switched to history and my dad said it was the biggest mistake of my life because I wouldn’t be making money doing that and that definitely affected me because he made me second guess my career and I wanted to graduate in four years and I did.

For a short time, Veronica believed that she would not be successful, due to her father’s view of her career choice. This put pressure on her and made her think twice about what she was doing. Luckily, she had assistance from her faculty mentor to understand the value of being a History major and she completed her studies and graduated. Financial and familial barriers were huge factors impacting the success of these three students. Although academics were challenging in
college, they believed that these two factors could have made or broken their persistence and success and they may not have graduated if it were not for internal and external support systems.

**Advice they would give.** The last question that was asked to the participants was about the advice they would give to colleges and universities when finding ways to support Latina college students. Sally said that colleges needed to reach out to students at a younger age so that they understand more about colleges because many Latina students do not have many people to talk to about college and give them the facts about college and what they can do with their degrees. The other suggestion is to increase financial aid and scholarships for these students so they can attend college. Sally explains that many smart students cannot afford a four year school, and they first attend a community college because that is all they can afford. She also went on to say that when admission counselors are recruiting, they say that the university is diverse, but once Latina college students arrive on campus, they see little diversity, making the student not trust the information given to them.

Stephanie explained that colleges must increase Latina staff and faculty so that the Latina college student sees that people like them are represented. She continues to say that it is important to have people that look like them and have the same values and traditions so that the students can relate. She also explained that she believed that more supports and staff need to be added to the cultural centers because at a predominantly White institution, it helps the Latina college student feel at home. She added that the Latina college students are in need of cultural role models since they do not have many in higher education and lack those at home. They tend to seek out those that are like them because they understand the value of family and financial pressure and issues.
Veronica said that the most important support service colleges can give is financial support. The university focuses on STEM majors, and she felt that she didn’t get sufficient support as a History major. She also explained that having more Latina faculty members who can bond with students with similar backgrounds would be helpful and colleges and universities should create programs so that students can connect more with faculty and students of color. These experiences have to happen during the college experience to assist with students choosing their major and remaining at the college until graduation. Opportunities for financial support can greatly assist the Latina student, increasing their chances of success. She also reiterated that all Latina students do not need the services and may have different experiences based on their upbringing and value system. Colleges need to not assume that, “one size fits all”. This means to ask these students on what their needs are not expect them to all need the same support. The backgrounds of Latina college students may be very different and how they ask for help may be different as well.

**Persistence and Success Themes**

**Resiliency.** All three participants had persistence to achieve academically, regardless of barriers that existed. All three participants had the internal motivation to succeed. These students persisted through internal and external barriers during their college experience. They experienced loss of family members, divorce and decisions to change their entire major. These were drastic life events for each of them. Even with these barriers, they still persisted and succeeded academically and worked hard, not behaving like the unmotivated stereotype. They showed great work ethic, responded with resiliency and were always searching solutions to help them succeed. They did not want to give up because they did not want to let themselves down or their families.
They all demonstrated self-motivation and resourceful attitudes in pursuing their degrees. They took initiative in getting jobs and seeking scholarships that could help ease the financial burden of a college education. Their interviews highlighted attitudes of traditional Latina American values of responsibility and self-discipline. They had their own ways of navigating their studies and their social activities. One of the participants sought out psychological assistance through a troubling time so that it did not negatively affect her academics.

To varying degrees, the participants also depended on their families for emotional and material support. These students were definitely engaged in the full life of college both academically and socially.

**Cultural Values.** The participants were all motivated to do well academically. All three focused on getting good grades and the motivation was self-motivation with much support from family, friends and mentors. These cultural values began at a very young age for each participant. They understood that they needed to work hard and did not have any family members who could be of assistance. The needed to be self-reliant and look for their own resources at times without letting fear stop them. They undoubtedly believed that culturally they were brought up to be this way. One participant thought that her race and culture had a lot to do with her drive but the other two believed it was more culture than race. Cultural values are what made them stick to their goals and focus on their future and not so much the present.

All participants believed that their selected major would have an impact on their career. One participant indicated that she was currently able to use what she learned in high school in her honors courses in her classes in college. They all focused on careers that they had set in their minds since childhood and what their parents would deem acceptable. One participant described how hard it was to change her major because her parents were not sure she would be financially
stable as a history major. All participants explained how their academic advisor and university faculty helped them during their time in college. They said that they still keep in contact with faculty even after graduating from school. These mentors became family members to these students and they build trust and a relationship that lasted outside their college career.

