VOICES YET TO BE HEARD: THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS OF OLDER LATINO\A UNDERGRADUATES

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OF OLDER LATINO\A UNDERGRADUATES

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my maternal grandparents, Robert and Alice Crichton

As a young child, I would spend hours at Grandpa and Grandma Crichton’s house, carefully looking through volumes of encyclopedias and classic books. Grandpa was a voracious reader, and completed the newspaper’s daily crossword puzzle without fail. He once told me that he tried to learn a new word every day. When I was older, Grandma told me that Grandpa studied so much because he only had a 6th grade education (she was able to complete the 8th grade). Even with their humble educational histories, my grandparents offered steadfast support of my college goals. I believe they would be proud of all that I have learned.

With love and gratitude to my family and friends

Even though my educational journey has hit numerous bumps and detours, I have been blessed with the undying love and support of family and friends who bolstered my morale and kicked me in the fanny when I needed it.

David E. Baker (a.k.a. “Safety Dave” and “Dean Dave”) has been with me from the start, as colleague, collaborator, best friend, and partner. More so than anyone else, Dave believed that I would reach my goal. His faith, optimism, tenaciousness, and accomplishments serve to inspire me. I am proud of you, too.

For more than eight years, my daughter, Becky, has endured the agony of the repeated question: “Is your Mom done with school yet?” I treasure our love and friendship, Beck, and hope that you know how much I have appreciated your support through the tough times. Now that I am done, I can learn to ride that motorcycle.

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Also very dear to my heart is Jose Alberto Cerdas Chavarria, my former roommate, whose home is in Costa Rica. About ten years ago, as poor graduate students trying hard to make ends meet, we decided to move in together and split living expenses. It was a tiny place, yet Jose called it a “palace” because his family home, next to a banana plantation, had a dirt floor. In a peculiar way, we achieved a bicultural living situation: Our place smelled of potpourri, lemon Pledge, garlic, and cilantro. We had fabulous conversations over Costa Rican coffee and music, comparing lifeworlds, ideologies, and language—laughing about our cultural assumptions. Jose taught me to slow down and enjoy life more. Upon reflection, I also know that he helped prepare me for this study.

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As a reader of this dissertation, you will learn about the educational journeys of eight older Latino undergraduates I called Maria Elena, Pilar, Sofie, Leana, Luis, Miguel, José, and Carlos. From our interview excerpts, you will see their intelligence, humor, motivation, forgiveness, and selflessness. It is my hope that you also hear their voices. I will never be able to thank them adequately for helping me grow personally and professionally. These are remarkable individuals, who set aside time from their busy lives to candidly share their life stories and reflections with me (us). It is as much their dissertation as much as it is mine.

Over the years, many students within and outside our department have told me that Dr. Joe F. Donaldson is the best teacher they have encountered, and remark at how fortunate I am to have him as my PhD advisor. I heartily concur. Not only is he a consummate professional, exemplary educator, and brilliant scholar, he is a patient, kind, and sincere human being. Dr. Donaldson’s teaching and mentoring taught me much about adult students and about my own cognitive processes and perspectives. I am indebted for his contributions to our discipline and hope to emulate him as thoughtful and reflective practitioner.

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Pablo was not the only person I cornered with an endless stream of questions about diversity, assimilation, discrimination, and Latino culture. A number of faculty
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VOICES YET TO BE HEARD: THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS OF OLDER LATINO\A UNDERGRADAUTES

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ABSTRACT

With this cross-cultural qualitative study, I sought to understand older Latino\as’ undergraduate experiences, including how identity, history, family, culture, values, and lifeworld experiences influenced their learning and constructions. The eight participants, ages 35-50, were persisting toward four-year degrees on predominantly white, non-Hispanic campuses in the Midwest. We engaged in conversational interviews, mutually sharing personal experiences and reflective interpretations. I cautiously adopted reflexive interpretation strategies and employed two frameworks--critical postmodernism (theoretical) and Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (conceptual)--to enhance my understanding of their stories. My meaning clusters pointed to ideologies, hegemony, assimilation, and patriarchal dominance; I tempered my analysis with cultural realities and divergent perspectives. I encouraged the reader to view them holistically: as busy, family-centered adults who manage multiple life roles.

The participants’ voices also teach us how discrimination against Latino\as festers in many classrooms, that student-instructor expectations are not always clear, and that methods do not always meet adults’ needs. Propelling from their stories, I (a) offered suggestions applicable to a wide range of professional practice and (b) supported the call to rectify social injustices and educational inequities in the U.S. Voices Yet to Be Heard provides an opportunity to learn how multiple realities and tensions coexist in our world and how much we can benefit by listening to others.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Chapter Introduction

*It seems almost impossible. First of all, different language. No high school. I mean, if we work little by little, it can be done. Nobody can say, “Oh, no, piece of cake. Just go to college, have a seat there, and everything will go in.” No. You have to work very hard for it. But it’s worth it.* - Maria Elena (participant)

This cross-cultural study shares the educational journeys of eight older Latino undergraduates who were persisting toward degree completion on predominantly white campuses in the Midwest. The primary purposes of Chapter 1 are to help the reader understand (a) how I approached the qualitative research process; (b) biases, assumptions, or judgments that may have limited my listening and understanding; and (c) how I applied two different perspectives to interpret and share the participants’ stories.

Through the extensive use of quotes I attempted to allow the participants’ unfiltered voices to be heard. Discussion sections merely present my understanding and interpretation of their stories. The reader will find that my writing style reflects the complementary and contradictory nature of *critical postmodernism*. In keeping with my desire to focus on these participants, I begin this chapter with an introduction to them.

Participants

The eight Latinos who participated in this study were between the ages of 35-50. Their family origins include Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Three of the participants were born in the United States, two arrived as young children, and three
immigrated as young adults. At the time of the interviews, these undergraduates (evenly divided by gender) were enrolled in predominantly white, four-year institutions in Illinois and Missouri. All had completed at least two years of college credit, five had earned associate’s degrees, and three had transferred credit across more than one four-year institution. These adults described busy lives, centered on their family, while managing other life roles at work, college, church, and in the Latino community. Their shorter term goals pertained to completing college while their longer term goals encompassed their lifeworld, employment, and social action. To protect both anonymity and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms and did not disclose personal information that could be used to identify them. To the reader, the women will be known as Maria Elena, Pilar, Sofie, and Leana, and the men as Luis, Miguel, José, and Carlos.

Philosophical Viewpoint

Our society is replete with contradictions, complexities, and tensions; the diverse contexts in which we learn and interpret are continually in flux. So it was with my research process. I commenced with a study to understand the essence of older Latinos’ experiences as undergraduates in predominantly white, non-Hispanic classrooms. Yet, based on the participants’ stories, the focus of my dissertation evolved. My thoughts continued to shift until I was able to embrace the nebulous, interconnected space between modern and postmodern thought. As a result, this dissertation presents the participants holistically, not solely as students, but as adults1 on educational journeys who manage

1 Although not an ideal definition, the term “adult” refers to students age 25 and older. The dichotomous labels of traditional and nontraditional are avoided as these terms are
multiple life roles. My title, *Voices Yet to be Heard*, does not imply that these Latino students cannot speak for themselves. Rather, my message is that we must listen and learn from their engaging stories.

**Intent**

The springboard for my dissertation research was a modest body of emerging scholarship which helped me understand how institutional policies and classroom practices can marginalize underrepresented students (Aiken, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Johnson-Bailey, 1998; Kasworm, 2002; Kumashiro, 2000; Ross-Gordon, 2005) and how White, Eurocentric ideologies often establish troublesome learning environments (Brookfield, 2003; Huber & Cale, 2002). Despite their high levels of participation on college campuses and in continuing education programs, what is known about adult learners--especially students from historically underrepresented groups--is limited. Our persistent knowledge gap has been fueled by a triad of barriers. First, the higher education journal literature reflects a historic focus on the experiences, constructions, and outcomes of young, White, non-Hispanic undergraduates (Aiken et al., 2001; Donaldson, Townsend, & Thompson, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Ross-Gordon, 2005; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Second, adult students’ voices are often filtered by the assumptions and interpretations of the scholars who study them (Donaldson et al., 2003). Third, dominant ideologies about adult learners are prevalent and analyses from critical perspectives are lacking (Merriam, 2001; Quinnan, 1997).
These indicators guided me toward an in-depth study with underrepresented adult students.

Specifically, the overarching intent of my dissertation was to understand the educational journeys of older Latino undergraduates who had completed at least two years of baccalaureate study. My primary research aims were to learn about the students’ diverse educational experiences and share their stories in their respective voices. Recognizing the problems of privilege, voice, and representation, I continually viewed the students as co-producers of knowledge (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Holstein & Gubrin, 2003), which included joint reflective interpretation during the interviews (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Secondarily, I interpreted the interview transcripts from two different frameworks, critical postmodernism and A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (Donaldson & Graham, 1999)--the former more theoretical, and the latter, more conceptual but well-grounded in the extant literature. My biases, assumptions, and limitations are included in this chapter.

Inquiry Questions

Inspired by the literature (or a lack of), my overarching research question was, “What are the feelings and interpretations of older Latino undergraduates about their classroom experiences on four-year, predominantly white\(^2\) campuses in the Midwest?” To extend my learning, I also wanted to explore how these students described the influences of (a) their background histories and families; (b) age, gender, race, ethnicity,____________________

\(^2\) This study does not include Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), some of which may also be considered predominantly white. However, in the interest of readability, the term “predominantly white institutions” is used throughout this study.
and class, and (c) institutional policies, teaching methods, and a predominantly white, non-Hispanic classroom climate.

**Reaching Participants and Interview Settings**

To honor the confidentiality of potential participants, I extended my original invitations through administrators (gatekeepers) at each location. Because I reached only a few students, I received two Institutional Review Board amendments to add an institution and broadly distribute my flyers through state and local Latino groups in Illinois and Missouri. My recruiting efforts, which lasted most of the 2006 calendar year, are detailed in Chapter 3. I called every individual interested in participating, to make certain that they (a) could ask me questions, (b) understand the purpose of the interview and how I would share findings, (c) would know they could cease participation at any time. As a final consideration, we talked about their availability and willingness to be engaged in the study. I offered each participant a $35 stipend as partial reimbursement for time, car gas or bus transportation, and child or elder care service. I did not interview three people who had enrolled in graduate school, as that was not the focus of this study.

At the time of the interviews, the eight participants were enrolled in courses on four unique, predominantly white campuses in the Midwest including the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) and three campuses of Columbia College of Missouri. Columbia College administers a network of satellite locations across the U.S. To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, I did not identify specific campuses, MU colleges, or degree programs. The participants and I met in a variety of locations, including public libraries, colleges, and respective places of employment. I invited them
to select the time and setting of the interviews, hoping that they would select locations convenient to them, where they would feel safe with a stranger.

Biases, Assumptions, and Researcher’s Role

For me, writing an autoethnography was a catharsis. As a result of the process, I grew to believe that my early childhood experiences with class, race, and religion would make me a more sensitive, caring, cross-cultural researcher. I hope that is true, but I also recognize the risk of assuming too many similarities with participants and lapsing into an insider mentality (Finlay, 2002; Ryen, 2003). It was important that I bracketed those assumptions to help assure that I was listening to their voices and not my own.

Even more problematic for me was how previous findings in the literature (e.g., Johnson-Bailey, 1998; Kasworm, 2002; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000) had clouded my thinking. Based on earlier studies, I assumed that these participants would describe primarily frustrating classroom experiences. I became too focused on learning what contributes to underrepresented students’ feelings of isolation, marginalization, and Otherness. Fortunately I realized that I was anticipating negative themes and was able to bracket that bias during the interviews. During data interpretation I again realized that I was subconsciously looking for negative themes when in reality, they shared with me many positive messages, too.

Candidly, I was excited about my inquiry topic because I knew very little had been written about middle age Latinos who enroll or return to college later in life. I was convinced that I would be the lucky recipient of glorious “sound bites” about their journeys and the meanings they attached to those experiences. In fact, these are warm, wonderful people who shared rich and engaging stories. However, as I wrote the final
chapter, I realized that my purpose was not to create the “dissertation of the year,” but that I had a moral and professional obligation to these students to help others learn about their journeys.

I also held an age bias, selecting an age range of 30 to 50, looking for eventful life stories and lessons learned across decades. My assumption was that younger undergraduates, between the ages of 18-24, had limited experience in multiple life roles, and therefore would attach meaning to their collegiate experience somewhat differently than older adult students. Much later I was finally able to abandon the younger-older contrasts. Most enlightening was the moment I began to view the participants holistically, not simply as students, but as adults engaged in multiple life roles, who also persisted with college studies.

Entering this research project I accepted that I was privileged and held White, Eurocentric assumptions that would influence my thoughts, listening, interpretation, and writing (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Manglitz, 2003). To facilitate my reflexivity, I (a) developed an autoethnography and (b) engaged in critical discourse (Brookfield, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1998) with Latinos and African Americans about my doubts, concerns, and assumptions. I also kept a journal (Gilbert, 2001; Janesick, 2000) and documented my personal experiences and constructions (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Through this vigilance, careful listening, and engaging participants in reflective interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Finlay, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Oleson, 2000), I hoped to diminish (or better, extinguish) faulty questions, analyses, conclusions, and representations in this study.
However, during the interviews I found that my thinking was clouded by gender, culture, and citizenship. Upon reflection, I realized that I was judging many of the men’s values and identifying with the women’s roles and frustrations. One example was my observation that these women had altered goals and life plans (and delayed schooling) to place the needs of their family first, or return to their husbands’ role expectations. It troubled me that I did not hear similar stories from the men. However, what I thought I heard I actually had filtered through a lens shaped by background experiences in my marriage and a platonic relationship with a male Latino roommate. Because I continually reflected on my conclusions and interpretations during the interviews, I recognized and bracketed these reactions.

From a cultural or ethnic perspective, I also worried that I might fail to listen and reflect on a subconscious level due to my White, Eurocentric ideologies. I especially struggled with my conclusion that one of the participants was a racist or bigot. Although I have talked with several faculty members and graduate students about my impressions, I am still unclear how to interpret what this person said to me. I feel it is far better for me to continue to reflect than abandon critical analysis simply because multiple, conflicting interpretations are residing in my thoughts.

I also recall feeling stunned that one student, who had lived in the U.S. for more than 40 years, had not sought citizenship. Candidly, I dwelled on that during the interview, not understanding this person’s perspective. Later, in the context of his entire life journey, I better understood the fluctuations and contradictions in his thinking. Postmodernism allowed me to accept his contextual meaning making and multiple ways in which he described his identity.
Research Approach and Interactive Interview Process

I intended to conduct a phenomenological study, to avoid superficial understanding and grasp the *essence* of their experiences—as defined, communicated, and interpreted by the participants. Due to time, distance, and other factors, I was not able to achieve the ongoing relationship that I had hoped. Therefore, I prefer to say that this is a phenomenological *inspired* inquiry.

The primary data source associated with phenomenology is the in-depth interview (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). However, I adopted “emerging innovations in methodology” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027; see also Fontana, 2003; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003) to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. In doing this, I believe my resulting interview methods became more consistent with a critical postmodern underpinning. For example, I strived for a conversational, “reflexive dyadic interview” to generate data (Ellis & Berger, 2003). This included sharing my experiences, understandings, and feelings with the participants (Charmaz, 2000; Gilbert, 2001), which are documented in Chapter 4 and in my autoethnography (Appendix F). I also jointly constructed interpretations with the participants (Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Oleson, 2000), which I also shared.

Due to their busy schedules, I met with seven of the participants once for about two hours each time. I suggested additional meetings, but respected their availability and choice not to participate. The eighth participant was able to meet twice with me, for about two hours each time. During the second interview, we conducted additional reflective interpretations. I was careful to uphold ethical research practices throughout my study and protect the participants’ rights (Sieber, 1992; University of Missouri, n.d.).
Interpretation of Interview Transcripts

Moustakas (1994) listed four steps to phenomenological data analysis as a means to group, reduce, and eliminate data: (a) horizontalizing data, (b) listing meanings, (c) creating clusters, and (d) writing textural and structural descriptions (see also Creswell, 1998). However, I felt that this isolated approach was fertile ground for abusing my power and privileged position, a way to silence students’ voices, and control representation (Fontana, 2003; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003). In an effort to minimize these problems, I used several levels of data interpretation that provided “breadth and variation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 247) to the study. For example, during the interviews I asked the participants for their reflective interpretations and then I pursued a more “critical interpretation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 250) of the interview transcripts. First I applied a lens of critical postmodernism to explore their descriptions and constructions, then used the constructs of Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) A Model of College Outcomes for Adults to organize and discuss their stories. My rationale for this second lens: The model would help me explain the students’ experiences and interpretations to a larger audience by circumventing the ambiguity of postmodern-inspired critique. However, I found that in illuminating the data from two perspectives, I enhanced my learning and viewed the participants holistically. To further challenge my assumptions, I also reflected on Latino culture and values. These next two sections describe the two key perspectives used in data interpretation.

Framing Interpretation with a Critical Postmodern Perspective

Critical postmodernism served as the theoretical lens for this study--a merger of postmodernism and critical theory. Alvesson and Deetz (1996) noted considerable value
in “working with the tensions” (p. 212) of these two paradigms. While postmodernism offers allowances for diverse opinions, multiple realities, ambiguity, and contextual meaning-making (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003), critical theory addresses “issues of power and justice and the ways that economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourse, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, as cited by Patton, 2002, p.131). Despite these contrasts, modern and postmodern thinking can be complementary because they share joint purposes of raising consciousness and hope for change (Alvesson & Sköldberg; Brookfield, 2005). Several notable scholars, including Henry Giroux (1992), have “forged links” between these paradigms for years (Aggers, 1991). The application of more than one paradigm can also facilitate reflective interpretation because the researcher does not become “locked into a particular philosophical position” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, p. 247).

The use of postmodernism as a tool for examining organizational culture was endorsed by Giroux (as cited in Tierney, 1993), Martin (2002), and Edwards and Usher (1997). Precedence for applying critical postmodernism to studies about higher education institutions was established by Tierney, while Quinnan (1997) employed the perspective to his research on adult students.

Reframing Data Interpretation Using Donaldson and Graham’s Conceptual Model

Following my interpretation through the lens of critical postmodern, I used the constructs of Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* to understand the students’ stories and interpretations more fully. This conceptual model is grounded in constructivist, socio-cultural, and adult learning theories; its six
components include (a) **prior experience and personal biographies**, (b) **psychosocial and value orientation**, (c) **adults’ cognition**, (d) **connecting classroom**, (e) **lifeworld environment**, and (f) **outcomes**.

Over the last seven years, quantitative researchers have applied the model to persistence studies (Kent & Gimmestad, 2004; Samuels, 2005) and have tested the model using path analysis (Gartenlaub, 2003; Webb, 2004). Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) conducted a qualitative study about the model. Unfortunately, none of these studies addressed the influences of gender, race, class, or ethnicity. Thus, I decided to accept Donaldson and Graham’s offer to use their conceptual model as a “catalyst for scholarly discussion” (p. 25).

**The Multiple Definitions of Latino and Adult**

Being of a postmodern mindset, I resisted the notion of one definition for terms and labels, because we describe ourselves in diverse ways and often reinterpret when we hear others categorize us (Gracia, 2000; Jandt, 2004). Moreno and Guido (2005), along with others (e.g., Olivarez, 1998; Suro, 2006a) pointed out that a half century ago, the terms Hispanic and Latino did not exist, and both terms have political undertones and imply homogeneity. In reality, the labels are based on a shared language, and disallow diversity across continents and countries. Gracia noted, “The only thing that these diverse peoples have in common is their marginalization and the domination imposed on them by others” (p. 23). Morín (2005) observed that use of the term Hispanic is “deficient and inaccurate” (p. 9). In fact, many scholars suggest that terms like Hispanic and Latino also perpetuate a view of Other. Olivarez added, “The only ‘positive’ aspect [of the ‘generic’ term Hispanic is that it]…brings attention to the fact that this is a large and growing
population” (p. 427). A 2002 Pew Hispanic Center [PEW] survey revealed that “the terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ were not very popular” (Suro, p. 25) with either Hispanics born in the U.S., or immigrants. Half of the U.S.-born Latinos in the PEW study identified themselves as “American” while two-thirds of the immigrants identified themselves by country of origin.

The U.S. government collects and reports data for five categories of race: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White; and two ethnicity categories: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Select definitions from U.S. Office of Management and Budget’s Statistical Directive 15 are shown in Figure 1. The federal government uses these official definitions in an attempt to collect uniform data across agencies (e.g., labor, census,

- **Black or African American.** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as "Haitian" or "Negro" can be used in addition to "Black or African American."
- **Hispanic or Latino.** A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The term, "Spanish origin," can be used in addition to "Hispanic or Latino."
- **White.** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Source: Office of Management and Budget (1997)

*Figure 1. Select U.S. government definitions for race and ethnicity that were used in the 2000 Census. While the study participants used these terms is does not imply that the government definitions are meaningful to them as individuals.*
education). However, for the first time with its 2000 Census, the government provided an opened ended category entitled “Some Other Race.” Speaking for the Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA,) Douglass (2000) called the option “a long overdue victory for…human diversity” (¶ 2). She added,

> What has been dismantled by this shift in public policy is the mythical notion that race is fixed rather than fluid, or that any government agency’s perception of racial identity takes priority over an individual’s right to self-identify. The American people will finally be able to display a full range of single and multiple race responses reflecting the truly diverse fabric of our current and historical roots (¶ 2).

Suro (2006a) also noted that “Latino identities are fairly fluid” (p. 25), which Mareno and Guido (2005) in part attributed to the influences of acculturation, sociopolitical identity, and geographic area.