**Support Systems.** All participants explained that family support was important to them and affected their success and motivation. One participant explained that her aunt had a lot to do with her positive motivation for college and another participant explained that her parents’ divorce negatively affected her academics. After attending college, peers and mentors became the next major support systems for these students. These mentors were a big impact to the participants because they shared their personal stories with these members and needed to trust them in order to do this.

One participant explained that without that specific mentor at the cultural center, she might not have graduated. Another participant explained that a faculty mentor was a big part of her persistence and because of that person, she felt better about changing her college major.

All participants explained that their parents were a support system but could not help navigate the college application, financial aid or academic advising processes. They did explain that they could talk to their parents about the experience and took initiative to get that support from university staff and faculty. They all said they always worked hard not to disappoint their parents and for that reason they used all the resources at hand.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to discuss the experiences of successful Latina college students with a 3.0 GPA or higher at a Predominantly White Institution. Their narratives revealed that all participants had family support to attend college and academic success was instilled in them during their upbringing. Additionally, each participant explained that although
they had many barriers in college, they depended on their family, friends and mentors to help them get through difficult times. The key points show early communication with regards to college, familial and peer support and a personal drive were factors in their success. Participant perceptions of being Latina sometimes played a role and sometimes it did not. The perception or race and culture was also perceived differently. Assumptions can be made that all support systems must be increased, but it primarily depends on the needs of the student and their own drive to be successful. Some participants felt that the missions of some of the support systems were too rigid and that not all minority students needed them. Other participants said that they were what helped them persist through college. The one factor that was common was that family was a huge factor (both positive and negative) for these students but regardless, they all persisted until they graduated from college.
Chapter 5: Findings

The purpose of this study was to discuss the experiences of successful Latina college student with a 3.0 or higher at a Predominantly White Institution. Their stories provided insight into what influenced their persistence and success and what opportunities and what barriers they overcame to become successful. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of these stories and to link the data collection to the research. The following research questions were answered:

What are the cultural experiences and stories of Latina college students or recent graduates who maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher while attending a Predominantly White Institution?

Additionally, three sub questions were:
1. How do the participants understand internal/external factors that afforded them to opportunity to persist in a PWI?
2. How do the participants feel that race played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution?
3. How do the participants feel that culture played a role in their persistence and success in a higher education institution?

In this chapter, the major themes generated from the participants’ narratives will be presented, and the study’s findings will be linked to the themes presented in the literature. Additionally, narrative themes that closely align with the concepts of the theoretical framework will be explored. A comprehensive understanding of participants’ collective key points and experience will be provided, and the implications of this study for practice in relation to the literature and this study’s research question will be discussed. Finally, recommendations for
future research and implications for higher education professionals and for college and universities will be presented.

**Perception of Being Latina.** Participants in this study noted the importance of their upbringing and how they recognized that they were Latina and members of a minority group at a very young age. They immediately explained the cultural values associated with being Latina and how they see their physical traits as Latina. Veronica explains that to her being Puerto Rican was different than being American because to her being Puerto Rican is an aspect of the American culture. She goes on to explain that she understands she’s a different race when she compares herself to other females on campus and knows she sticks out with her physical traits due to her Puerto Rican race. The biggest difference is her cultural values and how she was brought up by her parents. All three participants explained how their cultural values assisted in their success in college but their race at times hindered on it because of some discrimination and stereotypes. Specifically, they described that education was huge value and one that was taken very seriously.

Latina college students face an additional burden of coping with acculturative stresses because of perceived cultural incompatibilities and self-consciousness (Gil, Vega, &Dimas, 1994). These participants felt comfortable with their cultural incompatibilities because they were still able to assimilate due to the command of the English language, appearance and their resiliency. Although they were discriminated against in high school and in college, they were able to psychologically adjust due to the internal and external support systems in place. These participants understood that they were culturally different from the white students but did not allow the fact that they were minority persons to serve as a barrier. They considered the difference an asset. These participants all came from families with limited financial resources.
The message they heard growing up was to succeed academically so that they could get good jobs and not struggle economically. The focus on not struggling was a common theme with all participants as they all told stories on how their parents struggled financially. The students took charge of their education and took the opportunity to attend college and succeed although they came from disadvantaged backgrounds and parents had little knowledge of the college experience. The ambition to succeed also comes from wanting more economic security and not struggle as their parents did. Cejda, et al explained that familial support and encouragement as well as a motivation to “not repeat” or “not be like” other family members that did not attend college were found as primary influences on students’ college-going decisions (2002). Latina college students in general are more likely to come from low socio-economic backgrounds to be first-generation college students (Saenz et al., 2007).