**Respecting the Multiple Meanings of Hispanic, Latino, and Minority**

While absolute definitions contradict my intent to share diverse perspectives, for writing clarity, I will explain how the participants and I used the terms *Latino, Hispanic, minority, and underrepresented student*. Throughout the interviews, many of the participants interchangeably used the term Hispanic and Latino\Latina when referring to themselves. One person also used the term *Mexican American* when describing his family. The term minority was used by most of the participants, usually in reference to others. In deference to the research participants, I quoted their respective terminology usage (e.g., Hispanic, Latino, and minority) (Gracia, 2000).
Even though some of the participants used the term minority, I refrained from using the label because it presents a negative connotation of Other and reinforces a discourse that is centered on a White, Eurocentric perspective. However, when used by statisticians, minority can refer to individuals who are of a racial or ethnic group that is typically underrepresented in the U.S. undergraduate population or individuals from a group that statistically represents less than 50% of the U.S. undergraduate population. I have elected to use the terms underrepresented students or students from underrepresented groups whenever I need to refer broadly to diverse racial and ethnic groups. Another option would have been to use a broader application of the term, “person of color,” which I infer (from today’s media, pop culture, on the Web, and the literature) means to embrace people’s lives as colorful and rich due to race or ethnicity (e.g., Morín, 2005). However, none of the participants used the term of color, and one told me that the term meant African American to her. Since the term of color was not meaningful to these eight participants, I dropped the term from my dissertation and thinking. None of the terms is ideal as they remained centered on a dominant, White, non-Hispanic norm. Although not much better, the term I apply--underrepresented students--acknowledges the inequitable access to higher education of select racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.

In Chapters 1-3, I used the term minority only if the original reference used the term. In Chapters 4-6, I quoted the participants’ exact terminology (e.g., Hispanic, Latino, and minority). For my writing across all chapters, I consistently used the terms Latino and Latina, even though, like the term Hispanic, they lack “specificity regarding national origin” (Moreno & Guido, 2005, p. 90). My decision to use Latino and Latina or Latino\a (Gracia, 2000; Morín, 2005) was based on how the majority of the
participants in this study described themselves, and because the terms provide a gender
distinction. I also used the term Latino as a descriptor (Gracia, 2000) for example, Latino
community or Latinos’ values. In conclusion, I intend no disrespect, only to learn. If we
must label or categorize to understand better, then my preference is to allow individuals
to identify themselves (Gracia, 2000) by race, gender, religion, and/or ethnicity, and
avoid perpetuating dominant ideologies and discourse centered on government mandated
terms such as White, non-Hispanic, as a norm for measuring others, or discriminating
against them (Jandt, 2004).

Perspectives on the Category of Adult

Educational researchers do not share a precise meaning of the term adult. Speaking
chronologically (not functionally) the typical demarcation is age 25, but the
literature reflects that the adult age range can start anywhere from age 24 to 30. Also,
depending upon the study, the upper age limit might be set at 40, 50, 60, or above. For
example, the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics
(NCES) uses age 24 as the lower limit and reports data in 10 year increments up to age 50
(NCES, 2001).

According to Cleveland-Innes (1994), age 23 is the “acceptable place to
distinguish between adult developmental stages” (p. 425), claiming “support in the
literature” based upon Merriam’s 1984 work. Citing several sources, Barker,
Felstehausen, Couch, and Henry (1997) defined an older undergraduate as one 25 years
of age or older. However, Kasworm and Blowers (1994) targeted adults over age 30 and
Graham and Donaldson (1996), those 27 years of age or older. Functionally, scholars
target the long developmental period “between the ages of “seventeen and thirty-three,”
and claim “emerging adulthood” happens “between ages eighteen and the “mid- to late twenties” (Baroody Butler, 2005, p. 62). For the purpose of this study, I selected an age range of 30-50, because I was interested in talking with adults who were likely to have families, engaging life histories, and considerable work experience outside of the home.

Learning from Their Stories

My interpretation of the participants’ stories continues to evolve, so I will attempt to share what I have learned up to this point with general impressions. I do not want my descriptions to be misconstrued; these thoughts are not representative of all of the participants nor can they be generalized to a broader Latino population. In fact, the eight participants held very different realities about college, learning opportunities, life roles, and outcomes. I accept that my learning, like theirs, is contextual and ongoing.

Foremost to me was how the participants described an essence of self that included family, ethnic/cultural identity, gender, spirituality, altruism, and a strong work ethic. I believe that self provides a foundation from which they learn and make meaning. Around that core is a lens for viewing the world, which refocuses each time as they acquire and interpret new knowledge. At times, they realigned their perceptions, values, and beliefs about themselves and those around them. With two exceptions, I believed that it was this lens, and not their identity, which they adapted over time to various settings. Intertwined with their lens is their lifeworld, and this juncture (again, for most of them) is the center of their learning, participation, and goals. Because their lives are constantly changing, I conceived the lifeworld with a permeable boundary, ever in flux and influenced by learning, meaning making, family roles, work, and community engagement. From a critical perspective, my resulting interpretation clusters pointed to
ideology, hegemony, assimilation, patriarchal dominance, and discrimination. However, I considered these meaning clusters as “contingent, partial, and tentative” (Finlay, 2002, p. 226) until I explored Latino culture, values, beliefs, and norms.

Specific to their collegiate experiences, I felt that the classroom was not the focal point of their learning and meaning making, for three reasons. First, many shared disconnecting experiences. Second, most of the students talked about self study and tutoring more than formal learning experiences. Third, one student’s reality was that authentic learning “comes from his hands.” Even though they also shared “good” experiences with me, I never interpreted the classroom as a center stage, but more like a setting with a revolving door. Many of them described the “banking” method (Freire, 1972) of learning from instructors, so it seemed that they entered through this door to acquire knowledge or (for some) simply take tests and deposit papers (tasks for course completion). They applied knowledge primarily to their family roles and goals for community engagement. To a lesser extent, some of the participants applied learning to work, which was best illustrated by those in health-related and social service fields.

These Latinos’ voices also tell us that (a) discrimination festers in many classrooms, (b) student-instructor expectations are not always clear, and (c) teaching methods do not always meet their needs. My implications for adult educators were not necessarily new (e.g., Donaldson, 2003; Greenhouse Gardella, Candales, Ricardo-Rivera, 2005; Kasworm, 2003c; Ross-Gordon 2003a, 2003b). However, to better meet the needs of these eight Latino students in the future, educators need to recognize cultural differences by country of origin; acknowledge that many of them are concurrently learning English; offer them reassurances about their accents, verbal skills, and being
understood by others; and validate that they are intelligent and capable of comprehending new concepts, even though they may not be proficient English speakers. I also explained my belief that educators should help students make meaning of new knowledge--meanings that are defined by the students--without indoctrination, protecting both students’ rights and academic freedom. I offered service learning and flexible writing assignments as examples of how this can happen for students.

Limitations to Understanding

Due to my past interviewing experiences, I believed I could easily engage in meaningful research within and across racial and ethnic boundaries (Tierney, 1993). However, from experience I also knew that time constraints and lack of prolonged engagement may have threatened my ability to achieve trust and rapport with research participants when our class, gender, race, or ethnicity differed (Ryen, 2003; Young, 2000). As Young notes, “No researcher has the ability to see and understand exactly as the participant sees and understands. All research, thus, involves crossings” (p. 632).

After talking with colleagues from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, I forged ahead with this study, believing that any contribution to respectful scholarly discourse is potentially helpful (Tierney).

Phenomenological study is intended to be rich, not necessarily broad, so I was not concerned that I met with eight people. I would have preferred prolonged engagement rather than one lengthy interview. Rather than make assumptions about why I was unable to sustain contact with them, I let go of what I wanted and respected their choices to limit participation. That said, I was well pleased with the trust we
were able to establish in the short amount of time we had together. I know that for many, disclosure about discrimination and dissatisfaction was difficult to share, as they qualified remarks or stopped in mid sentence. Ultimately, however, stories such as these will help to reduce the marginalized status of older adults in the higher education journal literature. My mantra: It is not important to measure how much of the knowledge gap we narrow, only that we continue to learn and allow students’ voices and interpretations to remain unfiltered (to the best of our ability).

Finally, these postmodern-inspired methods are not without critics (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2000; Finlay, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003; Lavenda & Schultz, 2003) and there does not appear to be one correct approach to the postmodern interview (Fontana, 2003; Holstein & Gubrim, 2003a, 2003b). Reflexivity and “participant validation” have also been challenged as potentially misleading (Finlay, 2002). This is as expected: The contradictory, ambiguous nature of postmodern thought and the potential polarization of critical thinking may cause deep divides. I ascribe to an opposite view. I see postmodern-inspired methods, including reflexivity, as extremely useful tools for illuminating assumptions, challenging knowledge and power, and eliciting new ways to understand others in our complex and rapidly changing world. Ambiguity is not ignorance, but a sign that we have much more to learn.

Sharing the Participants’ Stories with Others

With the participants’ permission (and encouragement), I intend to share my dissertation research with a broad range of audiences. Late in 2006, I discussed my preliminary impressions during a roundtable discussion at the Adult Education Research Conference in Minneapolis and in a presentation at the Adult Continuing and Higher
Education Conference in Los Angeles. I was able to do this without duplicating content due to the (a) richness of the data, (b) application of two frameworks, and the (c) the two different (public-private) institutional settings.

Two weeks prior to my defense, I also shared my interpretations in Kansas City at the state Cambio de Colores conference entitled Latinos in Missouri: Everyone Together – *Todos juntos*. My focus at that conference was the intersection of social, economic, and educational issues, as described by these participants. While the first two conferences were attended by faculty and doctoral students across the U.S., the third involved professionals from academic, government, civic, and nonprofit, service organizations in and around Missouri. I considered this my first step toward meeting my commitment to share what I have learned outside of the academy.

I intend to develop an executive summary for the key stakeholders of this study, the research participants, and will provide them with copies of the entire dissertation if desired. I will also seek new opportunities to present, including at American Education Research Association. I also plan to submit articles for peer review to *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education* and *Adult Education Quarterly*. Finally, I will meet with administrators of the University of Missouri-Columbia and Columbia College of Missouri, to share these stories, being careful to protect the identity of all participants.

**Interest Areas for Future Inquiry**

This research is truly a beginning. Since little is known about the collegiate experiences and educational needs of older students, additional interviews should be conducted with underrepresented students (especially Latinos) in a variety of settings. It would be particularly interesting to continue to talk with students in this age group, to
learn more about how background histories and prior experiences contribute to their learning and interpretations. I would also like to follow up with these same participants in five years, to ask them about their goals and (for some) graduate school experiences.

Based on preliminary work to operationalize the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model (Gartenlaub, 2003, Webb, 2004), it would be intriguing to collaborate with a statistician on mixed methods research. The quantitative paradigm is not how I frame my research questions, so this would be a challenge for me. However, it would also provide an opportunity to work once again with the tensions of critical postmodernism.

Finally, due to the richness of their stories, I recognize the potential to reinterpret the same interview transcripts using other perspectives, such as adult or social learning theories. Based on my dissertation experience, I am convinced that a new perspective will illuminate the data in yet another way and serve to enhance my learning further.

Chapter Conclusion

An emergent body of literature on underrepresented adult students describes how institutional policies and classroom practices can marginalize students. Informed by the literature, I sought to better understand the educational experiences of older Latino undergraduates, including how their background histories, families, and lifeworld experiences influenced their learning and constructions. At the time of the interviews, the eight participants were between the ages of 35-50 years, currently enrolled, and persisting toward a four-year degree on one of four predominantly white, non-Hispanic campuses in the Midwest.

We engaged in conversational, reflective interviews, mutually sharing personal experiences, feelings, interpretations, and reflections. In an effort to minimize voice,
control, and representation problems, I adopted reflexive interpretation strategies during the interviews and throughout interpretation of the transcripts. My biases, assumptions, and judgments are listed in this chapter. As a cross-cultural researcher, I continually challenged my biases, assumption, reactions, interpretations, and was mindful of my position with the participants; I further challenged what I thought I understood by examining Latino culture, values, and norms for my discussion sections.

For the secondary level of data analysis, I used critical postmodernism as a theoretical perspective to explore the students’ stories, and employed Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* as a conceptual framework for discussion. By employing two different strategies to understand their stories, I was not “locked into” one philosophical perspective (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2000, p. 247), which helped me extend my learning across chapters. The final chapter synthesized my interpretations. I did not compare the students’ stories to the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model but developed sketches of my understanding. Then came two important steps: I returned to the literature to learn more about Latino culture and I shared my final sketch and interpretation with one of the participants. As a result of those two processes, I am confident that I listened well, learned a great deal, and minimized “filtering” their stories. I do not pretend speak for the eight participants, and encourage the reader to hear their voices and view them holistically, with rich, fulfilling (and busy) lives.

From a critical perspective, my meaning clusters pointed to ideology, hegemony, assimilation, patriarchal dominance, and discrimination. Their voices also taught me that discrimination festers in many classrooms, student-instructor expectations are not always clear, and teaching methods do not always meet their needs. Based on previous findings
in the literature (e.g., adult learning, marginalized students, Latino culture), what I learned was not necessarily new. However, contributing to our deeper understanding were the multiple realities and constructions of these older Latino undergraduates and how their gender, age, race, ethnicity, cultural, identity, and economics intersected with their educational experiences in and out of the classroom. My interpretation and reinterpretation of their stories were performed in the spirit of (a) creating awareness, (b) informing adult education practice, and (c) supporting the call for action to rectify social injustices and inequities in our educational system.

To provide the reader with additional background, Chapter 2 is designed to provide an overview of the higher education journal literature with particular focus on the historic scholarship trends pertaining to adult students. The chapter also describes the philosophical underpinnings of my research approach (i.e., phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism) and provides definitions from the literature about Latino identity and values.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEWS

Introduction to Substantive, Theoretical, and Methodological Reviews

To create a foundation for this study, I conducted three literature reviews--substantive, theoretical, and methodological (Gehart, 2001; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Wolcott, 2001). For writing clarity, I also discussed them as distinct phases and organized the findings into substantive, theoretical, and methodological sections. Each phase was multifaceted. The substantive review targeted (b) the terms minority, Hispanic, and Latino, (b) Latino lifeworld and values, and (c) the representation of adult students in the extant literature. The second literature review phase, theoretical, also involved several subjects, as I needed to understand the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism, as well as the merger of the latter two paradigms into a third entitled critical postmodernism. The third literature phase, methodological, involved linking theory to approach and methods. For example, phenomenological methods are grounded in phenomenology (the philosophy) but phenomenology is both a “method and a movement,” and has been adopted--and adapted--by several other disciplines (Moran, 2000, p. 21). Similarly, critical postmodernism implies that critical analyses and deconstruction are necessary in order to raise awareness about underlying themes of power and oppression, yet the underpinnings of the respective paradigms challenge the researcher to negotiate modernity and postmodernity. I also reviewed general qualitative approaches, including specific interviewing and data interpretation techniques inspired by postmodern thinking.
The purposes Chapter 2 are to share the findings from the first two phases of my literature review—substantive and theoretical. This will help the reader understand (a) why we need to learn more about older Latino undergraduates; (b) that my inquiry intent (from phenomenology) was to seek the essence of their stories; and (c) how the tenets of critical theory and postmodernism guided my thinking for the study’s design. The third phase--methodological review--is summarized in Chapter 3.

Literature Review Processes

Paralleling Kemtes et al.’s (2003) suggestions, I systematically approached the literature reviews. First, I defined the article selection criteria and scope of the search. Next, I identified primary information resources. Finally, I retrieved articles of interest and created a master bibliography list. As a quality control check, I used Boote and Beile’s (2005), standards for a comprehensive literature review that include (but are not limited to) (a) justifying why articles are included or excluded, (b) examining historical literature topics, (c) synthesizing, (d) discussing ambiguities in the literature (including definitions) and, (e) critiquing research methods.

Scope

For the purpose of this study, I selected articles pertaining to adult students age 24 and older at four year institutions. I intentionally avoided articles about nontraditional students, due to the expanded definition of the term that encompasses adult characteristics, regardless of a student’s age (Choy, 2002; Horn & Carroll, 1996). Also, I did not include literature pertaining to adults in community colleges or distance delivery programs. My assumption was that these learning experiences can be fundamentally
different (Cofer & Somers, 2000; Donaldson, 1989; Kasworm, 2002) than those attending classes on four-year campuses.

**Search Strategies**

I used several different search strategies to locate research. First, I turned to the journal literature most familiar to me, the portion relative to adults in higher education. From those articles, I followed up with many of the cited references. Next I sought advice from faculty members on how to extend my search into other disciplines. I also searched for information over the Internet, using various descriptors in electronic databases, professional organizations, with search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo) and government Web portals. This led me to studies in the U.K., conference proceedings, and other published papers. Last, after searching the library catalog, I perused select shelves in the library to locate additional titles of interest. I also hand-examined the contents of several top-tier journals from 1998 forward, looking for articles I may have missed during my electronic searches.

As a result of these processes, I was able to locate numerous refereed journal articles, conference proceedings, unpublished papers, books, chapters, and government reports on a variety of interrelated topics pertinent to my study. My original reviews occurred in 2004-2005, so I updated them in 2006, and again in 2007. Unfortunately, very little has changed substantively since 2005. However, I was able to improve my theoretical and methodological understanding through the additional study.

**Synthesis and Critique**

In this chapter I presented the substantive literature review first. I organized the substantive section into two parts. Part I, Researchers’ *Depictions of Latino\(\)as Lifeworld*
and Values, provides a broad overview of Latinos in the U.S. and highlights key aspects of Latino culture and values from the perspective of the scholarly community. This is the portion of the review I conducted after completing an initial draft of my dissertation, in an effort to minimize biases and assumptions. I also withheld a critique of Part I because my goal was to understand individual experiences, not representations in the literature. I remain willing to learn and will participate in future discussions with people from a variety of Latin American and other cultures.

Part II of the substantive review, Literature on Adult Students, includes four sections of (a) historic trends, (b) findings from government reports, (c) researchers’ perspectives on adults in college classrooms, and (d) adult students’ voices on their undergraduate experiences. Concurrent to my synthesis of the literature for Part II, I began to critique what I was learning. Foremost was the lack of articles on adult students, especially about students from underrepresented groups. My reviews yielded nothing about older Latino undergraduates, which underscores the overall lack of current research about this group of students (Lytle, 2005). To my surprise, I also found that of the few articles on African American and Black students, most were written by the same core group of about eight researchers. Like Quinnan (1997) described, I began to see repetitive research trends and I inferred negative images of older students from some of the current literature (e.g. Clevland-Innes, 1994; Hagedorn, 2006; Kasworm, 2003c). My efforts helped me to understand why Boote and Beile (2005) uphold that critical analysis and critique are integral parts of a comprehensive literature review.

The purpose of my theoretical literature review was to understand the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism, as
well as blend of the latter two theories, critical postmodernism. For me, this review presented the greatest challenges. My first task was to learn about the underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism. Next, I had to comprehend critical postmodernism (the merger of critical theory and postmodernism), including all its contrasts, similarities, and tensions. Naively, I expected that I some point I would suddenly grasp the ideologies of this paradigm. However, it was not until much later, when I analyzed the data a second time (see Chapters 4 and 5), that I began to achieve a sense of comfort with critical postmodernism. I continue to learn.

My bifurcated substantive review and theoretical review were followed by a third literature review, methodological. Here my (again, naïve) aim was to link the underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism with specific methods for interviewing, interpreting, and writing. As my knowledge and understanding improved, I ultimately designed a study that reflected who I am, yet would help me share the participants’ stories to the best of my ability. In keeping with the distinction I made between my theoretical and methodological reviews, this third phase (methodological review) is summarized as part of Chapter 3. The balance of this chapter will summarize what I learned from my substantive and theoretical literature reviews.

Substantive Review Part I:

Researchers’ Depictions of Latino\as Lifeworld and Values

*Context*

It was only *after* I completed my first draft that I attempted to learn more about Latino culture and values. This was not an oversight, but a specific qualitative strategy (Wolcott, 2000) to help prevent stereotyped thinking during the interviews and data
interpretation. By delaying this review, I gained confidence that I had truly listened to the participants’ voices and had not forced their stories into preconceived clusters of meanings. In positivistic language, what I learned was highly consistent with the literature across several fields (e.g., adult learning theories, adult education, descriptions of Latino culture and values, or formulation of identity).

Wircenski, Walker, Allen, and West (1999) concluded that “few generalizations are accurate” (p. 493) in describing adult students. In fact, how we define ourselves is shaped in multiple ways—by individual characteristics, race, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, age, and disability, or a combination of those influences. Similarly, Moreno and Guido (2005), pointed out how Latinos are diverse “in socioeconomic factors such as income, education, marital and family composition, and employment…as well as different in experiences regarding class, race, and in color” (p. 91). Yet, generalizations about Latino/as persist to the point of becoming stereotypes that marginalize and exclude others, which also reinforces the White, Eurocentric discourse that permeates the U.S.

This portion of my substantive literature will not include a grand narrative on Latino culture, because one culture does not exist. In fact, many individuals from countries in the Caribbean, Latin America, and South America identify themselves as being Latino, yet embrace a variety of rich and distinctive cultures. To think in terms of one Latino culture is analogous to claiming that the culture in California is the same as in the Deep South, Midwest, or New York City. I want to reiterate that Part I of my substantive review is an attempt to understand others, not to create stereotypes. I do not imply that a shared language, Spanish, holds the same meaning for individuals as their respective ethnicity or culture. In my substantive review, I interchangeably use the terms
Hispanic or Latino exactly as the original sources used either or both terms. In conclusion, my writing in Part I has an important caveat: Latinos (or Hispanics) are a heterogeneous group (Moreno & Guido, 2005; Morín, 2005) with multiple cultures.

**Ethnicity and Race**

A special report based on Census 2000 data showed that more than 35 million Hispanics were living in the U.S., a remarkable 61% increase over the previous decade (Rameriz, 2004). However, by mid-decade, the U.S. Census Bureau (2006a) increased its population estimation to 42.7 million Hispanics, the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. (¶ 3). By country of origin, 64% were from Mexico (26 million), 16% from Caribbean countries (6.4 million), 7% from Central America (2.9 million), 6% from South America (2.2 million), and 8% (3 million) from other countries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). While states bordering Mexico had the highest percentage of Hispanics in their population, 14 million Hispanics live in Illinois and 2.6 million in Missouri (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). A majority (60-61%) of all Hispanics living in the U.S. were born in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), which is true for both Illinois (56%) and Missouri (70%). Of those Hispanics living in the U.S. who were foreign born, “46% of the individuals entered the U.S. between 1990-2000,” compared to 29% in the previous decade, 15% between 1970-1979, and 10% prior to 1970 (Rameriz, p. 9).

Shifting from the government data for a moment, according to a 2002 PEW survey, 42% of the individuals who identified themselves as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino also identified themselves as being of *Some Other Race* other than the standard governmental categories of White (48%), Black (6%) or two or more races (6%) (Tafoya, 2004). Tafoya said that the PEW’s survey
suggest[s] that Latino’s choice to identify as White or not does not exclusively reflect permanent markers such as skin color or hair texture but that race is also related to characteristics that can change such as economic status and perceptions of civic enfranchisement. Also, social context and the nature of race relations in a given place also appear to play a role (p. 2).

About 25% of native-born Latinos who identified themselves as being White “complain that discrimination is a major problem” for Latinos in this country as did about 33% of those who identified themselves as being from Some Other Race (Tafoya, p.2; see also Garcia, 2000; Morín, 2005).

Language Spoken in the Home

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007), slightly more than 77% of the U.S. Hispanic population spoke only Spanish at home at the time of Census 2000, and of those, 39% indicated that they spoke “very well” in English (p. 14). Individuals from Central and South American countries were most likely to speak a language other than English in the home, while individuals from Mexico and Puerto Rico were most likely to speak only English at home (Rameriz, 2004; U.S Census Bureau). According to PEW, 72% of first generation Latinos\(^3\) in the U.S. are likely to speak Spanish in the home, while 87% of third generation Latinos in the U.S. are most likely to exclusively English in the home (PEW, 2004c). Due to the large number of Latino immigrants that have

\(^3\) According to a *Survey Brief*, “First generation Latinos were born in a country other than the U.S. or Puerto Rico (63%). Second generation Latinos were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents (19%). Third generation Latinos are those who were born to U.S.-born parents (17%) (PEW, 2004b, page 1).
entered the U.S. in the last 15 years, “the number of Spanish speaking Latinos is greater than those who are currently bilingual and English dominant…” (PEW, 2004c, p. 5).

The Interplay of Latino Identity, Culture, and Values

The way our identity is conceived and the terms used to refer to us have serious implications for the way in which we are viewed and treated. There are social, racial, ethnic, and class implications which can emphasize prejudice and result in discrimination (Gracia, 2000, p. x).

In 2002, the Pew Hispanic Center and Kaiser Family Foundation jointly sponsored a national survey of Latinos in 2002. The findings revealed that “the terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ were not very popular” (Suro, 2006 a, p. 25) with either Hispanics born in the U.S., or immigrants. Half of the U.S.-born Latinos in the PEW survey identified themselves as “American” while two-thirds of the immigrants identified themselves by country of origin. PEW (2004b) also examined differences in perceptions of first, second, and third generation Latinos in the U.S. About 68% of first generation Latinos are “likely to select their country of origin” as part of their identity compared to 38% of second generation Latinos (p. 1). About 57% of third generation Latinos “use ‘American’ first or only when describing themselves” (p. 2). However, PEW also noted that “age, gender, income, country of origin” and language may be “more useful in explaining differences in attitudes” (p. 6). Both Olivarez (1998) and Suro (2006a, 2006b) remind us of the distinction between the identities of U.S. born Latinos and the identities of immigrants.

When discussing ethnic identity, several scholars have noted the influences of assimilation and acculturation. Assimilation has been defined as “the ways that
immigrants and their offspring change as they come into contact with their host society…but does imply any superiority in the host society’s views…” (PEW, 2004, p. 1). In a 2005 document, PEW refined its definition:

Assimilation is the process by which immigrants and their offspring adopt some values, beliefs, and behaviors more characteristic of the U.S. culture than the culture of the countries from which they or their ancestors originate. This is neither a complete nor a uniform process, as some individuals change more than others and some attitudes change more than others (p. 17).

The literature depicted acculturation as a different concept and the descriptions varied. According to Pew (2004) acculturation is a process that realizes “changes in both the newcomers and the hosts when they come into contact with one another” (p. 1). Anthropologists Lavenda and Schultz (2003) defined acculturation similarly. However, other interpretations negatively implied that the values and ways of the new dominant culture (a) supersede a person’s original culture, or that (b) a person forsakes or abandons the original culture, or that (c) a person will supplant native culture in a quest to become integrated into the new culture (Chapman & Perreira, 2005; Gans, 1997; King & Wright, 2001; InTime, 2001; Schaefer, 1996). However, acculturation has also been interpreted as a process by which one acquires a second culture and becomes bicultural (Korzenny, 1999). I also found discrepancies in the literature which suggest “the Latino experience has been different. They have not readily been molded into the U.S. melting pot and have wrestled with adapting to the Anglo culture versus maintaining traditional beliefs and practices” (Zanner & Stevens, 2001, ¶ 11). Olivarez, (1998) writes, “There is much
culture ‘inside’ as there is ‘outside’” (p. 435). The Director of the Pew Hispanic Center, Robert Suro, notes

We are watching a work in progress….Whatever Hispanic identity ends up being, to understand it, we’re going to have to open up our thinking about race and identity and about the ways that group identities take shape. We are seeing something new unfolding before our eyes… (Suro, 2006a, p.24).

Suro (2006b) upholds that both Latinos and the U.S. culture are changing, particularly influenced by the influx of Latino immigrants. He believes that Latinos are changing, but that “this is not simply a matter of assimilating to norms…while shedding the Spanish language and Latin American cultural expressions and attitudes” (p. 3). Suro described a process of “synthesis,” much like a symbiotic relationship of cultures, with an unpredictable “invention of altogether new norms, expressions, and identities” (p. 3). In her examination of representations of Latinos in the U.S. media, Olivarez (1998) also noted that “cultures and identities do not evolve in isolation” (p. 427), and like Morín (2005), offered examples of how Spanish language and Latino idols have proliferated the media and pop culture. In anthropological terms, this “mixing of elements from two or more traditions” acculturation process is called syncretism (Lavenda & Schultz, 2003, p. 187). Suro concludes

This is now a country of proliferating identities. Most assimilation/acculturation/ incorporation models measure movement, or lack of it, towards a national type….Today you can look to popular culture and see many forms of synthesis and hybridization as ethnic identities drawn from migrant population blend with
forms drawn from the host culture….Migrants are assimilating to a national type even as they are transforming it (Suro, 2006b, p. 13).

Greenhouse Gardella et al. (2005), Falicov (2005), and Moore Hines (2005) draw attention to Latino culture and identity in a different sense: Beliefs and values. Greenhouse Gardella pointed out that adult educators should “reach out to Latino students…[and] affirm such cultural values as familismo, personalismo, confianza, respeto, and dignidad” (p. 42). Figure 2 provides brief definitions for these and select other Latino values, but is not inclusive. Falicov noted how stressful a new culture can be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Concept/Belief/Value</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familismo</td>
<td>Importance of family (Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005). Strong identification with the nuclear and extended family; sense of responsibility and loyalty to the family, especially spouses and children (Mareno &amp; Guido, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalismo</td>
<td>Personalized approach to communicating with others; interest in another's situation, health and well-being; may “expect a certain amount of disclosure” (Mareno &amp; Guido, p. 94; see also Greenhouse Gardella et al.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confianza</td>
<td>Trust (Greenhouse Gardella et al.; Mareno &amp; Guido)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respeto</td>
<td>Respect especially for the elderly and those in positions of power (Mareno &amp; Guido); mutual respect (Greenhouse Gardella et al.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignidad</td>
<td>Care for the dignity of other persons (Greenhouse Gardella et al.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpatia</td>
<td>Simpatia “The ‘good face,’ implies avoiding confrontation and anger toward others, hiding true feelings when they are negative, and creating smooth relationships” (Mareno &amp; Guido, p. 94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Marianismo                | From the image of the Virgin Mary. “Women are
considered morally superior to men and therefore capable of ensuring the suffering inflicted by men…Having children raises the status of women in society and is a rite of passage into adulthood” (Moore Hines et al., 2005, p. 74).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Broad Concept/Belief/Value</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hembrismo</td>
<td>Relates to gender roles. From “hembra” or female, which “contributes to the complexity of Latino gender roles” (Moore Hines et al.); “places authority and power and male figures and allow them to exercise certain behaviors prohibited to females” (Moreno &amp; Guido, p. 94).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machismo</td>
<td>Male image as provider; being a powerful, strong, and active man (Moreno &amp; Guido, p. 94).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>“Emphasizes the needs and importance of the group rather than the individual” (Moreno &amp; Guido, p. 94).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Select Latino concepts, beliefs, and values identified in the literature as being meaningful to Latino families. List not intended to be inclusive, but as an illustration of how ideologies may also impact Latino/as’ identities.

when “cultural meanings…differ between the family and the dominant culture models” (p. 141). She explained how immigrants who live in the same ethnic neighborhoods can reinforce one another’s beliefs and views. However, PEW revealed that more than half (57%) of all Hispanics live in non-Hispanic neighborhoods.

Moore Hines (2005) offered gender roles as an example of how practices and beliefs can persist. Specific to Latinas, women are the primary family care givers. In being strong and “keeping the family together,” they make sacrifices and become “martyrs” of sorts, and neighbors and family members view “their sacrifice as exemplary” (Moore Hines et al, p. 74). While collectivism is a key value, Falicov (2005)
noted that “Democracy, egalitarianism, and individualism that typify small nuclear families are making greater inroads among Latinos” (p. 141).

Postsecondary Education

Overall, about 10% of Hispanics hold bachelor’s degrees, with about 29% of those being Spaniard, another 25% South American, 21% Cuban, 11% other Hispanic and Dominicans, 10% Central American, and 7% Mexican descent (Rameriz, 2004). By October 2005, approximately 256,000 Hispanics between the ages 30-49 were enrolled in U.S. colleges as undergraduates with approximately 102,000 of those students attending full time; a majority (60-61%) of students in this age range attend on a part time basis, whether they are enrolled in a two- or four-year institution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a). This is slightly higher than what PEW (2002) reported--51%. For this same age group, slightly more than half (54%) attend two year colleges, and 90% of those institutions are public (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a). The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) reported that 83% of Hispanics on four year campuses attended public institutions.

PEW noted that Hispanic undergraduates are “more likely to be older” (¶ 2) and have an average of 2.4 negative “risk characteristics” (¶ 3) (i.e., nontraditional attributes or academically at risk), as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (Choy, 2002). The 2005 American Community Survey revealed that 4.6 million Hispanics--28% of all native born and 14% of all foreign born--have at least “some college” (Fry, 2006; PEW, 2006). According to PEW (2002), “Latinos are the least-educated segment of the American population….because millions of adult immigrants with little education have arrived in recent decades” (¶ 1). Across the U.S., Latinos as lack preparedness for
advanced study (Lytle, 2005) and are underrepresented in Ph.D. programs (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute [TRPI], 2006).

The U.S. Census Bureau also provided age-related data on one of the nontraditional characteristics—employment. According to October 2005 data, nearly three-fourths (73%) of part-time Hispanic undergraduates age 30 and older are employed on a full time basis, as are 42% of full time students in the same age range (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b). Older Hispanic males are most likely to be employed full time regardless of enrollment intensity, with 92% of part-time students working full time and 59% of full-time students also working full time (U.S. Census Bureau). While 64% of part time female students age 30 and older also work full time, 45% of full time female students are not employed, and 30% work full time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b). Only 2.4% of the nation’s faculty members are Latino (Lytle, 2005); Latinos are underrepresented in science and engineering disciplines (TRPI, 2006).

Other Socio-economic Descriptors

PEW (2004a) described how “Latinos face a greater burden in meeting college expenses” with 57% of undergraduates having “unmet need after financial aid…despite attendance at lower-cost institutions” (¶ 5). Orfield et al. (2006) called for additional research on Latinos’ financial aid needs. In a separate report, PEW showed that first generation Latinos tend to have lower incomes than second generation Latinos. Specifically, 24% of second generation Latinos are more likely to have incomes over $50,000 than first generation Latinos. In its 2007 report, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that on average, “about 22 percent of Hispanics were living below the poverty level” and that “Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Hondurans” had the highest poverty
rates (p. 18). The 2004 median household income for all Hispanics was $35,929, with individuals from South America having the highest household incomes at more than $41,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, p. 17). The U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (n.d.) notes that “the number of prosperous Hispanic household (those with incomes of at least $100,000) rose 137 percent between 1990 and 2000” (¶ 10), and that “U.S. Hispanic purchasing power…is projected to reach $1 trillion by 2010” (¶ 12).

In conclusion, Part I of my substantive review provided highlights from government data and other literature relative to Latino/as lifeworld and cultural values. Again, these summaries were offered in the spirit of learning, not to make generalizations about Latino/as’ experience in the U.S. In the discussion sections of Chapters 4-6, I return to this section of the review as a means to (a) illuminate understanding and (b) challenge assumptions I may have made during data interpretation. The purpose of this next section, Part II, will be to synthesize the higher education journal literature about adult students.

Substantive Review Part II:

Literature on Adult Students

Part II of the substantive review pertains to the literature on adult students including (a) historical trends, (b) findings from government reports, (c) researchers’ perspectives on adults in college classrooms, and (d) adult students’ voices on their undergraduate experience. The historical trends section is a review of other scholars’ meta-analyses covering research from 1940-2000. The next three subsections represent three viewpoints in the most current literature (1998-2007) about adult undergraduates: a
data-driven, governmental perspective, researchers’ observations about adults in the classroom, and adult students’ voices.

Literature informing the last theme--adult students’ voices--was the most difficult to locate. Just as Geertz (as cited by Lincoln & Guba, 2000) pointed out, I found that “the authorial voice is…[often] hidden” (p. 159). To determine if a student’s voice was truly represented, I used *reflexivity* and *control* as the key criteria. Based on Lincoln and Guba’s work, I defined *reflexivity* as what the researcher revealed about his/her assumptions, role, and learning during the inquiry process (p. 183) and *control* as “who initiated the study . . . [established] the “salient questions,” . . . and determined how participants were selected, data collected, and findings shared (p. 175). I also took into consideration “what ‘voice’ was mirrored in the inquirer’s activities, especially those directed at change” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.115). Citing Giroux, Guba and Lincoln explained that

the inquirer’s voice is that of the ‘transformative intellectual’ . . . who has expanded consciousness and so is in a position to confront ignorance and misapprehensions. Change is facilitated as individuals develop insight . . . and are stimulated to act on it (p. 115).

Therefore, if the researcher did not share control of the study with participants, made no attempt to be reflexive, and did not appear to write as a transformative intellectual, I categorized those findings as exclusively representing the researcher’s voice, not the students’. Following Part II, I offered a critique of the extant higher education journal literature relative to adult students.
Context

Over the last 35 years, while public debate ensued over issues of equal access and genuine diversity in higher education, the evolving demographics documented an undeniable shift in the national undergraduate population: more adults were enrolling and returning to higher education. The catalyst for this unprecedented change was a complex combination of social, political, economic, and technological factors (Kasworm, 2003b; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Osgood-Treston, 2001; Pulliam, & Van Patten, 1995). Since the 1970s, millions of older women and people from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups have flocked to higher education institutions for personal enrichment, career enhancement, and to pursue degrees. By the turn of the century, 43% of all undergraduates in the U.S. were over age the age of 24, and more than half (56%), female (Horn et al., 2002). Additionally, 33% of all undergraduates indicated they are of a race or ethnicity that is non-White, non-Hispanic, with a majority of students from low and middle income quartiles (Horn et al., 2002). Also in stark contrast to the college campus of a generation ago, about 73% of the current undergraduate population is now categorized as nontraditional, an extended definition that reflects an emergent undergraduate population of students who have assumed the responsibilities of adult life, such as having dependents, being financially independent, attending part-time, and/or working full time (Choy, 2002; see also Horn & Carroll, 1996).

Despite these demographic changes, research about the adult undergraduate experience has been limited (Donaldson et al., 2003, Donaldson, Townsend & Thompson, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, 2005; Ross-Gordon, 2003; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Even by the turn of the millennium, researchers in the
higher education journal literature held to traditional patterns of study (Quinnan, 1997; Donaldson et al., 2003), such as comparing adults’ campus involvement and academic performance to younger students’ and attributing which factors lead to adults’ persistence and degree attainment. Consequently, there is much left to learn about adult undergraduates--especially students from underrepresented groups--whose voices are often filtered by the assumptions and interpretations of the scholars who study them (Donaldson et al., 2003).

**Historic Trends in the Higher Education Journal Literature**

Kasworm (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature spanning five decades--from 1940-1989. She was able to locate 345 articles, reports, books, and unpublished papers that met her selection criteria of (a) adult learners age 25 and older, (b) substantive research, and (c) American undergraduate education\(^4\). After reducing the selection to 96 pieces, her content analysis revealed that research was often grounded in “historical perspectives and beliefs of a traditional student profile” (p. 345), ages 17-22. Between those decades, she said researchers had applied various dimensions of younger undergraduates’ lives (e.g., academic performance, culture, leadership activities, and

\(^4\) In her 1990 article, Kasworm did not comment on the seemingly low number of substantive articles on adult undergraduates from what she described was an “extensive collection” of work (p. 347). After examining 50 years of research from top tier journals and other sources, only 345 pieces met her criteria--an average of less than 7 articles per year. However, ten years later in a coauthored piece, Kasworm acknowledged that higher education research had “neglected” adult undergraduates (Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000).
goals) to the study of older students. Kasworm noted a few references to gender comparisons in the historical literature, but she did not report if any of the pieces attended to class, race, or ethnic differences.

By inductive analysis, Kasworm (1990) identified five “domains of reality” (p. 345) framed by researchers to describe adult students. These included implied deficiency, student entry and adaptation, description and characterization, psychosocial development, equity, and outcomes. Kasworm coined the term implied deficiency to categorize studies that used age as a predictor of academic achievement, noting that comparisons between younger and older students were prevalent in the literature between 1940-1990. However, across those five decades she was also able to locate descriptive and correlation studies to dispel many of the myths and assumptions about adult students. Studies on student entry and adaptation showed that adults have a higher degree of satisfaction with academic performance and that women are more satisfied with their studies than men. The third domain, description and characterization, represented the largest section of the literature. Numerous characteristics and descriptors about adult students were identified, but Kasworm concluded that “age presented limited utility to uncovering key identifiers” (p. 358). Kasworm also listed several studies from 1971-1987 based on theoretical frameworks relating to the psychosocial dimensions of adult students, including adult roles, role conflict, and program interventions. The final domain, equity and outcome, pertained to the “value and impact of adult learners engaging in higher education” (p. 362). Kasworm did not present further findings for the last two domains.
A lack of breadth and depth in studies about older student (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998) seems to have perpetuated a number of misconceptions about them, including the notion that older students do not perform academically as well as younger students (Richardson, 1994; Richardson & King, 1998). Nearly a decade ago, Richardson and King were calling for the elimination of “myths and stereotypes” (p. 82) about adult students. Since then, several scholars have worked to refute the myths of implied deficiency, by showing that adults consistently performed as well in college as younger students (Donaldson, Flannery, & Ross-Gordon, 1999).

Quinnan (1997) concluded the historic research trends were redundant in that most “studies are done by repackaging hypotheses and reaffirming outcomes of earlier scholarship” (p. 1; see also Donaldson, 2003). Quinnan, and then others, called upon fellow scholars to explore new dimensions of the adult undergraduate experience (e.g., Donaldson, 2003; Kasworm 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). Pascarella and Terenzini labeled the failure of higher education researchers to focus on adult students a “substantial” research bias (p. 152). Further, Kasworm et al. (2000) concluded that the marginalization of adults in higher education is so widespread that it also encompassed public policy, programming, and mission. Specific to Latinos, Orfield, Horn, and Flores (2006) pointed out the need to address “civil rights and….policy decisions issues at the institution, state, and federal levels” (p. 81).

The decade of the 1990s reflected little change in the higher education journal literature. Donaldson et al. (2003) analyzed 2,533 titles from three community college journals, two student affairs journals, and three general higher educational journals from 1990-2000. They found that less than two percent (n=29) of the articles focused on older
undergraduates and *none* were specific to adult students from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups.

Donaldson et al. (2003) then conducted a deeper analysis of the 29 articles specific to adult undergraduates, by employing a five-phase framework for perspective analysis modeled after Tetreault’s (1985) method for studying feminist scholarship. The first phase, *exclusionary*, was the identifier for articles in which the researcher treated the traditional age student experience as universal. By definition, they found no exclusionary articles from 1990-2000. However, Donaldson et al. rated 15 of their articles as being in the second phase, *compensatory*, because adult students were viewed “in need of programs and support to assist them in ‘adapting’ to institutional practices oriented toward traditional age students” (p. 3). The third scholarship phase, *bifocal*, included 12 articles that treated adult students as being equal to younger students. Donaldson et al. noted that race or gender differences were addressed, but that each group was otherwise treated homogeneously. They found only two articles in which researchers represented a *valuing* perspective, where adult undergraduates were the sole focus of the study. Those authors attempted to develop new theories about the adult undergraduate experience. No articles in the Donaldson et al. study were labeled as being *multifocal*, the phase where adult undergraduates would be “considered holistically and relationally” (p. 4). The team noted they could not identify the researcher’s perspective for the two remaining articles in their study. Overall, they found that 23 (74%) of the articles applied conventional theories and models to adult undergraduates even though those conventional theories and models were based on studies of younger students.
As part of their longitudinal college impact study, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) examined nearly 2600 studies from the 1990s. Like Donaldson et al. (2004), they found that “the majority of post-1990 studies of [student] change in college, like those published earlier, focus on traditional age undergraduates” (p. 18). They also noted that scholars in the adult development field have published little on how college affects older adults. Further, they observed that while the scope of research topics on undergraduates has broadened, a “positivist, quantitative paradigm still dominates the total body of research” (p. 4). Lincoln and Guba (2000) explained that the inquiry aim of positivism is “explanation: prediction and control” and knowledge accumulation through “accretion-‘building blocks’ adding to [an] ‘edifice of knowledge;’ [with] generalizations and cause-effect linkages” (p. 166). The positivist literature Pascarella and Terenzini refer to then, are studies that attempt to predict the progress and outcomes of students or control what variables are studied and how those variables are defined. In positivist research, students’ voices are not heard because control of the salient research questions, data collection, analysis, and reporting are determined solely by the researcher.