**Internal/External Factors.** This study’s findings highlighted the ways in which participants positively interacted with a wide array of internal campus community/services and external support systems. Similarly, several studies cited the positive impact student involvement and leadership has on the overall campus experience (Astin, 2000). Stephanie explained that her connections with the Latino Cultural Center had a lot to do with her success. She used that space as a support system through very difficult times and maintained connections with members throughout her undergraduate career. The main person who helped her was the Director who even took her in when she needed a place to stay. This created a sense of belonging for Stephanie and allowed her to feel part of the campus community. Research indicates that having a sense of belonging is important to students of color (Nora and Cabrera, 1996). All of this support allowed her to focus on her academics and continue to be successful. Other participants made their connections with faculty and deans on other clubs throughout campus. This allowed
them to focus on staying in school and academic success rather than financial issues or family crises. What they all had in common was that their first priority was to academically achieve, and everything else was secondary. They also took initiative in finding solutions to stay in school with those internal campus connections rather than quitting and heading home.

Some external factors were the family and friends from home helped the participants by supporting them financially or personally through the college career. Parental encouragement, support of friends, and finances (Cabrera et al., 1992) assist in student success. For instance, Sally expressed that she spoke to her mother once a week and this helped her let out some stressful experiences as well as plan her week for school. She also said that friends also helped because her peers understood what she was going through with school and support from them really mattered to her. Overall, family support and encouragement is thought to have a positive effect on remaining enrolled (Hernandez, 2000). Encouragement, support from friends, and mentoring relationships were also consistently found to be positively related to Latina/o students’ decisions to remain enrolled at 4-year institutions (Bordes et al., 2011)

The combination of internal support systems and external support systems allowed these students to be successful. Research shows that those Latina students who feel a sense of belonging and feel connected to the campus do better academically than those they do not (Strayhorn, 2008). Veronica had the combination of familial support and she connected with peers that had the same aspirations. She sought out assistance from her internal resources (Latino cultural center) and external support (family) when she was struggling and this allowed her to persist and succeed academically. Making connections with school professionals, and surrounding themselves with like-minded people assists these students. Supportive peer
relationships are connected to the continued pursuit of academic goals and school-appropriate behavior (Hudley et al., 2009).

**Race vs. Culture Perception.** The study’s findings showed that race and culture were both important to the participants, but they perceived that culture really played a role in their persistence and success. All three participants explained that their values and traditions really focused on succeeding academically and avoiding too many social pressures. Veronica explained that the thought of drinking alcohol and having relations with boys was not a priority in her culture because of her religious beliefs, and she knew that it would take away from her focus on school. She tried to avoid these things by living off campus and just working and attending classes. She considered this to be a major value that helped her succeed and not get caught up in high risk behaviors because they could interfere with her academic success. Her main focus was to succeed, graduate and get a job to support herself. Although she changed her major, she did this with help from a faculty member and took a risk to disappoint her parents due the change from medical field to history.

All students expressed that their race wasn’t really a factor their success. They knew they were Latina but they believed they were Latina American and the fact of being Puerto Rican, Costa Rican and Mexican had nothing to do with their success. They all expressed that their racial identity impacted their success and recalled experiences in which they encountered racial and gender stereotypes and differential treatment throughout their undergraduate experiences. They believed that those things did not deter them from doing their best. It only made them work harder. They overcame racial barriers and their cultural values helped them succeed. This attitude is reflected in the majority of the research literature. Several studies
highlight how race affects success because the way students perceive themselves racially is important. For instance, a student of minority racial identity development might internalize the stereotypes about her racial group and begin to question her ability to perform well on academic tasks that say they measure her natural ability (Carter, 2000). These participants never questioned their academic ability to perform and were able to succeed. Some participants sought out cultural centers but Veronica intentionally did not use the cultural centers because she did not want to be labeled or treated differently than the White students. She explained that she was put into a minority group as an entering freshman, and she really didn’t need those services to persist. She was already academically ready from her high school and wanted to succeed on her own while knowing help was available when needed. Spencer and Steel explain that not all minorities need academic services or support services and higher education needs to be careful with racial stereotyping (1993).

**Overcoming Barriers.** All participants overcame personal, academic, familial and financial barriers. They all experienced levels of uneasiness and it was not easy to find support. They were all first generation students and their parents really did not understand how to help them navigate the issues. Choy explained that families who do not understand admissions requirements, financial support and the application process, affects the success of these students (2001). These participants overcame all these barriers and used their internal and external support networks for assistance. For instance, Stephanie had many of these barriers and persisted. She lost some financial assistance from parents, when her grandmother became sick, and she used her campus resources and support networks to get by these difficult times. She took initiative and reached out for help and used her mentor to really support her through the tough times. According to Castellanos & Jones (2004), mentorship programs are imperative to
the Latina college students so they can make connections. The importance of mentors and role models for Latino/Latina students has been stressed in various literature.