In sum, several scholars have pointed out the absence of refereed articles on adult undergraduates. They agreed that even by the close of 1990s, knowledge about the diverse educational needs, experiences, and outcomes of adult undergraduates--especially students from underrepresented groups--remained limited (Kasworm, 2002; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000). Most pointedly, Quinnan (1997) concluded that adults are one of many “besieged groups struggling to secure their own cultural niche on campuses largely indifferent to multicultural presences and needs” (p. 27).
Noteworthy, I found the most current literature (1998-2007) revealed similar patterns. After an exhaustive search with descriptors (e.g., older students, nontraditional characteristics, adult undergraduates, Latino students, Hispanic students, underrepresented students in the classroom, and adult learning), I found few reports from the U.S. Department of Education and no journal articles specific to older Latino undergraduates. This next section summarizes the 1998-2007 body of work.

*Findings from Government Reports on Adult Students*

Before exploring qualitative studies about the lived experiences of adult undergraduates, it is insightful to look more broadly at how adult students are depicted by the U.S. Department of Education—as numbers. In fact, the NCES publishes several documents from which statistics about adult students may be attained, including reports on enrollment numbers, minorities, persistence, educational attainment, and nontraditional characteristics.

As noted in the introduction, from the 1970s, the U.S. undergraduate population began a dramatic and unprecedented shift toward diverse student representation, as women and minorities—many of them older adults—were joining young, privileged, White males in higher education. By 1973, the federal government began reporting data for college students aged 35 and older (Shin, 2005). In the 2000 school year, nearly eight percent of the U.S. adult population—5.9 million adults age 25 and older—were enrolled as undergraduates; those numbers are projected to increase by eight percent by 2010\(^5\)

\(^5\) Depending on the source of data, enrollment numbers vary. These projections are based on adults enrolled in 2- or 4-year degree granting institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs.
Colleges, universities, and vocational/technical schools provide one fifth (21%) of all the work-related adult education programs in the U.S. (NCES). According to the government, nearly half (44-46%) of the U.S. adult population (approximately 86-90 million adults) are actively engaged in adult education programs (Kim & Creighton, 1999; NCES). This estimate included adults attending college on a part-time basis and those enrolled in non-degreed programs who would not otherwise be “counted” as undergraduates. Kim and Creighton underscored that participation in adult education was “six times the higher education enrollment in 1999” (¶ 2).

_Adult students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups._ For the 1999-2000 year, Wirt et al. (2003) reported an increase in the proportion of minority undergraduates over the previous decade, while the number of White, non-Hispanic students decreased. However, the percentage of White, non-Hispanic students in the undergraduate population increases with age. For example, at the start of the 21st century, 60% of all undergraduates between the ages of 24-29 were White, non-Hispanic, but after age 39, the percentage of White, non-Hispanic students grew to 70% (Horn et al., 2002). Conversely, representation of underrepresented groups decreases with age. For example, at age 24, Black and Hispanic adult students comprised 14.3% and 14.0% of the undergraduate population, respectively, but those numbers drop to 13.2% and 9.2%, by age 40. The number of participating adults also declined for other minority groups and for those who identify themselves by more than one race (Horn et al.). Representation in the undergraduate population by _ethnicity_ is slightly different. Younger students (18-23) comprised _more_ of the White, non-Hispanic population (58%); younger students comprised _less_ of the Black population (49.4%), while younger students comprised _more_
of the Hispanic or Latino population (58.6%) (Horn et al.). The only other racial or ethnic group where older students outnumbered younger students was American Indian/Alaska Natives (54.8%) (Horn et al.).

As it pertains to adult education overall, the government data show that minority participation in adult education has increased: The 2005 Condition of Education reports that more than half (51%) of all Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders participate in adult education, as do 46% of Blacks, 44% of Whites, 41% of Hispanics, and 36% of American Indian/Alaskan Natives (NCES, 2005).

Other adult student characteristics. Within the last seven years, the U.S. Department of Education released several reports that further illuminated students’ backgrounds and characteristics. At least two of these reports included statistics on older undergraduates. For example, about 40% of younger adult students (ages 24-29) are from lower income families (Choy, 2000), but nearly half (45%) of students over age 40 have higher incomes (Horn et al., 2002). Horn et al. (2002) attributed this difference to “experience in the work force” (p. 14), which may also explain why a majority of students over the age of 30 attend college on a part-time basis. Low income students ages 25 and older were also more likely to have parents with less than a high school education (Choy). Horn et al. also pointed out that 62% of adult students age 40 and older were first generation students, defined as their parents having no more than a high school education or equivalent. (The term first generation has a different definition by immigration status).

With increasing age, also comes an increase in disabilities. The average age of those with disabilities was 34, but students age 40 and older reported the highest incidence (33%) of disabilities (Horn et al., 2002). Overall, about one quarter (24%) of all
adult undergraduates considered themselves to have a disability, but not all of those students reported “academic difficulties” because of a disability (Horn et al.).

Student retention is another topic of interest to the government. As reported by Horn et al. (2002), factors that place an undergraduate student at risk of non-completion include delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, being financially independent, having dependents or children, being a single parent, no high school diploma, and working full time. According to the statisticians, “students with three or more risk factors could be in danger of leaving postsecondary education without a degree or credential” (p. 33). They reported that 100% of adult students (ages 24 and older) are academically at risk, and that adult students over age 30 have an average of 3.8 risk factors. In a separate report, Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, and McCormick (1996) showed that as “age at entry into postsecondary education increased, persistence and attainment decreased” (p. 16) and that only 35% of students who initiated studies at age 30 or older, had attained degrees or were still enrolled five years later. Although most adult students did not initiate studies at 4-year degree granting institutions (Berkner et al., 1996), of those who did, 46% departed within the first three years (Bradburn, 2002). After controlling for other variables, Bradburn found that age was a contributing factor to early attrition. Berkner et al. suggested that other factors such as “institutional selectivity, academic preparation and individual motivation may explain the difference in persistence and attainment” (p. 20) among students.

Despite attrition rates, in July 2000, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the number of White, Black, and Hispanic students between the ages of 25-29 who had attained a bachelor’s degree had risen between 1971 and 1998. In 1998, 34.5 % of
White, non-Hispanic students had attained a degree, compared to 23.1% in 1971; for Blacks, the numbers were 17.9% in 1998 compared to 11.5% in 1971; and for Hispanics, 16.5% in 1998 versus 10.5% in 1971. The U.S. Department of Labor reported that in 1997, nearly 80 percent of adults over age 25 who held a bachelor’s degree participated in the labor force, compared with 66 percent holding high school diplomas (NCES, 1998).

Researchers’ Perspectives on Adults in College Classrooms

The historic patterns of scholarship noted by Kasworm (1990), Quinnan (1997), and Donaldson et al. (2003) have been mimicked in the current literature. For example, studies conducted between 1998-2007 provided demographics on adult students (Aslanian, 2001; Bash, 2003; Kasworm, Poulson, & Fishback, 2002; Kasworm, 2003b); shared theories on adults’ cognition and learning (Dill & Henley, 1998; Graham, 1998; Merriam, 2001; Richardson & King, 1998; Ross-Gordon, 2003a); described the motivations and goals of adult students (Kasworm 2003b; White, 2001); discussed adults’ family and work roles and barriers to education (Aslanian, 2001; Fairchild, 2003; Home, 1998; Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000; Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2005; Kerka, 2001; Osgood-Treston, 2001; White, 2001); compared adult students to younger college students (Bash, 2003; Carlan, 2001; Dill & Henley, 1998; Graham & Long-Gisi, 2000; Howard & Baird, 2000; Howard & Henley, 1998; Jacobs & Berkowitz-King, 2002; Kasworm, 2003c; Richardson & King, 1998; Senter & Senter, 1998; Spitzer, 2000); offered strategies for recruitment and retention (Hadfield, 2003; Hagedorn, 2006; Kasworm et al., 2002; Kasworm et al. 2005); and explained factors of persistence (Hagedorn; Hensley & Kinser, 2001; Kent & Gimmestad, 2004; Samuels, 2005). Most of
the articles treated adults as one homogenous group, paying scant attention to adults’ age, race, class, or ethnic differences.

Rather than being constrained by status quo conceptualizations, a few researchers have begun to challenge labels and definitions that have historically stereotyped adult students in negative ways. For example, Adelman (1999), a government employee, and Hensley and Kinser (2001) offered that the conventional definition of persistence comes from an institutional perspective that students must stay continually enrolled at one institution and complete studies within a period of about five years. Adelman pointed out that current statistics show more than 60% of undergraduates now enroll in more than one institution, and that many others stop out for one or more semesters before returning to studies. He advocated eliminating persistence as a variable in government studies and candidly pointed out: “Simply because [a variable] has been used for decades or because a federal agency paid for it” (p. xi) does not mean that the variable is a valid measure of the undergraduate experience. Like Adelman, Hensley and Kinser preferred to define persistence from a student perspective rather than an institutional one. Hensley and Kinser coined the term tenacious persisters, with a positive tone, to describe students who stop out or enroll in more than one institution as still making progress.

In a similar fashion, other researchers have challenged a traditional notion that college outcome is equated with degree attainment. Donaldson and Graham (1999) pointed out that existing models of persistence and college outcomes were based upon studies of younger students (e.g. Astin, Bean & Metzner, Tinto) and “may not fully capture the essence of the undergraduate experience for adults in higher education” (p. 25). Donaldson and Graham also suggested that adults define outcomes in a variety of
ways beyond academic achievement, including but not limited to, application of learning
to life and work, improving the lives of others, and attitudinal change. In 2003,
Donaldson expanded on that observation, noting that adult undergraduate outcomes are
“influenced by multiple factors and not simply and only by what learners experience on
campus” (p. 7).

In addition to challenging the definitions and labels used to categorize adult
students, some of the literature published between 1998 and 2007 reflected researchers’
attempts to illustrate the adult undergraduate experience from new perspectives. For
example, Kasworm (2003a) introduced five adult student voices including “entry voice,
outside voice, cynical voice, straddling voice, and inclusion voice” (p. 86), representing
adults’ beliefs about the creation of knowledge and the relationship of their learning
experiences in and out of the classroom. According to Kasworm, a student with an entry
voice is one who values academic knowledge, successful class performance, and grades.
In contrast, a student with an outside voice values applied and real world knowledge and
expertise. Kasworm labeled a student who enrolls in college for credentialing purposes,
with little classroom engagement as having a cynical voice. However, a student who
connects academic and real world knowledge possesses what Kasworm called a
straddling voice. Finally, those students who value more of a worldview and multiple
forms of knowledge Kasworm said had an inclusion voice (p. 86). Looking at knowledge
acquisition differently, Hayes (2001) identified that “gendered ways of knowing may
differ by society, culture, ethnic group, locality, and so on . . .” (p. 39), and suggested that
“if educators seek to promote social change, they might explore with learners how
gendered beliefs are acted upon, recreated and transformed in the classroom” (p. 41).
Donaldson and Graham (1999) examined what happens to adults both in and out of the classroom. Their conceptualization of the adult undergraduate experience was depicted as *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Figure 3) with six non-linear components including (a) prior experience and personal biographies, (b) psychosocial and value orientation, (c) adult's cognition, (d) the connecting classroom, (e) lifeworld environment, and (f) outcomes. For each component of the model Donaldson and Graham offered both theory and rationale, and described the “variations within each component and the interactions among them” (p. 28). To build a case for their model, Donaldson and Graham (1999) pointed to diversity in adult lifestyles, work demands, and family roles, and that, unlike younger students, few adults had the opportunity to fully assimilate into the campus culture, partake in student leadership roles, or engage in campus roles. 

*Figure 3*. Miniature adaptation of Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults*. Edited to show the six constructs only for discussion purposes. Does not include influences and interactions. Complete model is shown in Chapter 5. Adapted with authors’ permission.
activities. They noted that despite this lack of campus involvement, studies consistently showed that the academic achievement of adults equaled or exceeded that of younger students. Therefore, they concluded that adults must use other “skills, techniques, settings, or interactions” (p. 26) to attain the same or better academic achievement as younger students. A brief description of the six components of *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* follows:

**Prior experience and personal biographies:** According to Donaldson and Graham (1999), adults have “fertile and abundant experiences” that help shape their learner profile. As a result, they have “complex and rich mental schemas that might make learning more personally meaningful for them” (p. 27).

**Psychosocial and value orientations:** The literature shows how adults’ prior experiences directly and indirectly influence norms and values. Donaldson and Graham also reported that adults assess their personal potential as learners. Combined, these factors help formulate “adults' commitment to the student role,” (p. 29) dedication to learning, and desire to obtain high quality instruction. They also reported that adults are “more intent on learning” and have “clearer goals” (p. 27) than younger students.

**Adults' cognition:** This component of the model has three dimensions including “(a) declarative and procedural knowledge structures, (b) metacognitive or self-regulatory processes, and (c) cognitive operations (e.g., accretion, transformation)” (p. 32). It is based upon literature that shows how adults draw upon “lifeworld knowledge structures” to comprehend, make meaning, and apply their newly-acquired “academic knowledge” (p. 33).

**Connecting Classroom:** For Donaldson and Graham (1999), the classroom is the
“focal point for learning experiences” of adult undergraduates. The authors theorized that because adults are less involved in traditional collegiate activities, they “may use the classroom differently” (p. 31) than younger students, for example, as the primary resource for social interaction with peers. The literature also showed that younger students “interact differently with instructors” and that older students “take instructors more seriously” (p. 27).

**Lifeworld environment:** Donaldson and Graham (1999) described adults' lifeworld as their present lived experiences, for example, their roles at work, with family, and in the community. It also includes adult learners' support systems. As Donaldson and Graham explained, adult students connect classroom learning to other life activities and immediately apply learning to their work and other settings.

**Outcomes:** The literature revealed that many adult students in college realize social, emotional, and intellectual growth that parallels or exceeds traditional-age students (Donaldson et. al, 2000). Further, adults define “outcomes” in a variety of ways beyond academic achievement, including but not limited to application of learning to life and work, improving the lives of others, and attitudinal change (Donaldson & Graham, 1999).

Donaldson and Graham (1999) used literature primarily from 1991 through 1999 to provide the theory and rationale for their model. Their reference list includes 65 titles, and 37 of those titles (57%) pertained to mature, adult, and non-traditional students (at least in part). The balance of the titles represented scholarship on constructivism, student demographics, the effects of college life, academic advising, and various learning and development theories. Several of the cited studies compared students by age; one study
addressed middle-age women; and one was a government report that included sex and age as variables. According to their titles, none of the studies cited by Donaldson and Graham were specific to adult students by race, class, or ethnicity. Further, in their description of the model, Donaldson and Graham did not cite information specific to the needs, interests, experiences, or outcomes of adult students from underrepresented groups.

While all of the model’s constructs are germane to this study, my primary focus was on the connecting classroom component, described by Donaldson and Graham (1999) as the “focal point for learning experiences” of adult undergraduates (see also Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 2000). The scholars theorized that because adults are less involved in traditional collegiate activities, they “may use the classroom differently” (p. 31) than younger students, such as for social interaction with peers. In a qualitative study with degree-seeking adult undergraduates, Donaldson et al., (2000) tested the model with thirteen White adult undergraduates at two different institutions. Their findings showed that adults (a) distinguish between “success in learning” and “success in college” (p. 5), (b) perceive that adult experience, maturity, motivation, and self monitoring contribute to success, and (c) identify that classroom experiences and support systems can be either positive or negative. The researchers reported that their “findings resonate well” (p. 9) with A Model of College Outcomes for Adults and suggested further study on the models’ six components. Acknowledging that no students from underrepresented groups participated in the study, Donaldson (J. F. Donaldson, personal communication, December 18, 2003) welcomed further exploration of the model.
Recently, Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) model has been cited in several studies relating to adult student persistence (Kent & Gimmestad, 2004; McRay, 2005; Perry, 2003; Samuels, 2005). Other studies have tested or drawn connections to select constructs of the model (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Justice & Dornan, 2001; Kasworm, 2003a). For example, Gartenlaub (2003) applied path analysis to the model with a sample of 2,068 urban community college students age 25 and older, with an aim to predict academic success. His descriptive statistics did not include race or ethnicity. While some of his results were inconclusive, he found that “self-efficacy is significantly and positively relates to the connecting classroom . . .[and] interaction with instructor…” (p. 72). He also found that the connecting classroom component had “. . . little or no effect on either grade point average or course completion” (p. 74).

However, Gartenlaub’s (2003) findings are problematic for (at least) two reasons. First, some of his variables were incongruent with the constructs of Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) model. As example, he selected math and science courses as a variable to predict adults’ cognition (typical variable in studies of younger students), but the developers’ intent was to look beyond academic achievement. Instead, Donaldson and Graham incorporated numerous theories on adult cognitive processes into the model. The second glaring problem was that Gartenlaub’s positivist approach to predicting outcomes is contradictory to Donaldson and Graham’s position that students construct their own definitions for the term outcomes. As the Donaldson et al. (2000) study clearly revealed, college outcomes can be both positive and negative and that adults define college success in a multitude of ways. Donaldson (J.F. Donaldson, personal communication, March 18,
2005), indicated similar concerns about the Gartenlaub findings. Some of this disconnect may be explained by Gartenlaub’s many references to studies of younger students.

*Spirituality.* Tisdell (2001) is one of few researchers deviating from the historical research trends. In her review of the literature on adult *spirituality* in higher education, Tisdell notes that “As the cultural fabric of North America is changing, there is greater emphasis on creating culturally relevant programs for specific population groups” ( ¶ 9). Referencing bell hooks, Tisdell notes that “spirituality has a role in breaking the silence that erases our passion . . . [and has] a place in higher and adult education” because it leads to “culturally relevant,” “emancipatory,” and “transformative” education ( ¶ 1; ¶ 8). As the adult learner population becomes increasingly diverse--and global--educators will begin see the application of Tisdell’s work to their classroom methods. In fact, Aiken et al. (2001) listed spirituality as a strong motivating factor for African American nursing students.

*Repressive tolerance.* Contrasting Tisdell’s (2001) pedagogical ideologies are Huber and Cale’s (2002) observations that “liberal and humanistic teaching practices” such as feminist pedagogy, transformative education, and democratic discussions “may lead to the marginalization and even silencing of more progressive and inclusive oppositional voices and viewpoints” (p. 101) in the adult education classroom. Citing Marcuse, they describe how this *repressive tolerance* occurs:

Democratic tolerance demands that all voices are heard…because people are indoctrinated into the dominate hegemonic thinking, they naturally reject radical or alternative perspectives that violate their formative ideological
conditioning . . . oppositional voices would be marginalized, met with hostility, and finally ignored (p. 102).

Huber and Cale (2002) contended that faculty members should remain ethical, but use “coercive restraint, . . . oppositional teaching” and other methods to “delegitimatize the status quo and silence the dominate majority” (p. 102). They reiterated bell hooks’ position that a “teacher’s role is to facilitate the challenge of structured power relations. This may mean that classrooms are not ‘safe’ and that students feel uncomfortable being challenged” (Huber & Cale, p. 102). In order to do this, Huber and Cale added, faculty members must be willing to “exert authority” when repressive tolerance occurs, even if it means at times they must abandon Freirean methods that “downplay the distinction between learner and educator” (p. 102). The authors candidly shared reflective examples of how marginalization occurred and voices were silenced in their “tolerant” classrooms (pp. 103-104).

With an argument similar to Huber and Cale’s (2002), Brookfield (2003) described how a “democratic” classroom environment with “self-directed learning, critical reflection, and transformative learning” methods (p. 498) can lead to repressive tolerance. Not only did Brookfield expound on Marcuse’s concept of repressive tolerance, he underscored the prevalent, racialized discourse in adult education classrooms, refuting “the myth of neutral, non-impositional, adult educators” (p. 520). Brookfield made a distinction between racialism and racism, the former being a “positive recognition of how his or her lifeworld, positionality, and sense of cultural identity comprise a set of preconscious filters and assumptions that frame how one’s life is felt
and lived” (p. 499)\textsuperscript{6}. Thus, White educators of European descent, “informed by their racial histories and identities,” protect and promote a “Eurocentric epistemology,” values, and ideologies that predominate the racialized discourse of the typical adult education classroom (Brookfield, 2004).

Kumashiro (2000) suggested there are “four approaches to anti-oppressive education. . . . [including] Educating for the Other, Education About the Other, Education that Is Critical of Privileging and Othering, and Education that Changes Students and Society” (p. 25). However, according to Brookfield (2003, 2004, 2005), the task of moving away from repressive tolerance toward\textit{liberating tolerance} is fraught with challenges for White adult educators, who may be perceived as insensitive and disrespectful with ill-conceived attempts at “diversity” and “inclusion” their Whiteness remains the “invisible norm” at the center of discourse, and other perspectives are merely additions to that center (Brookfield, 2003, p. 499; see also Edwards & Usher, 1997; Manglitz, 2003). Contreras and Gándara (2006), Watson (2002) and others have also pointed out the importance of critical discourse to students from underrepresented groups.

\textit{Negative experiences of marginalized students}. The works of Brookfield (2002; 2003, 2005), Huber and Cale (2002), and Tisdell (2001) have all been published within the last six years. Also emerging in the literature during this same period, was scholarship that did not treat adults as a one homogeneous group and recognized how gender, race, 

\textsuperscript{6} In contrast, Brookfield (2003) defined racism as a “ . . . brutal, negative celebration” that denies “targeted racial or ethnic groups full participation in the social, political, economic and cultural . . .” aspects of life through “modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination, and exploitation” (p. 499).
ethnicity, culture, and class shape the adult undergraduate experience. Examples of this emerging body of literature on marginalized groups was Hayes’ (2001) study on women’s learning, including African American women, Ross-Gordon’s (2003b) observations on African American women in academia, and Spradley’s (2001) work on education strategies for adult Black males. When these and other pieces were assembled, several consistent themes emerged about the experiences of adults from underrepresented groups—themes that revealed both oppressive and supportive collegiate experiences. This finding is consistent with Donaldson’s (2003) observation that “a range of factors” can contribute to either a “supportive or non-supportive” (p. 7) learning climate for adults.