**Discussion of Findings**

Through the lens of a Latino Critical Race Theory, this section explores the cultural and racial experiences of the Latina college students. LATcrit theory has been derived from Critical Race Theory and allowed the researcher to investigate how the participants’ cultural and racial experiences at a PWI affected their perception of success. Although each story was distinct at its central core, the collective narratives of the three participants elucidated three major themes: Importance of Resiliency, Cultural Values and Support Systems and how they attribute to success through the lens of the Latina college students.

**Resiliency.** Women have often served as an integral center in Latina families (Burton & Hardaway, 2012). There were several elements of resiliency throughout each participant’s story. Resiliency was a consistent strength through obstacles presented by stress from family and external situations. When obstacles arose or their typical support system was not available, the students sought out new forms of support. They used their family’s ability to persist as a model on which to build their own strength. Although they felt guilty about not being available at times for their family, they always put their academics first. They also believed that they had control of difficult situations. Each participant mentioned the importance of effort and hard work in the accomplishment of their goals, and they said that they were in control of their academic futures. For example, although obstacles could have affected their attitudes toward their final goals, each participant believed she was in control of her academic future and focused her efforts on those aspects she believed she could affect.
Resilience theory focuses on strengths of these students when in high risk situations. The participants use social competence, problem solving and positive expectations to get through their undergraduate experiences and persist. As the participants shared, they had some personal and social barriers as well as financial barriers that really did not deter them from moving forward. Their experiences of overcoming barriers in the past, allowed them to be more resilient when overcoming the barriers in college. Bernard (1995) discusses how resiliency theory indicates that Latina college students who are successful express that they had autonomy and social competence. The participants in this study showed both of the qualities as they overcame barriers and connected with internal and external people and services.

**Cultural Values.** When recalling their upbringing, all three participants explained how their values had much to do with their experience and decision making. They understood that they needed to work hard and did not have any family members who could be of assistance. They undoubtedly believed that culturally they were brought up to be this way and that their focus on their academics as a route to success was always a priority. They even went as far to explain that they did not conform to peer pressure at times due to letting their family down or it affecting their ultimate goal. They had to succeed and be financially independent and make their family proud.

As mentioned earlier, since Latina college students are probably helping to support the family, these students are expected by their families to learn a trade and start earning money in a short period of time (Boden, 2011). Boden (2011) also explains that these students want to find careers to assist their families and that is their priority. They must focus on attending to the family needs first, particular as the female of the family. This is a clear retention issue and difference due to the barriers they face as Latinas. The fact they are responsible to take care of
the family increased their departure from college and universities. Tinto’s (1993) review of studies of student departure indicates that among Black and Latino students, as well as White students, issues of social contact or congruence and academic performance are evident. In addition, there is some indication that financial aid and financial status may be more crucial to disadvantaged students from traditionally underrepresented groups than for White students (Tinto, 1993). This affects the retention rates and graduate rates of the Latina college student since college may not be the first priority. This is the reason why the Latino cultural values play a major role in the participant’s education and focus on their studies. This is a huge factor in persistence and success and can lead a student to fail or to succeed depending on the student.

**Support Systems.** In the Latino culture, the family serves as the primary social structure and main source of support for individuals (Williams, 1990). Latinas perceptions indicate that family support, home and community influences, cultural values, and parents’ perseverance contributed to their graduation from a four-year university. All the participants went directly to a four-year college from high school because they believed that it was what their parents’ expected. Villanueva and Buriel (2010) explain that strong academic performance for some students may be a way for them to express gratitude. Cabrera and Padilla (2004) conducted semi-structured interviews with two students of Mexican heritage who graduated from Stanford University. The interviews were conducted to learn more about what factors contributed to the students’ academic success. Specifically, participants were asked about the role that their mother and father played in their lives. Both participants shared that although their mothers provided limited help with academics, they were motivational figures who stressed the importance of education. One participant stated ‘My strength comes from my mother. These participants all labeled their mom the first support system they had and father second. These women are
eternally grateful to their parents for the sacrifices they made for them to get an education. Latinas use intrinsic motivation to negotiate societal structures, language barriers, inadequate school preparation, or other temporary deterrents embracing a strong belief system that “one must never give up.” Additionally, they were driven by great desire and motivation to succeed and they shared their perceptions of the support factors that contributed to their four year degree completion. The perceptions exhibited by participants in this study are consistent with cultural capital employed among Latina students. They navigated the system and found resources to complete higher education and have employment opportunities that were different from those of their parents. Latinas build early bonds with mentors to guide them through the educational system, which is unknown to their parents. They sought Latina networking opportunities to fulfill their objective of higher education graduation. They tapped into on their social capital by using the community resources as encouragement and affirmation that they were not alone in their struggles and would represent those who have supported them.