Several researchers have reported that the oppressive experiences (which were more prevalent than supportive experiences) served as educational barriers to adult students of color. The oppressive themes in the current literature included the *racialized culture* of higher education (Hayes, 2001; Ross-Gordon 2003b; O’Brien, 1998); *marginalization and otherness* (Ross-Gordon); *Eurocentric curricula* (Donaldson, 2003; Ross-Gordon; O’Brien; Ziegahn, 2001); and *racism* (Ross-Gordon). According to Castellanos and Jones (2003) findings about younger African American and Latino students are similar.

Ross-Gordon argued that African American students are the “double other,” meaning they are marginalized in classrooms because of their race and age. She pointed out how these students have a “degree of cultural dissonance with the college learning environment” in part because of racism and stereotyping, absence of faculty of color, Eurocentric curricula, and “covert and even overt discrimination” (pp. 9-10). According to Ross-Gordon, Black students have a strong sense of self-efficacy yet found that they
needed to “learn the academic ‘rules of the game’” (p. 8) and how to “navigate the culture of higher education” (p. 10). As it pertained to classroom practices, Ziegahn (2000) explained how mandatory student presentations in front of a class can create dissonance for “Asian and Native American students who come from a culture of reverence to those in leadership, power, age, gender or status” (p. 5) and how the “emphasis on actions, results and deadlines . . . may create a disconnect for Hispanic learners whose time is linked to the ‘exploration of ideas’ rather than a goal or product” (p. 6).

Supportive climates for marginalized students. The current literature also identifies supportive collegiate experiences related to classroom climate (Kasworm, 2003c; Ross-Gordon, 2003b; Watson, 2002; Ziegahn, 2001), faculty attitude and accessibility (Donaldson, 2003; Ross Gordon, 2003b, Stebbins, 1998), curricula (O’Brien, 1998; Ross Gordon, 2005; Watson), and campus environment (Ross-Gordon 2003b, Spradley, 2001; Watson). Morín, (2005) noted the importance of “reaffirming culture and identity” (pp. 112-113) of Latino\as, while Ross-Gordon (2003b, 2005) emphasized the importance of cultural visibility in curricula for Black, Hispanic, and Native American adult students. Ross Gordon and Donaldson underscored the criticality of positive instructor attitudes toward adults and “. . . faculty sensitivity to cultural and educational differences…” (Donaldson, p. 7) in and out of the classroom. Spradley and Ross-Gordon (2003 a, 2003b,) also described how supportive peers and study groups are an important aspect of the campus environment for African Americans.

Specific to supportive environments for adult Latino\as, Greenhouse Gardella et al. (2005) identified how “learners increasingly expect to reach their educational goals as
they face challenges, accept help from mentors and guides, interpret adversity, learn positive lessons, identify accomplishments and goals, and assume responsibility for others” (p. 40). The authors also identified that “culturally meaningful support” (p. 40) is needed, such as family involvement, affirmation of cultural values, and connections with the Latino community and college life. Unique to the Greenhouse Gardella et al. (2005) program, students participated in a structured mentoring program with other Latinos and could “speak in their preferred language, English or Spanish” (p. 42).

Parallels with international perspectives. As it pertains to institutional barriers for marginalized groups, a set of studies from the United Kingdom illustrated how class is a barrier to institutional access. The similarities with policies in the United States were stunning. For example, Reay (2002) highlighted the ongoing difficulties faced by working class adults who attempt to access higher education (see also Nesbitt, 2005, Walters, 2005). In reference to U.K. policy aimed at attracting more older students, Reay concluded that “despite the superficial noisy welter of innovation, at a deeper more impenetrable level certain structures remain impervious to change” (p. 415). Bowl (2001) and Bamber and Tett (1999) showed how a triad of situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers impact working-class adult students in higher education. While their comments were specific to students in the U.K., a parallel may be drawn with Ross-Gordon’s (2003, 2005) observations relative to the barriers faced by older African American undergraduates in the United States.

Bamber and Tett (1999) concluded that the “ethos” of higher education in the U.K. “tends to reflect existing social inequalities” (p. 468). Writing about adult students in the U.S., Sissel et al. (2001) similarly noted that “the experience of adults in higher
education cannot be separated from politics, culture, economics and social structures” (p. 25). Labeling the U.S. higher education ethos as “the politics of neglect” (p. 17), Sissel et al. described higher education as an “elitist environment” and “hegemonic system,” replete with “... prejudice, and denial of opportunities” because those in privileged positions keep marginalized individuals “powerless and voiceless” (pp. 18-19). O’Brien (1998) added, “To the extent then, that American educational institutions reflect consciously or unconsciously this historical sense of exclusion, they will appear to do so on racial grounds, and ‘racism’ becomes an accurate perception” (p. 85). In sum, the picture that O’Brien and Sissel et al. portrayed about the inequalities in higher education is not much better than what the scholars from the U.K described.

Adult Students’ Voices on their Undergraduate Experience

Johnson-Bailey’s (1998; 2001) work with Black reentry women in college as well as a study of Black women in nursing programs (Aiken et al., 2001) and a study from the United Kingdom (Bowl, 2001) matched my selection criteria for this section on the adult student experience from the students’ perspective. Similar to the previously-cited literature, several consistent themes emerged from the voices of students from underrepresented groups, including self-efficacy, determination, Otherness, racism, and racialized institutional culture. The students’ stories illustrated how oppressive the undergraduate experience can be for marginalized adults.7

7 My preference is to include excerpts of the students’ narratives in this section. In the interest of space, I will instead use the scholar’s interpretations to summarize the findings, which filters the students’ voices.
The African American women who shared their stories with Johnson-Bailey (2001) “characterized their reentry episodes as chilling experiences and depicted academia as hostile” (p. 121). Overall, she observed that “race and gender oppression overwhelmingly affected them both inside and outside of the classroom” (p. 121). Johnson-Bailey’s and Ross-Gordon’s (2003b) work also illustrated another conceptualization of the *Double Other* on college campuses---in this case, those who are marginalized by both race and gender. The Black nursing students who shared their collegiate experiences with Aiken et al. (2001) described instances of both overt and covert discrimination, leading the authors to conclude that “issues of race and identity (the experience of being *Other*) and racism are the strongest barriers to participation” (p. 317). Aiken et al. shared that “Injustices are manifested by way of intimidation, difference in treatment, silence . . . being ignored and humiliation” (p. 314). Citing Hayes and Colin, Aiken et al. also noted how “Black women are uniquely affected by struggles around race, class, and gender in a wider society” (p. 309).

The women who talked with Ross-Gordon (2003b) needed “help to navigate the culture of higher education” (p. 10). Similar to Bowl’s (2002) article, Ross-Gordon’s participants reported that “learning the rules of the game” (p. 156) was one of many campus barriers. Bowl concluded that the role of the adult student is one “of a highly motivated but frustrated participant unable to gain access to support and constructive advice” who “tend to blame themselves for their failure to understand what is required of them” (pp. 157-159). Bowl also pointed to the oppression of being a Double Other:

> University entry is experienced as a dislocation and disjunction which is intensified if the learner is “non-traditional” in more than one sense. Dislocation
seems to centre on class, gender, and ethnic difference between the overall ethos of the institution and that of the non-traditional student (p. 157).

Critique of Extant Literature on Adult Students

Concurrent to my synthesis of the literature about adult students (Part II of the substantive review), I began to critique what I was learning. Foremost I found a lack of articles on adult students, especially about students from underrepresented groups. My reviews did not yield one article about middle-age Latino/a undergraduates. To my surprise, I also found that the few articles on African American and Black students were written by the same core group of about eight researchers. Like Quinnan (1997) described, I also began to see repetitive research trends, and found that negative images of adult students were still present in the most current literature. These findings helped me to understand why Boote and Beile (2005) uphold that critical analysis and critique are integral parts of a comprehensive literature review.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000) the inquiry aim of positivism is “explanation: prediction and control” and that knowledge accumulation occurs through “accretion-'building blocks’ adding to [an] ‘edifice of knowledge;’ [with] generalizations and cause-effect linkages” (p. 166). Clearly, the governmental reports in this study reflect a positivist viewpoint. For example, the reports on low-income students, short-term enrollment, and nontraditional students had an inquiry aim to predict the progress and outcomes of adult students. Scientists controlled what variables were studied and how those variables were defined. Annual reports such as *Condition of Education* and *Digest of Educational Statistics* demonstrated knowledge accumulation through accretion. The data revealed who students were, but little about their collegiate experiences. Further,
students’ voices were not heard in the government reports because control of the salient research questions, data collection, analysis, and reporting were determined by the government--another indictor of a positivist approach to learning about adults.

Perhaps the most ludicrous finding from the government was that 100% of adult students (ages 24 and older) are academically at risk (Horn et al., 2002), when no student who enrolls after the age of 24 may escape the label. The at risk definition was based on questionable assumptions. The first was that all adult students enroll in college to complete a degree and do not waiver from that goal. The second assumption was that all students progress toward degree completion at one institution in a predetermined amount of time. Therefore, in the government’s view, adults who enrolled in just a few courses for personal enrichment or those who are forced (or elect) to “stop out” for several years are unjustly identified as problematic “noncompleters” and “early departers.” As Sissel et al. (2001) pointed out, these types of labels negatively categorize adult students “. . . as other, as marginal, and as needy” (p. 19), perpetuating a political agenda for those in positions of power and privilege.

An additional argument can be made for abandoning historic and arbitrary labels: The blanket at risk assumption is not wholly supported by data. For example, the at risk label held little relevance for the 34 % of White, non-Hispanic, 18% of Black, and 17 % of Hispanic students who did attain degrees. Nor did the label explain why more adults than ever--including students from underrepresented groups--completed degrees despite being labeled nontraditional and at risk.

In 2004, when I first began to study the government reports, I was frustrated that data on older “minority” students was 13 years old (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998;
Orfield et al., 2006). Not only was this a blatant disregard of students from underrepresented groups, our government’s omission stifled understanding about the educational needs and experiences of these students. It also served to illustrate how “dominant cultural paradigms have produced fractured, racialized, identities and experiences” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 159; see also Brookfield, 2005) and how those in power protect their research priorities and agenda, exacerbating the ongoing marginalization of students from underrepresented groups.

Specific to student attrition, the government (and some higher education researchers) held the positivist assumption that adults could be treated as one homogeneous group and “nontraditional” factors (i.e., delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, being financially independent, having dependents, and working full time) are as appropriate to an 18-year old as a 48-year old, or as appropriate for White, non-Hispanic adults as for students from underrepresented groups. Further, much of this research was based on Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model for nontraditional student attrition, which was developed following a meta-analysis of dated literature from 1969-1984, when a majority of the adult student population was young, male, White, and non-Hispanic.

By the mid-80s, many adult students had weathered civil rights and Vietnam, and the life roles (work and home) of men and women were very much in transition. It seems the researchers who were still adapting Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model forgot how adults’ lifeworld had changed over the past 25 years, and ignored the possibility that assimilation, acculturation, hegemony, or the hyperreality of postmodern times may have impacted adult lives in and out of the classroom. Hyperreality, as described by Kincheloe
and McLaren (2000) is “an information society socially saturated with ever-increasing forms of representation [i.e., television, film, the Web.] . . . that have shaped our cognitive and affective facilities in ways that still remain insufficiently understood” (pp. 292-293; see also Edwards & Usher, 1997; Gracia, 2000; Olivarez, 1998). An inference, then, is that the influence of postmodern hyperreality on college campuses is also “insufficiently understood,” particularly for adult students with vast life experiences and diverse characteristics. I believe we have much more to learn about how assimilation, acculturation, hegemony, and hyperreality may impact academic aspirations, needs, experiences, and outcomes of Latino/a students.

When reviewing the literature on adult student demographics, motivations, and goals, it was hard to ignore Quinnan’s (1997) perception that “studies are done by repackaging hypotheses and reaffirming outcomes of earlier scholarship” (p. 1). One must question why so many researchers treat adults as a homogeneous group--creating “grand narratives” on motivation, student involvement, and persistence, with little regard for age, gender, race, class, or cultural differences. As Moreno and Guido (2005), Suro (2006a) and others underscored, “few generalizations…are accurate” (Wircenski et al., 1999, p. 493).

Positivist approaches to data collection and analysis (with predetermined variables set by dominant ideologies) will continue to lack the richness and depth that is needed to understand adult students’ diverse undergraduate experiences more fully. We need to learn how familial, social, cultural, economic, and political factors influence adults’ histories and current life-world. To broaden the scope of quantitative inquiry, new variables such as racism, injustice, culturally-insensitive curricula, lack of role models,
powerlessness, and Otherness should be added as choices on student departure surveys. These variables more closely reflect what students from underrepresented groups are telling us. Theoretically then, quantitative statistics on student departure would still show that a student withdrew due to dissatisfaction, but that the student did so specifically because of (for example) culturally-insensitive curricula. The inclusion of terms used by marginalized students would signal a shift toward expanded research approaches informed by students’ voices and framed by critical perspectives. Meanwhile, many researchers continue to embrace (or deny the existence of) the Eurocentric values and ideologies of a dominant White, non-Hispanic culture, assuring hegemonic control over research trends and classroom practices, and reinforcing the status quo discourse on adults that has remained prevalent in higher education for more than 60 years.

Also missing from a majority of these references was a call to action (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For example, NCES data show that 34% of White, non-Hispanic students had attained degrees, compared to 19% Blacks and 17% of the Hispanic students. The government’s statisticians did not point to this attainment gap and call for higher education to take action to reduce the disparity. Another example: Researchers in higher education seemed content to suggest areas for additional study and offered innocuous implications for practice, but few wrote with the voice of a transformative intellectual (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114), seemingly unwilling to broach a call to action. In sum, until more scholars move beyond mundane, safe approaches, we will not achieve a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences of adults coming from a variety of social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.
Negative inferences about adult students can be made from the work of Hagedorn (2006), who called middle age students “last chancers” (p. 47), and Kasworm (2003c), who labeled adults’ voices as either entry (to me, sounding novice); outside (sounding Other); straddling (sounding indecisive); and cynical or inclusion (value judgments based on dominant ideologies). Cleveland-Innes (1994) proclaimed that “adult non-persisters” were a “loss of human potential and wasted resources” (p. 423). As unintentional as these labels may be, I believe scholars should be more attentive to the nature of their discourse. Critical postmodern thought encourages transformative cognition and helps us to grasp renewed, multiple meanings about the purposes and outcomes of adult education. Fortunately, my substantive reviews revealed that many other researchers have moved abandoned horribly oppressive notions of adult students and moved scholarship in new directions. These critical thinkers have (a) challenged historic, negative labels and definitions; (b) reframed traditional concepts of college outcomes and persistence; (c) identified institutional policies and classroom practices that are oppressive; and (d) employed qualitative inquiry methods in an effort to allow marginalized students’ voices to be heard on themes such as otherness, racism, culturally-insensitive curricula, and racialized institutional culture. Collectively, their efforts of liberating scholarship have rejuvenated the literature and initiated new patterns of critical discourse, illuminating “institutionalism of asymmetrical relations of power and privilege,” and the exclusion of groups by gender, class, race, and/or ethnicity (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, pp. 294-295). Yet there is more work to complete.

For me, the most provocative dialogue came from Brookfield (2002; 2003; 2005) and Huber and Cale (2002) on repressive tolerance in democratic classrooms. They
explained how they (and other) educators “informed by their racial histories and identities,” protect and promote a “Eurocentric epistemology,” values, and ideologies, leading to a racialized discourse in college classrooms (Brookfield, 2003, p. 498).

Brookfield’s observation was that Whiteness remains an invisible norm at the center of discourse, and other perspectives serve as mere additions to that center. His perspective helped me to reshape my thinking about the historic and current literature trends on adult students. Without question, the scholarship trends over the last sixty years have been framed by White, Eurocentric ideologies, and the scholarship represented in this paper, with few exceptions, is not much different. Dominant ideologies and hegemonic thinking have served as unrelenting gatekeepers, allowing select voices to be heard while others have been silenced. This is best illustrated by the pervasive use of sterile and negative governmental terms to describe adults such as minority and nontraditional, researchers’ treatment of adults as one homogeneous group, the repetitive nature of scholarship lasting more than a half century, and the lack of scholarship on adults from underrepresented groups. Observations about underrepresented students still seem to be inserted into studies for comparisons to the White experience as the norm. Further, of the articles represented in my substantive reviews, few scholars have challenged their White epistemology (Brookfield, 2003; Manglitz, 2003; Scheurich & Young, 1997). As a result, this myopic scholarship has served only to strengthen the grip of the dominant, Eurocentric discourse that prevails over the higher education journal literature, restricting our knowledge about the learning experiences of underrepresented adult students and diminisihing the likelihood of any action toward liberating policies and just practices in higher education.
Based upon this critique, a few suggestions for expanding the literature include:

1. Conduct research on the effects of institutional policy and marginalization on students’ (a) persistence and (b) attendance at multiple institutions.

2. Change the practice of treating adult undergraduates--including students from underrepresented groups--as one homogeneous group. Even simple age breakouts (e.g., 25-35, 35-45, 45-55) would help us better understand students’ developmental factors and life roles.

3. Revamp the variables used in government surveys on student departure to include terminology used by students from underrepresented groups.

4. Promote the inclusion of multiple voices, diverse perspectives, and critical theories in the higher education journal literature.

Up to this point in Chapter 2 I have focused on the substantive literature review. Part I described representations in the literature about Latino lifeworld and values. Part II summarized the higher educational journal literature specific to adult students. This next section contains findings from the second phase of my literature review, theoretical.

Theoretical Literature Review

The purpose of my theoretical literature review was to understand the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism, as well as a blend of the latter two theories, critical postmodernism. Again, for clarity, Chapter 2 contains a discussion about the underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism. I link their corresponding methodologies in Chapter 3.
About a century ago, Moravian-born Edmund Husserl (1859-1939), introduced phenomenology as a new approach to philosophy. Until that time, philosophers’ writings focused heavily on ontology (what is), epistemology (knowing), logic (reasoning), and ethics (how to act). Even though Husserl is generally credited as being the “Father” of philosophical phenomenology, some of the theoretical underpinnings had emerged much earlier in history (Kockelmans, 1994; Schnell, 1997; Woodruff Smith, 2003). Husserl’s contribution, however, was to posit a new facet of professional understanding—individuals’ subjectivity and meaning making in their description of experience (Woodruff Smith).

Husserl’s initial work (1894-1903), labeled as static or descriptive phenomenology, was based on psychology, mathematics, logical semantics, perception and “various types of re-presentation,” such as imagination and memory (Embree, 1997b; see also Kockelmans, 1994). As a research tool, static phenomenology “defines and classifies various types of mental phenomena, including perception, judgment, emotion, etc.” (Woodruff Smith, 2003, ¶ 30). Over several decades, Husserl’s thinking evolved dramatically (Donohoe, 2004; Kockelmans; Moran, 2000). He extended his descriptive scientific methods to include more explanatory tools aimed at the etiology of mental phenomena, and he made allowances for individual development based on historical, cultural, and shared experiences (Donohoe; Woodruff Smith). Husserl’s later writings
were grounded in transcendental psychology (Kockelmans). Despite his metamorphosis, Husserl “steadfastly protected the subjective view as a necessary part of any full understanding” (Moran, p. 21).

Concurrent with his evolving scholarship, Husserl’s followers also diverged. Heidegger, especially, “radically transformed” Husserl’s work (Moran, 2000, p. 4), by (a) rejecting key concepts (e.g., reduction and epoché), (b) focusing on existentialism and questions of Being, and (c) adding more interpretive methods (Cohn, 2002). In turn, successions of noteworthy scholars (e.g., Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Gadamer) similarly critiqued and reconceptualized phenomenology (Donohoe, 2004; Moran). Throughout Europe, elements of phenomenology were soon integrated into other philosophical movements including neo-Kantianism, idealism, pragmatism, and Hermenutics (Moran). By the 1980s, phenomenology had spread around the globe and was adopted or adapted by researchers in numerous other disciplines including but not limited to psychiatry, sociology, theater, anthropology, religion, law literature, ethnology, and nursing (Creswell, 1998; Embree, 1997a). It is understandable, then, that Moran described phenomenology as both a “method and a movement” (p. 21). Other scholars have called phenomenology “arguably the most significant philosophical movement of the 20th century” (Embree, 1997a, ¶ 7; see also Hitzler & Eberle, 2004).

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8 Husserl eventually made a distinction between the phenomenological philosophy and phenomenological psychology in 1927, adding that phenomenological psychology was “closer to our natural way of thinking” (Kockelmans, 1994, p. 30).

9 Alfred Schutz is generally credited for bringing phenomenology to the social sciences in the U.S. (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Hitzler & Eberle, 2004; Patton, 2002).
The current literature revealed numerous ways to categorize phenomenology—from philosophical foundations to various research methodologies (Figure 4). Hence,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of Phenomenology</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>realistic, constitutive, existential, Hermeneutical</td>
<td>Jung (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcendental, naturalistic, existential, generative,</td>
<td>Woodruff Smith (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genetic, Hermeneutical, realistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflective/transcendental, dialogical, empirical,</td>
<td>Creswell (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existential, Hermeneutic, social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Figure 4. Summary of literature findings on the “branches” of phenomenology for comparison with the adaptations by Husserl’s and Heidegger’s followers.*

there does not appear to be a shared understanding of “phenomenology” today. As a fledgling researcher, I find the tenets of the phenomenological paradigm are elusive, both complex and contradictory within and across disciplines. Yet it is the essence of phenomenological study—the described *lifeworld* experiences and the subjective meanings individuals attach to those experiences—that remains an extremely useful tool for qualitative inquiry (Greene, 1997). Like Moran (2000) offered:

> It is indeed true that central to phenomenology and indeed part of its continuing appeal is its attempt to provide rigorous deference of the fundamental and inextricable role of subjectivity and consciousness in all knowledge and descriptions of the world (p. 15).