Summary

By exploring the participants’ narratives through the lens of Latino Critical Race Theory, this study’s findings affirmed several elements of both theories. For example, the findings supported the notion of Latina college student overcoming barriers to fulfill their academic mission and still succeeding within those barriers to due resiliency and support. Finally, this study showcased that although participants shared the same cultural and gender status, the ways in which they made meaning of their racial experiences varied. Based upon whether participants acknowledged their race and culture as affecting their experiences, the standpoints of participants varied.

Findings and the Research Questions
The way Latina college students perceived themselves and their environment has an impact on their persistence and success. The findings and analysis of data shows that five major themes emerged: Perception of Being Latina; Internal/External Factors; Race vs. Culture Perception and Overcoming Barriers. Within these themes there were three sub-themes; Resiliency; Cultural Values and Support Systems. The literature review and the data analysis provided information that aligned with the findings of this study. The research answers from the participants explained how these subjects perceived themselves at Latina college student and impacted their experience at a Predominantly White Institutions. When explaining their experiences, they described the challenges and the successes and the ways that their culture and race played a role. Internal factors such as supports systems and resources were important and external factors such as their family and friends were crucial to their success. Additionally, the findings also suggest that the early influences of their families and role models within their own family and friend group heavily influenced these participants to become successful academically in a PWI. They expressed that involvement in campus organization, connections and jobs opportunities as students also improved the overall experience of all participants. The benefits associated with the experiences of serving as Latina leaders greatly increased participants’ skills and engagement with the cultural centers and campus community. They overcame challenges and financial and familial barriers during their undergraduate experiences but they were able to persist due to the support mechanisms they had in place in college and at home. Finally, this study’s results also demonstrated the need for higher education administrators to provide more opportunities for Latina college students earlier in their student career, add more financial support to these students, increase Latino/a faculty/staff and add cultural resources on campus so that students have full support in all aspects of their life.
Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Narrative inquiry relies on the rich details provided by its participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, Maxwell (2004) posited that “validity, meaningfulness, and insights of narrative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases” (p. 9). Although the study’s goal of capturing the detailed accounts of participants’ lived experiences were met, given the small sample size of the study (3 participants), claims of generalization cannot be made. Bracketing one’s experiences as a researcher is difficult to achieve. Using positionality may make it difficult to analyze one’s own beliefs from different vantage points (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher had to be aware of how her position as both a woman and a Latina influenced her perceptions of the data. Additionally, the researcher found that relying on self-reports from the participants caused a limitation because they ask for information directly and the researcher cannot avoid the effects of her own perspective. Objectivity is now considered a concept with limited utility applicable in specific types of research, but not universally generalizable. Current research acknowledges the interaction between subject and object under all circumstances (Laszlo, 2008). Harding (1993) uses the concept of standpoint epistemology to acknowledge that there are varying degrees of separation between the researcher and the subject but there is never absolute separation or objectivity.

Another limitation is that the study was conducted on a single New England, public, 4 yr research institution. Because the study took place on a single campus, the findings may not be generalized to other Latinas attending other four-year campuses or two year colleges and from different regions. Different regions across the country have different demographics and programs for the Latina college student. That would bring different data and findings with participants
have different experiences. Although as mentioned above, it is very objective and can be applicable to different institutions.

The research showed that these students persisted with familial support but it would be interesting to see research done on students with no familial support and how that affects their persistence and success. Future research should explore how students become resilient and move toward academic achievement without their parents' support and encouragement. The findings of how they perceived themselves and how they overcame barriers would be very interesting.

Another limitation is that the study did not focus on one specific group within the Latino community. Due to the variety within the Latina/o community, this study analyzed three female participants who are part a small group of the Latino community located in the New England, United States. This community represents two women from Puerto Rico and one Mexican/Costa Rican. By analyzing the perceptions of specific Latinas, one must ask, would dimensions of Latinas perceptions vary? Would dimensions of cultural wealth differ from different areas of the country and native countries? This research would vary if there more a larger sample size with representations of other Latina American countries and at another regions of the country.