Due my study’s scope, it is impractical for me delve into the complete history of philosophy, the emergence and evolution of Husserl’s phenomenology, his followers’
nuances, and the subsequent exceptions and debates. It may be also be a futile task. For even Heidegger (1954) voiced the “problem” that

We do not ultimately have a clear-cut and fully validated concept of phenomenology. Instead it might be enough to have some acquaintance with what is nowadays familiarly known by the name “phenomenology.” Admittedly, within phenomenological inquiry there are again differing definitions of its nature and tasks. (¶ 6)

Heeding Heidegger’s wisdom, I intend to adopt Daniels (2000) explanation as a simplified working definition for my study. He offered that phenomenology is a method for learning about another person by listening to their descriptions of what their subjective world is like for them, together with an attempt to understand this in their own terms as fully as possible, free of our preconceptions and interferences (¶ 5).

*Phenomenology as a qualitative research tradition.* Beyond philosophy and psychology, phenomenology also moved into the realm of qualitative study as a research paradigm, or as Greene (1997) calls it, a “philosophic inquiry method” (p. 199). In the body of literature on methods, descriptions of phenomenology appear less contentious, more harmonious, and are (frankly) more comprehensible to me. For example, Creswell (1998) explained that “a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51). Other authors similarly use the terms *meaning making* and *lived experiences* as key concepts of the research tradition (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2001).

Moustakas (1994) explained that “the empirical phenomenological approach involves a
return to the experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions…that portrays the essences
of the experience…in the context of a particular situation” (pp. 13-14). Bogdan and
Biklen emphasized that phenomenology allows for multiple perspectives--that people
experiencing the same event can attach unique meanings to that event, based upon their
respective perceptions. Bernard (2002) and Creswell drew a parallel between
ethnography and phenomenology in that the goal is to create an accurate description of
how people “think and feel about their lives,” (Bernard, p. 23). Whereas Creswell
indicated a preference to focus on the essence of individual experiences, other researchers
included shared experiences and social construction of meanings as part of the
phenomenological approach (Bogdan & Biklen; Hitzler & Eberle, 2004; Patton).
Regardless, I did not seek a “transcendent truth” but rather an “interpretation of reality
grounded in the empirical world….that is useful in understanding the human condition”
(Bogdan & Biklen, p. 25). In this case, I was captivated by learning more about the
phenomenon of older Latino\a undergraduates in predominantly white classrooms, as
articulated and interpreted by the students.

In Chapter 3, I will share my understanding of key phenomenological terms that
relate to data generation and interpretation. Although I also incorporated methods from
other research traditions, I allowed the essence of phenomenology to guide my research
design. My next challenge was to connect the spirit of phenomenology with a lens of
critical postmodernism.

Critical Postmodernism

To ensure consistency throughout the study, I wanted to understand the
philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism.
Ironically, I learned that the tenets of those three paradigms were in some ways complementary and in others contradictory, so my interpretation and writing could well be inconsistent at times. For example, Schnell (1997) asserted that “phenomenology is not a critical theory…[but] a critical philosophy” (p. 102). Jung (1997) added, “Phenomenology is not of but in postmodernity” (p. 558). However, bolstered by Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) work, I developed a sense of comfort about blending paradigms. Additional readings, specific to the merger of critical theory and postmodernism (critical postmodernism), also helped my thinking and approach to data interpretation.

Several researchers have noted that the extant higher education journal literature on adults has generally omitted social critique and that the feminisms, critical theories, and postmodernist perspectives are lacking (Donaldson et al., 2004; Sissel et al., 2001; Quinnan, 1997). To help fill this void, I selected critical postmodernism as the theoretical lens for my secondary level of data interpretation. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) describe critical postmodernism like a “synergism of the conversation between postmodernism and critical theory” (p. 294). Lincoln and Guba (2000) acknowledged this type of “confluence” of paradigms for qualitative study: “Indeed, the various paradigms are beginning to ‘interbreed ’such that two theories previously thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear, under a different theoretical rubric, to be informing one another’s arguments” (p. 164; see also Tierney, 1993). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) further suggested that the use of more than one theory facilitates “reflective interpretation” because the researcher does not become “locked into a particular philosophical position” (p. 247). However, Martin (2002) cited potential problems in that it is difficult to “reconcile the endless ambiguities of deconstruction with
the clarity required for a commitment to action in organizations” (p. 76). Another concern from Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) was that precise definitions of the various critical theories are difficult to develop in part because “. . . the critical tradition is always changing and evolving” (p. 281). They also added that a “set of fixed characteristics of the position is contrary to the desire of such theorists to avoid the production of blueprints of socio-political and epistemological beliefs” (p. 281).

I am not discouraged, because even within this context of flux, notable scholars--including Henry Giroux (1992)--have “forged links” between these two theories for more than 20 years (Aggers, 1991). Like Alvesson and Deetz (1996) I believe there is considerable value in “working with the tensions” (p. 212) of these two paradigms (see also Tierney, 1993). For the purpose of this study, the confluence of these two theories will work like this: The postmodern paradigm will offer me allowances for multiple realities, consciousness raising, and contextual meaning-making (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003) while critical theory will help me address “issues of power and justice and the ways that economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourse, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, as cited by Patton, 2002, p. 131).

My learning will be ongoing and my interpretations, dynamic. The challenge: To reflect, interpret, and describe in a nebulous space that sways in midair like a suspension bridge spanning both modern and postmodern thought. While each side of the bridge is anchored, I cannot run to the safety of one side (critical theory) or the other (postmodernism), but learn to be comfortable someplace in the middle, regardless of how
deep the chasm may appear. Despite the metaphor, I believe that the addition of critical theory will provide a bit of structure and purpose to my data interpretation that might otherwise end up incoherent due to the ambiguities of postmodern thought. In fact, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) explained that without the grounding of critical theory, “postmodern critique is incapable of providing an ethically challenging and politically transforming program of action” (p. 295; see also Kaufmann, 2000; Tierney, 1993). For me, the appeal of a blended theory is that it offers me the opportunity to critique and serve as a catalyst for change (Patton, 2002) and social action.

Precedence for applying a critical postmodern framework to studies about higher education institutions was established by Tierney (1993). Describing Tierney’s work with critical postmodernism, Giroux (1993) says Tierney analyzes how differences are constituted in and mediated across sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, class, and gender….Difference…is always treated historically and relationally as a struggle over power, signs and identities….For Tierney, theory is a practice that is constantly informing one’s beliefs, actions, and practices; at the same time, it is more than a matter of epistemology and aesthetics, it is also a borderland where conversations begin, differences confront each other, hopes are initiated, and social struggles are waged (page x).

Quinnan (1997) later employed a critical postmodernism perspective to the study of adult students.

Chapter Conclusion

The purposes of Chapter 2 were to share the findings from my substantive and theoretical literature reviews. I described a bit about Latino lifeworld and values as
represented in the literature, what we know about adult students in general, and the tenets of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism. The third phase of my literature review, which informed my methodological approach, is reserved for Chapter 3.

This review revealed that much of the current research continues to follow three rote trends of the past 60 years: adult student demographics; comparisons with younger students; and predications and explanations of adults’ patterns of enrollment, involvement and persistence. Most encouraging was an emerging body of scholarship that (a) challenged historic, negative labels and definitions; (b) reframed traditional concepts of college outcomes and persistence; (c) identified institutional policies and classroom practices that are oppressive; and (d) employed qualitative inquiry methods that allowed marginalized students’ voices to be heard.

From recent studies on adult students from underrepresented groups, several consistent themes emerged including Otherness, determination, self-efficacy, culturally-insensitive curricula, and racialized institutional culture. These students’ voices give credence to the arguments of researchers like Huber and Cale (2002) and Brookfield (2003, 2005) who point out that White, Eurocentric ideologies dominate the discourse of college classrooms and sustain control of an elitist policies that permeate higher education institutions. By working toward an “expanded consciousness” (Giroux, as cited by Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115), adult educators and researchers will learn to challenge the privileged, hegemonic structures that nurture oppression, thereby contributing to efforts to create a more socially-just U.S. educational system for adults from various racial and ethnic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education.
Again, the third phase of my literature review--the methodological review--is summarized in Chapter 3. My goal with Chapter 3 was to link the underpinnings of phenomenology, critical theory, and postmodernism with my inquiry approach and specific interview, interpretation, and writing methods.
CHAPTER 3
INQUIRY METHODS

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I described how I conducted three literature reviews--substantive, theoretical, and methodological. The purposes of the substantive review were to help the reader understand (a) the extant literature patterns on adult students and (b) why we need to learn more about the collegiate experiences of older Latino undergraduates. My theoretical review provided an introduction to phenomenology and described the tenets of critical theory and postmodernism. I present the third phase of my literature review--methodological--in Chapter 3. This final literature phase allowed me to link the philosophical underpinnings (identified in Chapter 2) to my planned approach and methods in this chapter. For example, phenomenological methods are historically grounded in philosophy, but as a “method and a movement,” were widely adapted by several other disciplines (Moran, 2000, p. 21). Similarly, critical postmodernism implies that critical analyses and deconstruction are necessary in order to raise awareness about underlying themes of power and oppression, yet the underpinnings of the respective paradigms challenge the researcher to negotiate both modern and postmodern thought. For this chapter, I also reviewed general qualitative approaches, including interviewing and data interpretation techniques inspired by postmodern thinking.

Methodological Literature Review

Phenomenology as a Research Tradition

Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000) noted that the nature of one’s questions is a key indicator of how one should approach a research problem. Because I sought to
understand the deeper meanings individuals attach to their educational experiences, qualitative methods best served the intent of my study. Following Creswell’s (1998) recommendation that qualitative researchers should work from a specific tradition of inquiry, I selected phenomenology as my guiding methodological approach. Daniels (2000) defined phenomenology as “a method for learning about another person by listening to their descriptions [and attempting them] in their own terms as fully as possible, free of our preconceptions and interferences” (¶ 5). In this case, I was interested in the phenomenon of older Latino undergraduates in predominantly white, non-Hispanic classrooms, as defined, communicated, and interpreted by the students. Beyond describing, phenomenological research can also be interpretive (Hitzler & Eberle, 2004). In my case, I intentionally waited before re-interpreting the participants’ constructions—first I attempted to allow the students’ voices to be heard.

Determining my approach was further complicated because I tried to identify a specific set of methods that were consistent with the many ideologies of postmodernism. This is where Gubrim and Holstein’s (2003) terminology, postmodern inspired methods, became helpful to me. To summarize, the methodological literature review included theoretical foundations, broad study on qualitative approaches, and specific interviewing and data interpretation techniques inspired by postmodern thinking. Ultimately, I designed a study that felt comfortable to me, and one that would allow me to avoid filtering the participants’ stories to the best of my ability.

Adoption of Postmodern “Sensibilities” for Interviewing

With the “old school” of qualitative inquiry, the researcher was depicted as a “survey instrument:” unbiased, neutral, and value-free (Moustakas, 1994; Silverman,
2001). Interviewees were treated as knowledge repositories, researchers exploited the contents with a barrage of questions, and scant attention paid to issues of power, control, and voice (Duster, 2000; Fontana, 2003; Sarangi, 2003). Specific to phenomenological interviews, Moustakas outlined a fairly structured interview process, with open-ended questions designed to explore meanings, “engage” the participant, and “sustain personal and passionate involvement” (p. 105). A phenomenological researcher should also practice *epoche* and *bracketing*, techniques to “set aside prejudgments” (Moustakas, p. 180; see also McKenna, 1997) and remain objective. In sharp contrast to positivistic methods are “emerging innovations in methodology” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027; see also Sarangi, 2003), many “informed by postmodern sensibilities” (Fontana; see also Gubrim & Holstein, 2003) or with roots in the feminisms, anthropology, ethnography, and other traditions (Fontana). As far back as 1991, Seidman was transforming the phenomenological interview with postmodern thinking (Fontana). The consensus among scholars is that there is not one “correct” method for conducting a postmodern interview (Fontana, 2003; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003).

*Application of Critical Postmodernism to Data Interpretation*

During the interview, I used reflective interpretation processes (Gubrim & Holstein, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) with the participants for the first level of data interpretation. For my secondary level of data interpretation, I started coding with Moustakas’ (1994) more traditional, phenomenological data analysis approach (see page 102). However, I soon felt this was fertile ground for abusing a researcher’s power and privileged position, silencing the students’ voices, and controlling representation (Fontana, 2003; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003). In an effort to minimize these problems, I
applied a theoretical perspective—critical postmodernism—to the meanings and clusters that emerged from the participants’ stories and constructions. After I clustered the meanings from the students’ stories, I again reflected on our discussions, mutual constructions, initial impressions, and what I understood them to say (my interpretation). Next I explored their stories for deeper meanings relating to power, injustice, discrimination, ideologies, and cultural dynamics. With one participant, I was also able to identify an intersection of issues pertaining to age, gender, and ethnicity. (In April 2007, at the Cambio de Colores conference, I also explored the intersections of education and culture and education and economics). Across time, I became more comfortable with the fluidity of my interpretations. I was able to accept the critical issues emerging from the data concurrent with valuing their multiple realities and changing, contextual meanings. Over the course of about four months, my metacognitive processes shifted from being structured and mechanical to organic and flowing. No longer was I focused on either critical theory or postmodernism, I was embracing both paradigms.

Participant Selection Criteria

According to Creswell (1998), phenomenological studies involve up to ten people, but the number of participants can range from five to twenty-five. My goal was lofty—to reach sixteen adult students. However, I suspected that reaching underrepresented adult students on predominantly white\textsuperscript{10} campuses would be difficult, and that proved to be true. After nine months of recruiting effort (described below), I met with only eight students. While disappointing, this number is within the range that

\textsuperscript{10} This study does not include Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), some of which may also be considered predominantly White.
Creswell suggested. Further, “the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases . . . than the sample size” (Patton, 2002, p. 245). The students’ stories, shared in Chapters 4 and 5, yielded life lessons and reflections that illustrate what Patton must have meant by “richness.”

The participants involved in this study were adult Latino undergraduates, ages 35-50, which was within my targeted age range of 30 to 50. At the time of the interviews, all were enrolled in predominantly white, four-year institutions in the Midwest. I further limited selection to individuals who had completed at least two years of college credit, but placed no restrictions on attendance patterns or number of institutions attended. However, because my intent was to learn about students’ experiences in face-to-face classrooms, I excluded students who were seeking online degrees and those who were using distance education to earn credit hours. This decision is not meant to pass judgment; I simply wanted a doable study and am more familiar with a “bricks and mortar” setting. In keeping with this decision, my literature review (Chapter 2) focused on adult students in face-to-face classrooms.

Institution Selection Criteria

The two predominantly white, four-year institutions I chose to target were Columbia College of Missouri and the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU)\textsuperscript{11}. My aim was to reach students on distinctly different campuses. Specifically, Columbia College is a smaller, private, non-profit college with a nationwide network of satellite

\textsuperscript{11}I later added Southern Illinois University’s degree completion program in Lake County, IL but did not interview any students from that campus.
programs for working adults. MU is a large, land-grant (public) institution (Carnegie, 2005). All of the campuses met my criteria of having a predominantly White, non-Hispanic student population.

I was confident I could reach Latino students because the area demographic data seemed promising. For example, Columbia College has several campuses in the Chicago suburbs where nearly half (45%) of the population is Latino (U.S. Census, 2000). According to the MU Office of Institutional Research, 2005 data show that 8% of undergraduates are from underrepresented groups, and 372 of those12 are age 30 or older (A. Patton, personal communication, October 26, 2005). The institutional representatives seemed highly enthused about my study and assured me that numerous older Latino students were enrolled in their respective programs. After talking with professionals at each location (non-specified to protect students’ identities), I believed they would be able to help me reach at least 20 students. The Chicago area is an eight-hour drive from Columbia, MO.

IRB Applications and Amendments

Following committee approval of my research proposal, I submitted my first Institutional Review Board’s application to the University of Missouri. Because I also intended to interview Columbia College students, I submitted an application to their Human Factors Committee shortly thereafter. In both applications, I described how I intended to employ fair and “equal” sampling methods, “minimize risks” to participants, document “informed consent,” protect the “confidentiality and privacy” of the participants, and “monitor participants’ welfare” throughout the study (University of

12 Figure includes only day time students, not those enrolled in MU in the Evening.
Missouri, n.d.). I did not engage in any research activities until I received official written approval from both entities. Columbia College sent approval within a week, but approval from MU IRB took six weeks (late January 2006). In part due to this delay, I was not able to recruit prospective participants as long as I had hoped. In fact, because I was not able to reach any students by May 2006, I submitted an amendment to MU IRB, requesting approval to add a third institution, Southern Illinois University (SIU). Concurrently, I submitted a Protection of Human Subjects application to SIU. Again, I received prompt approval from the outside institution, but had to wait another six weeks to receive approval from MU (May 2006). With this attempt, I was able to reach more students, but still did not achieve my goal of 16 participants. After looking in the literature and talking with MU faculty, I decided my best strategy was to recruit participants through local community Latino groups in Illinois and Missouri. It took another six weeks for my second MU IRB amendment to receive approval. By then, it was mid July 2006. I provide a calendar of my recruitment efforts in Appendix A.13

Recruitment Strategies

I had hoped to locate prospective participants with *intensity sampling* (Patton, 2002)--which is purposeful, not random--in order to obtain “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon” (p. 243). Moustakas (1994) justified intensity sampling in phenomenological study because the “aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Patton added a cautionary note that cases should not be

13 My IRB Human Subject Research certification remains current and was last updated in December 2006.
“extreme” and that students at both ends of the achievement spectrum should be included in educational studies. My “essential criteria” were that the “participant has experienced the phenomena, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings and is willing to participate in a lengthy interview” (Moustakas, p. 107).

To honor the confidentiality of potential participants, initially I worked through MU’s Office of Multicultural Affairs and the director of one of Columbia College’s extended campuses. I had hoped that these informal gatekeepers (Seidman, 1998), would help portray a sense of safety about me and my interests--lending credibility to my endeavor. I met with both gatekeepers, and then developed a plan on how to reach prospective participants. Next, I created a simple flyer with my contact information (Appendix A) and a letter of invitation and introduction (Appendix B) explaining the purpose and scope of the study (Moustakas, 1994). The plan was for these gatekeepers to hand deliver my information to students who met the selection criteria, and answer any questions prospective participants might have about me.

Imagine my disappointment when my deadline approached and not one prospective participant had contacted me. Upon reflection, I decided that it may have been more productive to first sponsor a focus group, then the one-on-one interviews. I surmised that in doing this I could have created a “safer” setting for students to get to know me and learn about the study. About the same time, I exchanged email correspondence with two doctoral students in other states, who were experiencing similar recruiting problems. Everything they suggested to me I had already tried, with the exception of going through university personnel records, which I believed would violate an individual’s right to privacy.
Highly perplexed, I spoke with my advisor and two Latino faculty members on the MU campus. They, too, seemed surprised at the lack of response to my efforts. We speculated about “what went wrong,” but there were no clear answers. One faculty member suggested that instead of the focus group approach, I should consider offering a workshop for students as a means of getting to know them. The idea struck a chord with me, because I had been seeking a way to give something back to participants. I disliked not being able to reciprocate favors with them or adequately thank them for helping me with my dissertation study. I felt I was only taking, and needed to give something in return. To me, the stipend was merely a gesture of reimbursement toward expenses. I wanted to offer them something more meaningful. This faculty member assured me that through publications and teaching others, I would be helpful through my work. (Later, the same sentiment was echoed by several of the participants).

I traveled to several locations in the Chicagoland area with a goal of establishing contact with institutional representatives. I met with the directors of various programs, talked with faculty and staff at the local community college, a school social worker, and faculty and staff at the University Center in Lake County. Following that trip, I established email contact with the director of a nonprofit, Latino organization in Waukegan, IL, and program directors at Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University. All assured me that they could reach students for me, but the nonprofit director told me that she would only do so after I had my flyer translated into Spanish. She indicated that having it in English was a barrier. I explained to her that because I was not bilingual, I felt it was misleading to have a flyer in Spanish. She did not budge.
Since this nonprofit director was the second professional to make that suggestion to me, I eventually paid a student at the University of Missouri to translate the flyer into Spanish for me (Appendix A). I initially delayed having the flyer translated because the day after I returned from my first trip to Illinois, I received a phone call from a student who was responding (late) to my original flyer, which was in English. The student was interested in meeting with me, so we set an interview date for two weeks later, when I could again make a trip to Illinois. During that phone call, I asked her if there was something wrong with my flyer that I needed to change. Specifically, I was seeking her opinion about English being a barrier for students, and if I should translate the flyer. Her answer provided an important lesson: No, I did not need to translate the flyer, but what did I mean by students “of color?” To her, the term “person of color” meant African American, not Latino. She said this was the reason why she did not respond earlier to the flyer. I revised the flyer immediately to read Hispanic/Latino, and that is when I had it translated into Spanish.

I also took some time to reflect on what the Latina had said to me. Worried that I had misused the term “of color,” I went back to the literature, visited Web sites, and talked with other PhD students I knew from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It was also a time for me to challenge my White, Eurocentric assumptions. Finally, I realized that it did not matter if I could prove correct application of the term, “of color.” What truly matters is the individual. For this woman, the term “of color” was not part of her identity. She is, by her definition, a Latina. It was a good lesson to learn.