**Problem of Practice Revisited**

The study’s findings indicate that Latina college students at a PWI encounter barriers due to their race and gender that create disengagement from their campus community inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, the findings revealed that several participants gave serious thought to withdrawing due to financial constraints. However, participants shared that after actively seeking out to family, peers, administrators, and faculty support, they were able to learn about campus leadership opportunities and gains support from family members. Given this study’s findings, the researcher plans to work with members of student affairs and academic
affairs divisions to develop ways in which to better engage Latina college students to the university within their first year of attendances so that they can make those connections early on while understanding that no all Latina college students need early interventions and transition program.

In addition, the researcher plans to work with the Latino cultural center to create a needs assessment survey for currently enrolled undergraduate Latina students to learn more about their experiences and how to enhance these experiences. In addition, other Latina college students will be provided with a current list of programming and campus engagement opportunities for students. Also, the researcher will work with the academic division to develop ways in which faculty can encourage their students to participate in extra-curricular activities as well as student support services to fully maximize their campus experience at this PWI.

Finally, the researcher will partner with faculty, administrators, and alumni to create a listing of individuals who can serve as mentors for incoming and current Latino college students and connect them with the Association of Latino Faculty and Staff to create support groups when they enter the university. This is imperative in order to build relationships and allow for early intervention into the college experience.

**Implications for Higher Education**

The purpose of this study was to discuss the experiences of successful Latina college student with a 3.0 or higher at a Predominantly White Institution. Their stories provided insight into what influenced their persistence and success and what opportunities and what barriers they overcame to become successful. They presented how they believed culture and race played a role in their persistence and success and how they achieved success in a White institution. Through detailed exploration of the rich narratives of three participants, findings indicated that the
perceptions of the overall campus experiences of Latina college students were greatly enhanced after they connected with support networks and overcame barriers. The findings noted that within the first year of their undergraduate experiences, they tried to keep academics at the forefront and focused on graduating on time from the first day.

These findings demonstrate the need for more meaningful engagement in the classroom and outside the classroom.

The findings also supported that resiliency, cultural values and support systems really impacted success. The most important factor for these students was their perception of being Latina and how they felt that culture more than race mattered in regards to their persistence and success. Their cultural values and beliefs allowed them to persist and move beyond the barriers that they came across. They focused on their academics first and reminded themselves that in order to succeed in life they needed to continue succeeding in college.

Their narratives called attention to their experiences with racism, sexism, and other differential treatment before attending college and during college. These experiences led them to seek support from peers, faculty, staff and family. Consequently, they began to forge relationships with a wide array of peers and joined clubs and organizations. Furthermore, their engagement with faculty and administrators grew and they began to feel fully connected to the campus community. As their support network grew through their positions as student leaders, participants’ perceptions improved in conjunction with their experiences.

These findings explain the important of higher education and its focus on early intervention, preparation programs, social support and community building with the Latina college student. These intervention and support program and help assist persistence in success
for these students. They are interrelated and can really make in impact on the student and the college or university.

**Conclusion**

Higher education institutions must be able to establish programs or frameworks that aim to assist and support Latina students, as the demand for access to higher education is correlated with the continuous growth in the number of students attending. Since the demographics are quickly changing and the Latino college student the fastest growing population in higher education, it is essential to focus on these students and their experiences of success. Higher education institutions must focus on involving students and their families early in the college process to ensure education and familial support. They should also focus on what barriers they may have by working a needs assessment and identify specific services and financial aid programs. The Latina college student also had specific cultural and racial needs and faculty and staff must understand how to integrate these students into the community by creating a sense of belonging, leadership opportunities, mentorship opportunities and overall support.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature by illustrating the need for early integration and involvement from family support systems, increase of financial support, mentorship and support programs and the need for Faculty and Staff members at universities to learn more about Latina college student racial and cultural needs so that they can transition, integrate and persist under many barriers affecting them throughout their life and college experience.
References


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Appendix A

Recruitment Email (Initial Message to Directors)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Claudia Arias-Cirinna Requests your Assistance for Doctoral Thesis Study

Dear Director ____,

My name is Claudia Arias-Cirinna and I am the Interim Director of Residence Life at UConn. I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants. I would like your assistance in emailed your students to participate.

I am researching how high achieving Latina college students make sense of their cultural experiences at a Predominantly White Institution. My goal is to raise awareness for the Latina college student cultural experience and to strengthen the support services offered by faculty, staff, and administrators. If you could send an email to any students you may know that meet the criteria of a 3.0 in their last semester (senior) or who has just graduated with a 3.0 or higher and identifies at Latina, this would be great. I am looking for 3-5 overall to interview and if you could send me 3, that would be helpful.

If they choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing your students about their academic experiences. The expected time commitment is between 30-60 minutes over the course of three interactions (all three in person). They will be offered a $20 gift card for participating at their last interview.