After gathering additional information, I added the new institution and broadly distributed my flyer to contacts in community groups in both states. Altogether, I sent and
hand delivered more than 300 flyers—in English and Spanish—to various institutional representatives, faculty, nonprofit directors, and Latino groups (Figure 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missouri Locations</th>
<th>Illinois Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri (select faculty)</td>
<td>Columbia College of Missouri (3 campuses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MU’s Cambio Center</td>
<td>Clinical manager, Nicasa Waukegan, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MU’s Office of Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>MSW, Daniel Webster Jr High Waukegan, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City (visited five different offices and talked with seven people)</td>
<td>Southern Illinois University satellite Lake County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alianzas, Kansas City</td>
<td>Director, University Center, Grayslake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro Latino, Columbia</td>
<td>Illinois State University Waukegan satellite program for Latinas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambio de Colores Conferences - Columbia and Neosho</td>
<td>Latino Alliance at the College of Lake County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society or Hispanic Professional Engineers’ (MU student group)</td>
<td>Women at College in Community, Palatine, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early study participants (snowballing) in both states.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Recruiting locations in Missouri (left column) and Illinois where I left flyers or attempted the snowballing technique by talking with one or more institutional gatekeepers.

In conclusion, my approach was not as successful as I had hoped. While they were optimistic, my institutional contacts were not able to reach students as they had predicted. I later learned that some made no effort to talk with students for me, but simply posted flyers. On one hand, I found that flyers are a poor recruiting strategy. On the other
hand, I cannot say that flyers are useless, because five of the participants responded to flyers--in English, I might add. If starting over, I would first offer a focus group or workshop, as a get acquainted strategy. Distance was also a barrier for me and I was unable to sustain face-to-face contact with my gatekeepers. Had I the time to develop better relationships with them, and engaged them more in the goals of my study, perhaps the recruiting results would be different. Late in 2006, I had the opportunity to test that concept, as described in this next section on gaining access to participants.

Gaining Access, Selection, and Invitation to Participate

Ultimately, six students from Illinois called me in response to the flyer. I promptly followed up with every individual, and made certain that I answered all of their questions about the purpose, processes, and products of this study. This was an essential first step in building trust with prospective participants (Moustakas, 1994). Final selection was contingent upon (a) meeting the eligibility criteria and (b) availability and willingness to be engaged as an active participant (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). I set interview appointments with all six, allowing them to select the time and location.

Additionally, in the fall of 2006, I gathered the courage to make a “cold call” to a nonprofit organization that serves Latino families. Frankly, I had deferred the visit for several weeks, feeling like I had no business to ask for favors. Then it dawned on me: I could be of service. Nonprofits are in dire need of money, and I have grant writing skills. I could reciprocate, and give them something in return for helping me. What a difference this personal contact made. Not only was the director willing to grant me an interview, he personally contacted at least a half dozen people, to see if they were eligible and interested in participating in my study. Due to his efforts, I had three more interviews.
(Three others were enrolled in graduate school and therefore not eligible to participate in this study). The strategy of working with a group in a local community was far more productive than anything else I tried. Also, I felt good about the contact: At the conclusion of our meeting, we explored the ways I could use my grant writing skills to help their group seek external funding. This was the opportunity to reciprocate that I had been seeking.

Research Ethics and Informed Consent

Above all, I made every effort to uphold ethical research conduct throughout my study (Sieber, 1992; University of Missouri, n.d.). This included, but was not limited to, the values of respect, confidentiality, and informed consent. In accordance with the specifications of 45 C.F.R. 46.110 (Office for Protection from Research Risks, 2001), I received expedited reviews since the risks to participants were minimal. In my application, I acknowledged the possibility that someone may find the interview process emotionally taxing. I was ready to protect each person’s emotional well being throughout all phases of the study, and was prepared to respond in the event a person indicated to me that emotional guidance is needed. While not a counselor, I have completed related course work and bring with me nearly ten years of social service interviewing experience, which included helping families locate appropriate services. Being a sensitive and compassionate interviewer, I intended to use all of my skills to avoid creating duress. Finally, as an ethical researcher, I remained highly committed to the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice, as described by the University of Missouri (n.d.).

At the beginning of the interview process, I launched the informed consent process. I handed each person a written consent form (Appendix C), and reviewed each
item carefully before asking him or her to sign. To help inform a participant’s decision on consent, I adopted Seidman’s (1998) recommendations and

1. explained who I was, the purpose of the research, and why the research is important.

2. emphasized the participant’s right to refuse participation.

3. described the participant’s role and the time commitment.

4. discussed the potential risks of engaging in the interviews and offered an example.

5. reiterated that each participant retains the right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer questions.

6. encouraged the participant to tell me if he or she is uncomfortable with my methods.

7. explained how I would protect his or her data, and how names and other personal information will be held in a secure location, separate from interview data and other documents.

8. offered each the opportunity to review my transcripts, data analysis, interpretation and final products (e.g. executive summary, Chapters 4 and 5, articles).

9. assured confidentiality and that I would do my best to protect anonymity; that data and quotes in my dissertation, presentations, or journal articles would not be attributable--or traceable--to individuals.

10. listed who would see the results, and where I planned to present the findings.

During the informed consent process, I again told each participant that I was only able to offer a $35 stipend, as partial reimbursement for time, car gas or bus transportation, and child or elder care service. At the conclusion of the verbal consent process, which I recorded, I asked each person to sign a written consent form. In return, I signed and gave
each person a copy of the consent form, to document my intent to protect his or her
rights.

Data Generation

In the tradition of phenomenology, the primary data gathering method is the in-depth interview (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002), with a goal of obtaining richness and insight. However, I also borrowed from other traditions--grounded theory, feminist methods, and ethnography--to add trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility to my study (Charmaz, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I sensed from the literature that the “depth” of an interview should be measured by the richness of the detail rather than the minutes expended in a dyadic process. That said, each interview lasted about two hours. I knew from past interviewing experience that this was inadequate time for developing deep trust and rapport. In fact, some scholars now suggest that the traditional lengthy interview should be replaced with multiple, shorter interviews, with time in between the interviews to allow the participant additional time to reflect (Seidman, 1998). After ten years conducting home visits, I knew this would be the best approach. Therefore, I had hoped to conduct two to three interviews with each person about two days apart. My dissertation committee recommended three interviews. I was also open to the possibility that we could schedule a follow up meeting later. I eventually made several trips to Illinois. Only one person granted a second interview.

Because I value people’s time and willingness to share their stories, I invited the participants to select an interview setting that was comfortable for them. For those without a preference, I suggested a “neutral” place like a coffee shop, park, or library. In
fact, Moustakas (1994) recommended an informal interview process. Regardless the
setting, I treated all of the individuals with the utmost respect for their privacy.

The consensus among scholars is that there is not one “correct” method for
conducting a postmodern interview (Fontana, 2003; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003; Holstein
& Gubrim, 2003a, 2003b). With this caveat, here’s how I proceeded: Rather than a
detached, objective, question-and-answer approach to interviewing, my style was the
more conversational, “reflexive dyadic interview” (Ellis & Berger, 2003) that allowed me
to partner with the participants and share my personal experiences and understandings
(Charmaz, 2000). To answer the control issue of “whose questions get raised for
investigation” (Duster, 2000), I did not use a rigid list of interview questions but adopted
a guide of open ended topics used by Johnson-Bailey (2001) with Black women in
college (Appendix D).

As I listened to the participants’ stories, I gently prompted them for illustrative
examples of their experiences (Creswell, 1998), asked about their interpretations and
feelings about those experiences (Charmaz, 2000), and verified that I understood their
perceptions to the best of my ability (Charmaz). Reciprocal, follow up questions occurred
naturally, as they do in the course of normal conversation. Again, I worked to protect
each person’s emotional well-being. Even if not asked, I was prepared to conclude the
interview if I sensed that it was, in any way, disturbing to the participant.

When appropriate to the topic at hand, I interjected brief vignettes and “lessons
learned” from my own life’s story (Ellis & Berger, 2003). I believe this reciprocity
helped to build trust and rapport with the participants (Seidman, 1998). I strived to
become equal partners with the participants (Seidman), and some of them asked me personal questions also.

As co-producers of knowledge, we jointly constructed interpretations during the conversation (Holstein & Gubrim, 2003), using reflection and reflexivity¹⁴ (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2000; Fontana, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Oleson, 2000) to learn how our knowledge had been constructed (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Holstein & Gubrim, Smith, 1999). According to Fontana, these methodological shifts have helped to enhance the validity of qualitative studies by addressing issues of participants’ control, voice, and representation.

Of the nine scheduled interviews, only one person did not arrive as planned. I waited an hour, and attempted two follow up phone calls, which were not returned. Honoring a person’s right to refuse participation, I attempted no additional contact.

Before beginning the interview process, I sought each person’s permission to record the session. I felt that the digital recorder, at only 1¼” x 4”, was fairly unobtrusive. For some of the interviews, I placed a small boundary microphone on the table to better capture voices. Based on the advice I received from a recent doctoral

¹⁴ Many researchers use the term reflective and reflexive interchangeably, and often do not define the terms. According to Alvesson and Skölberg (2000), reflection is thinking about the influences that shape perceptions, constructions, actions, and decisions. Examples are familial experiences, education, politics, cultural background, and societal expectations. They reserve the term reflexivity for reflections across levels of data analysis--in a way, analogous to metacognition, or reflecting about reflecting (pp. 248-249). They note that they differ from other researchers with this definition.
recipient, I had hoped that this would aid in transcription accuracy. However, I learned that the sound quality was better without the external microphone. In one case, the recording was nearly inaudible due to white noise, and I had to pay someone to restore the sound. (I later confirmed my understanding with that participant).

At the close of the interview process, I again explained to each participant how I planned to protect his or her data, and that names and other personal information would be held in a secure location, separate from interview data and other documents (which I did faithfully). I reassured them that data and quotes appearing in my dissertation, presentations, or journal articles would not be attributable--or traceable--to them as individuals. None of the participants indicated a pseudonym preference, so I used the first names of my friends. I also offered to share a summary of my dissertation findings and copies of Chapters 4 and 5, and several seemed interested. I believe all of the interviews progressed smoothly.

Data Interpretation

Heeding the advice of Charmaz (2000) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), I initiated transcription concurrent with the remaining interviews. This helped me critique and improve my interview approach. As example, I found that the vignettes I was sharing with participants were too lengthy. After that, I tried to listen more and talk less.

Rather than hire a transcriber, I listened to each interview and dictated my own transcripts, using the voice recognition software program, Naturally Speaking 8. Although this created an extra step for me, I believed it helped me better understand the participants’ stories. With a hard copy in hand, I again listen to their voices, and noted subtle word differences and verbal cues that I missed during the interview process. I also
noted hesitations, laughter, inflections, and emphasized words (Gee, 1999; Silverman, 2001; van den Berg, Wetherell, & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). From this accuracy check, I was amazed to find that I had unconsciously corrected grammar and replaced words while transcribing. I also learned how one misplaced word could significantly change the meaning of a sentence. After that, I was careful to make all the corrections to the transcripts.

Once I had a corrected copy of each interview, I hand-coded them and created notes (Charmaz, 2000) in the margins about topics, repeated themes, contradictions, and interpretations. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), specific methods for analyzing qualitative data are not well defined. I started with Moustakas’ (1994) four steps to phenomenological data analysis as a means to group, reduce, and eliminate data. The four steps: (1) horizontalizing data, (2) listing meanings, (3) creating clusters, and (4) writing textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 1998; Janesick, 2000). According to Moustakas, during the first phase, horizontalizing, I divided the data into statements relevant to inquiry topics and viewed them as having “equal value” (p. 118; see also Merriam and Associates, 2002). Next, I listed the meanings and meaning units (Moustakas) of the statements. In this step, the researcher gains a deeper understanding through reflection (Janesick, 2000). Third, I clustered the statements into themes and phenomenological concepts, or what Janesick calls a phase of “illumination”--deeper understanding (p. 391). Finally, I linked the clusters together to provide a rich description of the participants’ experiences, as I understood them (Creswell, 1998). Moustakas (1994) described this process: “From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and
an integration of textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon are constructed” (p. 119).

Levels of Interpretation and Processes

Specifically, to circumvent issues of control, voice, and representation, I adopted reflexive interpretation strategies as described by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), including several levels of data interpretation to provide “breadth and variation” (p. 247) to the study. As mentioned earlier, at the primary level of interpretation, I attempted to engage students as co-producers of knowledge (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Holstein & Gubrim, 2003; van den Berg et al. 2003), which included asking them for their reflective interpretations during the interview process (Alvesson & Sköldberg). During the second level analysis (creating clusters), I applied my “critical interpretation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, p. 250), using the blend of theoretical perspectives (critical theory and postmodernism) to further explore their descriptions and constructions. For example, I explored the meanings for age, gender, and discrimination issues, and possible indication of how power, oppression, and hegemony may be present in their stories. (I also considered Latino/as’ identity, values, and culture). Concurrently I accepted multiple voices, multiple realities, ambiguity, and contextual meaning-making. In some cases, I also interpreted consciousness raising and social action. As a final step, I hand-coded the transcripts again, using the constructs of Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults*. I recognize this data analysis approach really breaks with a postmodernism mindset and is modernistic because I generalized, built themes, and explained using a predetermined set of codes. However, my rationale for comparing the students’ stories to a model was simple: The ambiguity of postmodernism can be
frustrating and *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* is probably the most tangible method I have for explaining the students’ experiences and interpretations to a larger audience. For the reality of the big picture—the “neglect” of adult students “in terms of public policy, programming, and mission” (Sissel et al., 2001, p. 18)—indicates that modern approaches will still be necessary to convey strong messages to those in the academy who hold positions of power and privilege. A list of codes and meaning clusters is included as Appendix E (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**On Being a Cross Cultural Researcher**

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that “the interpreter must always ask, How shall I be toward these people I am studying?” (p. 159). The question is highly appropriate, because underlying beliefs and assumptions guide even the simplest of actions. For example, in describing the researcher’s role, Olesen (2000) pointed out how one’s own gender, history, race, class, and education interplays with the research participants’. Consequently, beyond journaling (Gilbert, 2001; Janesick, 2000), I documented my personal experiences and constructions (Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2000) in an autoethnographic piece (see Appendix F), which I describe later in this chapter.

I am highly committed to learning how to become a responsible cross-cultural researcher, mindful that “we can be strongly anti-racist in our own minds but be promulgating racism in profound ways we do not understand” (Pine & Hillard, as cited by Scheurich & Young, 1997; see also Briggs, 2003; Warren, 2000). One reason, as Brookfield (2003) pointed out, is because researchers often fail to “challenge their White epistemology” (p. 519). Scheurich and Young (1998) elaborated:
And one of the principal ways we researchers in education avoid White racism is by believing or presuming that somehow it does not infect our research assumptions, questions, epistemologies, and methodologies, that somehow we in the university have a special immunity that protects us from reproducing White racism, even though education and education research continue to be replete with racist concepts (p. 27).

Several authors offered advice for the cross cultural researcher, which I took to heart. For example, Dunbar et al. (2003) discussed the importance of having “subjective sensibilities,” a deep understanding of each person’s “biography that is socially and historically mediated, and proceed accordingly” (p. 147). Like Ellis and Berger (2003), they also pointed out the importance of the conversational-type of interview, so the participant may come to know the researcher. Along the same line, Ryen (2003) described the criticality of establishing trust and rapport so that each participant feels “safe,” but to avoid trying to disguise one’s self as an “insider” (pp. 431-432). At times I felt a real connection with the women, and cautioned myself about believing I was that “insider” (Ryen).

Reflexivity seems to be one of the keys to working with people in cross-cultural settings (Lavenda & Schultz, 2003; Twine & Warren, 2000). In fact, Duster (2003) noted that reflexive anthropologists now understand “the limitations of their own knowledge and [are] much more generous in the credit they give to their informants” (p. 11).

Going into this research, I accepted that I was (am) privileged by color and that my lens for interviewing and interpretation was (is) fogged with biases and Eurocentric assumptions. At points during a few interviews, I pondered if I was making assumptions
rather than listening and asking for the participants’ interpretations. I also found it helpful to engage in a racialized discourse\(^\text{15}\) (Brookfield, 2003) with faculty and students from diverse backgrounds about my doubts, concerns, and assumptions. In fact, I also presented some preliminary interpretations at a conference round table, and asked other attendees to help me challenge my assumptions. It was a most insightful process. For example, I had one interview quote that truly troubled me. This participant sounded like a racist to me, and I let that idea bother me during the interview. However, when I shared the anonymous quote with the round table group, a young African American woman said, “He’s talking about assimilation. He’s trying to fit in.” I was stunned, but had learned another valuable lesson about White, Eurocentric assumptions. Later, when I learned more about Latino culture, the assumptions I made about assimilation would also be challenged.

In conclusion, through vigilance, careful listening, working honestly with my co-producers of knowledge, challenging the influence of my Whiteness (Warren, 2000), and engaging in reflexive practices (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Dunbar et al. 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Oleson, 2000), I hope that I have minimized (or better, eliminated) faulty questions, analysis, conclusions, and representations in this study.

\(^{15}\) As described in Chapter 2, Brookfield makes a distinction between racialism and racism. In the same sense, he makes a distinction between the civility of a racialized discourse and a racist exchange involving “exclusion, inferiorization, subordination, and exploitation” (p. 499).
Authenticity and Credibility

Although Moustakas (1994) did not discuss triangulation or member checks as part of the phenomenological paradigm, I shared my critical interpretations and descriptions with one of the participants (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Janesick, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and several Latino faculty members. I believed this was an important step, to verify that I accurately captured their stories and reflections and did not interject my own biases and assumptions into their constructions. A similar verification approach was described in the realm of existential-phenomenological psychology methods (Polkinghorne, 1989).

An alternative to triangulation is emerging--crystallization--prompted by postmodern thought. Citing Richardson, Janesick (2000) described crystallization as recognizing “the many facets of any given approach to the social world as fact of life” (p. 392) and suggested that the way a qualitative researcher achieves a deeper understanding is through use of multidisciplinary methods to inform research processes. Therefore, another strategy I used to achieve credibility was borrowed from anthropology--to invite outside scholars to help me review my analysis (Janesick). First, as mentioned earlier, I conducted a round table discussion at the 2006 Adult Education Research Conference, held in Minneapolis. Fortunately, about eight faculty and graduate students representing a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds participated in my discussion. I shared my preliminary impressions, but more importantly, asked them to help me understand select quotes that I found confusing. In 2006 and 2007, I also met with several Latino faculty members on the MU campus, and the director of a local nonprofit organization that serves Latinos. Specifically I asked them questions pertaining to Latino identity,
immigration, assimilation, culture, and values. My goal was not to have them “validate my findings.” Rather, my goal in meeting with them was to check my biases and assumptions, learn all that I could, and identify if I had overlooked cultural influences during data interpretation. Hopefully these steps helped me to achieve a sense of “equity-validity” described by Scheurich and Young (1998)--that I was moving closer to being “free of racial [ethnic, and cultural] biases in all aspects of research” (p. 29). Hopefully, these combined measures also added to this study’s credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sharing Participants’ Stories and Interpretations

To remain philosophically and methodologically consistent in the remaining chapters of my dissertation, I wanted to employ several strategies to minimize my privileged position and enhance the visibility of the students’ control, voices, and representation. In fact, as suggested by Fontana (2003), I intended to dedicate Chapter 4 to the students’ unfiltered student stories, with only minimal editing. This decision would also present the students’ stories and interpretations first and independently from mine.

However, as I proceeded with this plan, I immediately faced a dilemma: Because there are only eight participants, their unfiltered stories could easily lead to their identities. My promise to them--and my responsibility as an ethical researcher--was to protect their right to confidentiality above all else. While I could not guarantee them anonymity, I assured them that quotes would not be attributable or traceable to them. Thus, as I described more fully in Chapter 4, I arrived at a personal compromise in order to protect the participants. In the end, I did not create personal profiles or share their unfiltered stories, but generally described similarities and contrasts in their background
histories. After the chapter overview, I attach pseudonyms to their quotes. In doing this, I believe it will be impossible for anyone to identify individuals beyond knowing that a male or female offered the quote.

In Chapter 4 I also presented the results of my secondary level of data interpretation, organizing the chapter around additional contrasts and similarities that emerged from the students’ stories. This included the co-constructed interpretations. Following Fontana’s (2003) advice, I also attempted to use polyphony (borrowed from anthropology), making certain to document “... different point of views in multiple voices” (p. 54).

Creating an Autoethnography

I also included an autoethnographic piece (Fontana, 2003) with my dissertation (Appendix F), in order to demonstrate that I am willing to share personal information, painful experiences, and my life’s lessons with others. It is from this autoethnography that I pulled vignettes to share with the interview participants. In this candid narrative, I described my earliest childhood recollections about the joys of diversity that were crudely usurped by the ugliness of racism in the early 1960s. I shared how I felt about wearing second-hand clothes, domestic violence, and being rejected by others due to my socio-economic class. While difficult for me to do so, I also revealed how I became reticent toward racism as an adult. The narrative concludes with how I was finally able to enter graduate school and why I became motivated to study the experiences of adult students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

I want to emphasize that my dissertation research was not a misguided attempt at restitution for past “wrongs.” Rather, this study is a reflection that my life has come full
circle--back to a place in my early childhood when I was permitted to embrace diversity and learn from others whose race, ethnicity, and class were different than mine. My autoethnographic piece is being included for two important reasons. First, “who I am” has been shaped by my personal journey; this background permeates my attitude, research questions, interactions, and interpretations. It made sense that I should disclose personal information to my readers. Second, because I was asking the research participants to share their stories and engage in a dialog with me, reciprocity was the natural thing to do. According to Dunbar et al. (2003), “Self disclosure on the part of the interviewer is especially important when he or she is interviewing people of color” (p. 143; see also Ellis & Berger, 2003; Fontana). They added that judicious use of one’s autoethnography during the reflexive interview helps to establish trust; care must be taken so that the interview does not become focused on the researcher.