If you know of any interested students, please have them email me at arias-cirinna@huskey.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

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Thank you for your support in this study.

Regards,
Claudia Arias-Cirinna
Appendix B

Recruitment Email (Targeted Message)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Claudia Arias-Cirinna

Dear (Student),

I hope you are doing well!

As you may know, I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am researching how high achieving Latina college students make sense of their cultural experiences at a Predominantly White Institution. My goal is to raise awareness for the Latina college student experience and to strengthen the support services offered by faculty, staff, and administrators.

I am writing to see if you would consider participating in this study. If you choose to participate, I will interview you about your academic experiences. The expected time commitment is between 30-60 minutes over the course of three interactions (all three in person). You will be offered a $20 gift card for participating at your last interview.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at arias-cirinna@huskey.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred days and times to meet (including weekends):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Regards,

Claudia Arias-Cirinna
Subject Line: Claudia Arias-Cirinna Requests your Participation

Dear Students,

One week ago you received an email about a research study that I am doing for my doctoral thesis.

This is a reminder to email me at arias-cirinna.c@husky.neu.edu if you are interested in participating.

Thank you again for considering participation in the study.

Regards,

Claudia Arias-Cirinna

*Note: This is a follow up email that will be sent to students that do not respond within seven days of the initial email. For the follow up email, the initial email will be forwarded to students so they can easily view the information included and respond appropriately.
Appendix D

Recruitment Email (Researcher to Student)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Claudia Arias-Cirinna

Dear (Student),

Thank you for your interest in my research study. As you know, my name is Claudia Arias-Cirinna and I am currently working on my doctoral thesis for the Doctor of Education degree program at Northeastern University under the guidance of Dr. Brown.

I am researching how high achieving Latina college students make sense of their cultural experiences at a Predominantly White Institution. My goal is to raise awareness for the Latina college student experience and to strengthen the support services offered by faculty, staff, and administrators. There is much research on how barriers affect the academic success of the Latina college student but not enough research on what allow them to succeed.

For this study, I am recruiting participants that meeting the following criteria:

- Latina American college students (South America, Central America, Mexico and Caribbean Islands)
- Enrolled undergraduate student/or recent graduate
- A CUM GPA of 3.0 or higher

If you decide to participate in this study, you will have three interactions with me. The first interaction is an in person meeting that will last approximately 30 minutes. I will ask you to fill out a short form with information about yourself, you will select a pseudonym to protect your identity, you will be presented with a consent form, and you will be asked some preliminary questions, this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The second interaction is an in depth interview about your experience as a Latina American college student and your academic success. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The third interview, will be a final interview to allow time to finish any questions that were not asked or a time for you to clarify or ask any questions. I have attached the questions that I will ask you so you can review them in advance. I will provide you with the transcript of our in-depth interview and a summary of my interpretation of your account. You will have the opportunity to share additional information and clarify points of confusion or inaccuracy. In total, these interactions are expected to take about 3-4 hours of your time.

Based on your availability, I would like to propose ____ as the time for our first meeting. Please let me know if you have a particular place where you would like to meet. Keep in mind that we will need a quiet place suitable for audio recording our conversation.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please email me (arias-cirinna.c@husky.neu.edu) or call me (786-610-8311) if you have any questions.

Regards,
Claudia Arias-Cirinna
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Title: Stories of Successful Latina College Students at a Predominately White Institution

Principle Investigator (PI): Dr. Ronald Brown, Northeastern University

Co-Investigator: Claudia Arias-Cirinna, Northeastern University

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being invited to participate in this study because you are Latina American college student and you have a GPA of 3.0 or higher. The study will explore how high achieving Latina college students make sense of their cultural experiences at a Predominantly White Institution.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is find out how high achieving Latina college students make sense of their cultural experiences at a Predominantly White Institution. My goal is to raise awareness for the Latina college student experience and to strengthen the support services offered by faculty, staff, and administrators in hopes to support other Latina college students to persist and succeed.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews. This study will involve three points of contact with the researcher. The first point of contact will be an initial interview with the researcher (30 minutes). The second point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 30-60 minutes). The third interview be a combination of clarification and interviews (30-60 minutes). All interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.
Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
Interviews will take place at the University of Connecticut student union or where you feel comfortable. Again, there will be 3 interviews that may take from 30-60 minutes each and will not go over 3 hours.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There is not foreseeable risk but if you wish to remove yourself from the study at any time for any discomfort, you may do that.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for the experiences of Latina college students at Predominately White Institution. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for Latina American students on college campuses.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating “pass.”

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Please contact Claudia Arias-Cirinna at (786) 610-8311 or via email at arias-cirinna.c@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Ronald Brown who is overseeing my research at ron.brown1@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will be offered a $20 gift card for your participation at your last interview.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site and parking. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be 20-22 year old to participate and be in your last semester of your undergraduate year or recently graduated.

**Contact:** Please contact Claudia Arias-Cirinna at (786)610-8311 or via email at arias-cirinna.c@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Ronald Brown who is overseeing my research at ron.brown1@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to [have my child] take part in this research.

__________________________  ________________________
Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part    Date

Claudia Arias-Cirinna
Printed name of person above

__________________________  ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study    Date participant above and obtained consent

__________________________  Printed name of person above

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Appendix F

Participant Questionnaire
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Personal Information

Today’s date: ____________________________________________
Full name: ______________________________________________
Pseudonym: _____________________________________________
Date of birth: ___________________________________________

Where did you grow up? Please include the city, state/country and the length of time you lived in each location. ____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Approximately what percentile where you when you graduated from high school? ______%  

Please select one of the following that best indicates your racial identification. If none apply, please share your preferred racial identification in the space provided below.

__ South America
__ Central America
__ Caribbean Islands
__ Mexico
__ Mixed Race Latina American (please identify your races): ____________________________
__ Other: ____________________________________________________________________

Academic History

Major: _______________________________________________________________________
Year of study: __________________________________________________________________
GPA: ________________________________________________________________________
Expected/Graduation Date: _____________________________________________________
Appendix G

Interview Guide #1
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Background Information

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
   Possible prompts: Where are you from? What is your age and cultural background? What was your upbringing like?

2. Why did you decide to obtain an undergraduate degree?
   Possible prompts: who talked with you about college? Who placed importance on academics? Who financed it?

3. Tell me about your undergraduate experience.
   Possible prompts: Academic experience, cultural experience, involvement?

4. Tell me about your support network.
   Possible prompts: Who is included, family, friends, peers, mentors and why?

5. How would you describe your campus community at a PWI?
   Possible prompts: Faculty and Administration, peers, programs, what does it look like?

Concluding Question: Is there anything you would like to add about your background?
   What other questions should I have asked you?
Appendix H

Interview Guide #2
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. What does it mean to you to be a Latina College Student?
   Possible prompts: What aspects of your identity do you see as Latina? American?

2. Tell me what is like to be a Latina college student at a Predominately White Institution?
   Possible prompts: What assumptions do others make about you because you are Latina?

3. What is your personal definition of academic success?
   Possible prompts: What importance do you place on grades versus happiness?

4. How does culture play a role in your success and persistence?
   Possible prompts: Has your culture affected your success? Why or why not?

5. How does race play a role in your success and persistence?
   Possible prompts: Has your race affected your success? Why or why not?

6. What kept you motivated to succeed in college?
   Possible prompts: Did anyone influence you to stay or was it self-driven?

7. Can you explain any barriers or factors that could have affected your success?
   Possible prompts: Any financial, familial or academic barriers?

8. What university support systems have you used on campus?
   Possible prompts: Have you used academic, financial, familial or social support systems?

9. Tell me about a time that you turned to someone for support?
   Possible prompts: Who did you talk to? Family, friends, community members, staff, faculty, peers? What type of advice did they give you? How did they help you?

10. Tell me about someone who have made a big impact our your success and/or persistence in college?
    Possible prompts: Parents, peers, faculty, staff or other?
Appendix I

Interview Guide #3
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. Are there any questions you have about the study or the questions I have asked?

2. Is there anything you want to clarify with any answers you shared?

(At this time, I will end the interview and give the $20.00 gift card to my participant)
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: February 17, 2017  IRB #: CPS17-01-11
Principal Investigator(s): Ron Brown, Claudis Arias-Cirrinna
Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University
Title of Project: Stories of Successful Latina College Students at a Predominately White Institution
Participating Sites: University of Connecticut approval forthcoming
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 2018

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit at any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chau
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan-C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection
Northeastern University
Institutional Review Board

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: February 20, 2018
IRB#: CPS17-01-11

Principal Investigator(s): Ronald Brown
Claudia Arroyo-Criana

Department: Doctor of Education
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Behringer
Northeastern University

Title of Project: Stories of Successful Latina College Students at a Predominantly White Institution

STATUS: CONCLUDED

The Northeastern University IRB has closed the above mentioned project in accordance with your report in which you indicated the project has concluded as of February 16, 2018. If you would like to resume this project or re-analyze the data for a purpose unrelated to your original approval, you will need to seek approval for the new research.

Please contact The Office of Human Subject Research Protection at 617-373-4588, with any questions or concerns.

[Signature]
Nahid E. Rezai, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630