With this warning in mind, I made certain that I did not disclose my full life history to every participant. Instead, I shared only those personal instances that made connections with each research participant’s story. For example, when a woman disclosed to me that her husband was not supportive and left her, I was able to draw upon that parallel in my life to share with her. When the participants discussed delayed schooling and self-doubt on academic achievement, I described similar feelings that I experienced. I believe that these examples helped to establish mutual trust and respect with the participants. My hope is that I have also illustrated how the reflexive, dyadic interview can transcend the traditional question-and-answer approach to interviewing.
Potential Limitations to Understanding

Postmodern-informed methods are not without critics (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2000; Finlay, 2002; Gubrim & Holstein, 2003). Further, some of these methods still threaten voice and representation (Finlay, 2002), and may seem to vacillate between modernity and postmodernism (Briggs, 2003). According to Fontana, (2003) reflexivity should help to achieve some balance, but Finlay counters that reflexivity can “disguise inequalities” and is no guarantee of credibility or validity (p. 226). As another strategy, I also followed Alvesson and Skölberg’s (2000) advice to avoid a single-minded, polemic stance with harsh postmodern critique during data interpretation and description.

Due to confidentiality and several other barriers, gaining access to older Latino\a undergraduates was difficult to achieve. Further, seven of the participants declined second interviews and did not return a follow up survey. Despite these limitations, I strived to complete a study that was rich in detail. Their experiences and constructions remained essential to my overarching aim, which is to help reverse the invisibility of adult students in the higher education journal literature. For me, it was not important to measure how much of the knowledge gap I narrowed. I was most concerned with learning from the participants and (to the best of my ability) allowing their voices and interpretations to be heard, so that others could learn from them as well.

With considerable past interviewing experience, I believed I could easily engage in meaningful research across racial and ethnic boundaries. However, some scholars have questioned if White researchers can obtain the same answers as researchers of color (Dunbar et al. 2003; Twine, 2000). In contrast, Fontana and Frey (2002) reported that “race of an interviewer only makes a difference on questions specifically related to race”
(p. 650). I did not ask questions specific to race, yet the topic came up in conversation. However, it is important to note that even though it appeared that the participants and I were of the same race, (a) the Latino concept of race is fluid (Tafoya, 2004), and (b) there remained differences in ethnicity, class, and gender (Ryen, 2003). Being highly concerned about this potential limitation, I approached several colleagues--from diverse backgrounds--who were willing to engage in a form of racialized discourse (Brookfield, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000) with me. Amazingly, the people I talked to gave me the same answer: Move forward with your study. In sum, while they acknowledged that my concerns about cross-cultural research were valid, they also saw merit in my effort. One said that because there are not enough researchers doing this kind of work, “any contribution will be helpful.”

Finally, common to the tenets of interpretative phenomenology, qualitative inquiry, and postmodernism, is that individual perceptions are context specific; these “findings” are not generalizable. Further, the participants in this study did not attempt to speak for--or represent--other adult Latino students (Briggs, 2003). At best, these stories begin to reflect what little we know and how much yet we need to learn.

Chapter Conclusion

This qualitative study, inspired by phenomenology, focused on the educational journeys of eight Latino undergraduates, ages 35-50. At the time of the interviews, all of the students were enrolled in predominantly White, four-year institutions in the Midwest. Beyond age, selection criteria included active enrollment and completion of at least two years’ of college credit. I placed no restrictions on attendance patterns or number of institutions attended, but excluded students seeking online degrees and those earning
college credit through distance education. Multiple attempts were made to recruit students. I worked with gatekeepers from three different institutions, leaders of Latino groups, and attempted snowballing with early participants. My interview methods were based on “postmodern sensibilities” (Gubrim & Holstein, 2003), and participants were engaged as active partners in a process to generate and interpret data. I conducted two additional levels of data interpretation—through the lens of critical postmodernism, and in comparison to the constructs of Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults.* To uphold my promise to participants, I protected their anonymity by highlighting similarities and contrasts in their stories, rather than offering personal profiles. I strived for authenticity and credibility, and challenged my White Eurocentric assumptions throughout the study. I also created an autoethnography, to demonstrate my desire to build trust and reciprocate stories with these participants. While the students’ stories are insightful, there is work yet to accomplish. Extensive qualitative and quantitative research must be conducted with adults enrolled in a variety of programs, to build a literature base that better reflects the voices, diverse experiences, and needs of adult Latino students in the U.S.

In Chapter 2, I provided the background rationale for this study with my substantive and theoretical literature reviews. My methodological review, in this chapter, linked the philosophical underpinnings identified in Chapter 2 to my planned approach and methods. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to begin sharing the participants’ educational journeys. Their stories continue in Chapter 5, with an emphasis on their postsecondary experiences. In Chapter 6, I synthesized what I learned across Chapters 4 and 5.
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS’ STORIES AND REFLECTIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

My intent with the first three chapters was to frame this study for the reader. I discussed my interview methods as well as the philosophical underpinnings for my approach. In these next two chapters, I offer excerpts from the participants’ stories and discuss what I learned. Specifically, the purposes of Chapter 4 are to (a) provide an introduction to the eight participants of this study, (b) share quotes from their life stories, (c) reveal my reflections and our joint interpretations, and (d) offer a discussion of their life stories through the lens of critical postmodernism. In Chapter 5, I will use *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) as a framework for further data interpretation, with particular emphasis on their postsecondary experiences.

As soon I started to write, I faced a dilemma. My intent was to capture the students’ personalities, beliefs, family histories, and stories as accurately as possible. I did not want to filter their voices. However, I realized that with only eight participants, I could be identifying them inadvertently, through the use of simple demographic information such as age, family origin, number of children, and college attendance patterns. For example, if I profiled a divorced, 35 year-old woman from Chile, who has four children and attends Columbia College, it would be possible to learn the woman's identity. These students were candid with me--and apologetic for being blunt about discrimination and classroom events. I continually reassured them that I would protect their anonymity, and would make certain that quotes would not be directly attributable to them as individuals.
To uphold my promise of confidentiality, and to try to protect anonymity, I did not reveal the students’ names, create personal profiles, or attach specific background information to pseudonyms. Instead, I generally described their background histories and then discussed clusters of meanings (Moustakas, 1994) from their stories. This structure is in contradiction to the spirit of postmodernism, but I could not arrive at better option for sharing their stories while protecting their identities. Hence, my approach is a compromise. Another note: These are real students, not composite characters. If the reader detects vagueness, please be assured I have written in this manner only to protect confidentiality and anonymity of the participants who shared their educational journeys with me. After a broad description of their backgrounds, I used the pseudonyms of Maria Elena, Pilar, Sofie, and Leana for the women, and Luis, Miguel, José, and Carlos for the men. I have refrained from summarizing too much; I tried to quote them as often as possible, to help these eight voices be heard.

Participants’ Backgrounds

Age, Ethnic Origin, and Race

After considerable effort to recruit prospective participants, I was able to meet with eight students, four males and four females, whose ages ranged from 35 to 50. Their family origins include Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, and Puerto Rico (Figure 6). Three of the participants were born in the United States, two arrived as young children, and three immigrated as young adults. With one exception, all

Figure 6. Family origins of participants. Map: World Atlas.com (copyright released for education).
are now U.S. citizens. Throughout the interviews, they interchangeably used the term *Hispanic*\(^{16}\) and *Latino* when referring to themselves.

I am a Latino…Hispanic, Latino. It’s all the same thing. Hispanic is the word that we need to use in the language for the government. And that’s fine. But I feel I’m a Latino from Latin America…[and I] became a U.S. citizen. But essentially, I am a Latino. I’m a Latino, kind of White-ish, not part of the indigenous population. My family came from [Europe]. So, I can make it up: Look, I’m a *European* Latino (laughs). (Miguel)

My brothers and sisters and myself, we were raised with the White population. And for our family, for some reason--maybe that’s because of the town where we grew up--that’s what we tend to do. My sisters are all married, there's no Blacks in my family….It seems like our family are either with a White population or maybe with some Black. But never with a population of Hispanics because we feel distanced from them. Maybe not so much for my mom or my dad and he was alive, but for the rest of us. We see how different they are from the rest of us now. A lot of times they are not accepting of us. They look at us like, “You guys are too White or something.” (Carlos)

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*Reflection.* Miguel’s keen sense of humor put me at ease, but even in my fits of laughter, I recognized his passion, insight, and intellect. His life story and reflections

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\(^{16}\) When quoting or paraphrasing a participant's story, I used their definitions and terminology. For example if a participant used term Hispanic or minority, then I use those terms to report what they told me. In my writings, however, I used the term, Latino.
show that he is sure of his identity and that skin color and ethnic labels do not reflect one’s spirit (Miguel’s words).

As Carlos' interview progressed, I grew increasingly distracted by the thought that I was talking to a bigot. My reference for bigotry is based on my White, non-Hispanic background--rejection of individual differences across racial or religious groups, or by social classes--within and across groups. Through data analysis, I later discovered the falsity of my initial reflections (see discussion section).

One person also used the term Mexican American when describing his family. The term minority was used by most of the participants, but none of them used the phrase person of color.

Reflection. I had used the term, person of color, in my recruiting materials because I sensed it was politically-correct and infinitely more acceptable than the term minority. Over the last several years I had observed that the term of color was being used broadly by people from various ethnic backgrounds, including Latinos. However, the very first student I talked to, Sofie, asked me what I meant by the term of color. Sofie indicated that the term of color meant African American to her; The term of color was not part of her identity. Sofie is, by her definition, a Latina. It was the first of the many erroneous assumptions that I would make in this cross-cultural study. I remained

17 During my dissertation proposal, I discussed my preference for using the term “of color” instead of “minority.” Like me, my committee members felt that the least offensive term I could use in my recruiting materials would be the phrase “adult students of color.” Before distributing my flyer, I shared it with people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds on the MU campus. No one suggested that I should revise the flyer.
determined to learn, and apologized to Sofie. I immediately revised my recruiting materials.

Family Histories

While stories about their early childhood experiences were unique, there were also some similarities. For example, many of them shared that their parents had come to the United States decades ago to find employment and attain better living conditions for their families. Several of the families arrived in California and Texas, and later came to the Midwest following other relatives to various communities.

Both of my parents were born in [another country]. My mom came over when she was 15, to live with her older sister, who had already made way for everybody. So did a lot of the younger siblings, as they were 15 or 16 years old. By...high school, you learned enough. You didn't need any more education. You come and you start working and start sending money back home. (José)

Reflection. Listening to their family histories, I began to feel that something was missing from my life. Unlike the participants, my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were raised in the U.S.. I know little about my family's ethnic origins, and lack any sense of cultural identity. Therefore, I have not been able to pass family traditions on to my daughter. Suddenly realizing this, I experienced a profound sense of sadness.

Many of the students described how their parents refused to abandon “old ways,” and that the culture of their respective countries remained important. Although many of their parents had learned how to speak English, some of them spoke only in Spanish to their adult children. For others, it was different.
You see, my parents were kind of stuck on the old ways…when we came here, for some reason, we would communicate with my dad and ma in Spanish. And that's how I learned Spanish….I remember my dad making a comment that he just flat out did not like to speak English. I mean, it was honest for him to say that….My mom, to this day, she can talk in English…she just likes the Spanish so much….With my brothers and sisters, we'd speak only English to each other. Sometimes we would play around…and say things in Spanish. To us, it was humorous. (Carlos)

[I’m] not fluent. I understand it. My mom speaks to me in Spanish the whole time on the phone…my family is all here and a lot of them spoke Spanish, especially the older group, the older people…. it seemed like my dad was in the mindset not to encourage the Spanish-speaking or whatever. Because they wanted to fit in, like they didn’t fit in. (José)

**Reflective Interpretation.** Carlos and I discussed why he thought his parents spoke only Spanish at home, and remain “stuck in the old ways,” as he put it. We felt that people of his parents’ generation might cling to Spanish because it connects them with their past. We surmised if they lost their language, then they might lose their identity, family history, and cultural connection.

Despite differences in thinking, family ties remain important, and the participants described regular contact with extended family members. Several of the students have also returned to their family’s country of origin with their own children, to visit grandparents and other relatives. While most stressed the importance of keeping their children engaged in the Latino culture, José held a different point of view:
People say my wife is more [Latino] than I am…. With our [children], she tries to teach them about it. She is basically more proud of the [Latino] heritage than I am. I can't help that. I'm not going to be fake about something…. My parents…raised me to be an American…. it's the American flag that rings true to me…. Yeah, I should be happy and proud of [my heritage], but it never really ingrained in me…. [My wife] gets mad at me and we have arguments.  (José)

Reflection. Several times through their interviews, I inferred that José and Carlos wanted to distance themselves from their Latino heritage. Frankly, I could not understand their motivation to do so. When I asked Miguel why some Latinos seem to distance themselves, he said, “That person has a problem with himself—he doesn’t know who he is…. If you are aware of who you are, it doesn’t matter where you were born, or what kind of color skin you have, or what kind of upbringing you had...” For Miguel, awareness comes from self reflection. According to Miguel through introspection, “you get to the essence of humanity.”

Several of the students talked about the grief of losing a parent, and of the importance influences that a parent had in their life. This seemed especially true when they talked about their fathers. Six of the eight students fondly recalled life lessons learned from their father, even though they all described their fathers as being somewhat strict. The four Latinas talked about marrying at an early age because of their fathers’ rules for leaving home. Two of the men described how that their fathers held a similar rules.
We had such a strict upbringing. In order to get out of the house, we had to get married. If I had to do it over, I would have moved out. Yeah, I was either going to get married or join the military. This is the only way out of your house. (Sofie)

I was working full-time, paying my way through school….I bought myself a new car. Then I thought, I'm going to get myself an apartment. I told my dad and he said, “No daughter of mine is leaving this house unless she gets married.” I said, “OK, fine, it's no big deal” (laughs). (Leana)

It's kind of frustrating now, because [my dad and I] are still pretty distant. All of us… moved out when we were 18. Live by the rules or you get out. I learned a lot by [my siblings’] mistakes...He used to beat them with a belt...I was scared of that and scared of him. So I did not get into any type of trouble. When we moved [to a more rural area] he was not there as much. I think he softened up…he did not feel like he had to watch over us as much. (José)

Reflections. From about the time I was 14, I wanted to get out of the house. Like José, my father would beat me, and had strict rules. I shared that with José. Unlike the Latinas, who were faced with marriage or the military as their only alternatives for leaving home, my plan was to escape to college. I did not consider marriage or the military as viable options for me.

Another similarity in the students’ stories was that most of their parents did not encourage them to attend college. All eight of the participants are first-generation college students. (For a definition of first generation by immigration status, see footnote page 32). The Latinas indicated that their fathers and other male family members discouraged their goals to attend college:
Back then my father, when he was alive, and my brother, he was still here, we would drive past [this college] so many times. Every single time we would pass, I would always say, “One day I'm going to this college.” They would laugh at me. They were like, “Just get a job. Just start working.”…But instead of getting down, it made me feel a little angry and I wanted to do it more. (Maria Elena)

I have a brother-in-law for some reason I don't know he's just not into the school thing. And he didn't understand why I would go back to school. He'd say, “Why are you wasting your time and why are you wasting your money?” He never pushed school with his kids. I think it's because he doesn't want to end up paying for it. I think that's the main thing. I think he’s just the kind of person that thinks about what he wants and what makes him happy. (Leana)

When I finished my degree [my brother] was like, “It is about time.” He never said nothing positive. Nothing positive. I'm thinking it could be a cultural thing, because they themselves don't have [a degree]. Jealousy could be. And he's not the only one. Like on my husband's side of the family. So I told [my husband], “Do not tell them that I am going to school”….I hid it….I noticed that some of my friends are the same way and they are not Latinas. They were older, female, with family and a husband….Just being an older female….we're supposed to be home cooking and cleaning. (Sofie)

Reflective Interpretation. At this point I could feel myself slipping into stereotyped and thinking about Latino men. In order to place my reaction in check, I asked each of the women if the lack of support came from all family members or just the men. They all responded with, “just the men.” We also engaged in reflective
interpretation. Each concurred with Sofie’s interpretation that male family member animosity stems from machismo and role norms and values. However, Sophie pointed out how the interplay of being older and female spans many cultures. This was a segue to tell her (and the others) that I waited for more than ten years for my husband’s consent to return to college.

After the interview on the way to the parking lot, Sofie elaborated on the intersection of being female and Latina. I told her about the concept of the Double Other, from the literature on African American women. Sofie said, “That’s what I am, a ‘double devil’.” When I told her the term was really Double Other, she said, “Oh. I thought you said double devil. That’s what I am, too. A ‘double devil.’”

In comparison, the men’s parents were neutral or supportive. Carlos emphasized that he did not believe his parents were anti-education. Rather, he said that because his parents had worked hard to find financial stability and buy a home, they could not see why the same approach would not work in today’s economy. One man indicated that his father was willing to pay for his college education right after high school, but he had “other priorities” and felt it would be a “waste of money” to pursue a post secondary education at that time. Collectively, even though they had fathers, uncles, and brothers who opted for the workforce rather than college, these men remained determined to attain a bachelor’s degree.

Reflective Interpretation. Carlos and I speculated that parents who come to the U.S. for economic reasons, might also value work over education for their children. Our interpretation was that the longer parents were in the U.S., and achieved financial stability, the more amenable they become to postsecondary education for their children.
Also, as Carlos pointed out, the longer parents are in the U.S., they observe how a college degree provides opportunity for higher salaried jobs.

Although they have from three to ten siblings, all but one of the students will be the first person in the family to receive a college degree. Two people discussed, with a great sense of pride, siblings who have “followed in their footsteps” and started college later in life.

Like my sister, the one who just earned her GED, she is now trying to get into college, and I think I have a little bit to do with that. Because before she didn't want to. She was like, “I already got a job and wages, so why should I?” So now she is willing to go for something that is related to what she is doing. She wants to become a nutritionist, and I'm so proud of her. (Maria Elena)

The one participant who was the exception has three siblings who have already earned bachelor's degrees.

Even though their parents and most of their siblings had no college experience, the participants talked with pride about family member accomplishments in the workplace. This was especially true of the men, who described male family members as successful because they had sustained regular employment, or a purchased a nice home, or made a “good salary.” At no time did these students pass judgment on their parents or family members for not taking the opportunity to attend college.

Reflection. I have three siblings, all of whom have had the opportunity to complete some college coursework. When I learned that very few of their siblings had attended college, I was again reminded of my White privilege and assumptions. I had forgotten that not everyone in the U.S. has had the opportunity to attend college.
Participants’ Early Educational Histories

While the educational systems are different, in Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico, compulsory education is considered completed around the age of 14, after eight or nine grades. All three of the students who attended elementary school in their respective home countries completed compulsory education. Whether abroad or in the U.S., the participants told me that they generally liked elementary school and performed well as a young students. Five of the study participants attended Catholic elementary school, including the three students who were born in other countries.

I was always interested in books. All the time….it was a Catholic private school….so I loved it and I have good memories….My house was very far, about 12 blocks….my sister and I would walk together….No buses, like here. It was hard. The chapel was in the same building as a school, so every morning they had Mass at 7:30….I think I like to pray because that's what I always did first thing in the morning. I was thinking of God. That's the way I was raised. (Pilar)

Of the participants who attended public elementary school in the U.S., three recalled unpleasant memories, including feelings of isolation, discrimination, and punishment. For example, Leana talked about being the only Hispanic child in her school, and how other children treated her:

I ended up going to a public school. I felt like an outcast…I don't know, in a way, for me it takes a while to get in used to some things. New people and change are difficult for me….I had bad experiences. Other kids would pick on me. Not that they were mean, I think they did it for fun. You know how kids are. My mom would get sick of it and I would come home scared. (Leana)
Likewise, Sofie said she was the only Hispanic child in her school. She observed harassment toward other children.

I had a German friend in elementary school and I did not understand why the other children picked on that girl. When I grew older I learned it was because they were mostly Jewish and she was German. Because of what happened during World War II, I did see a lot of hate--hate and discrimination. Racial hate between children who did not even know each other. (Sofie)

As early as second grade, Carlos noted racism.

One of the worst things that happened, was when we lived in this one town, it was integrated. A couple of blocks over there was a Black neighborhood. So going to school, it was mixed. Then we moved to an area that was all White. So things were kind of tough for a while with a lot of racism. Just trying to fit in…. and that pretty much lasted…seven or eight years. (Carlos)

As noted earlier, several of the participants said that they spoke Spanish at home. Two of the participants revealed that stuttering made speaking English especially difficult. Luis talked about the challenges of entering elementary school as a Spanish-speaking child:

I was really embarrassed. I didn't know how to speak English, is was kind of broken. I remember sitting next to this girl and a teacher wrote the word “vacation” on the board. She said, “This is what I want you to write about.” Everybody was writing and I was copying off of this girl (laughs). She read her paper on her vacation. When they asked me to read, it was the exact same paper.
So they put me in the back of the room facing the wall….that was my first experience in school. (Luis)

On our way to the parking lot after the interview, Sofie described her initial challenges of being a Spanish-speaking child in a U.S. school. Similar to Luis, she said that teachers treated her like she was stupid, even though she was not stupid. She had not related this experience during the interview. Luis further described what it was like for him:

After that, they segregated our classes. We had two third grades and two fourth grades. One was a smart group and the other was a dumber group. I was always in the lower group. (Luis)

Reflective Interpretation. Like Sofie, I attended an integrated grade school with Black and Jewish children (Appendix F). In my case, as a White, non-Hispanic child, I was in the minority population. Even so, I did not have feelings of isolation, nor was I harassed at that school. It occurred to me that being a child in the minority population is significantly different than being the only child in a school from a particular racial or ethnic group.

On a positive note, Sofie also told me that her experiences (of being treated like she was stupid) made her determined to “prove to others that I was smart.” Luis told me that his placement in the lower group prompted the same type of reaction. Not only was he determined to achieve academically, he devoted himself to extracurricular activities.

When I got to seventh and eighth grade, I was really accelerated by then, as far as my knowledge in English. Even though I was still in the lower group, I was the only person in that classroom who was nominated for class officer….I got elected
vice president of our class….I also joined the track team and got two or three
trophies from different competitions. (Luis)

Reflective Interpretation. When I fell behind in school, and was placed in a lower
group, like Sofie and Luis, I grew determined to prove myself. I studied hard and caught
up academically, and by eighth grade, I also excelled in sports. Sofie and I had the
opportunity to discuss this in detail. We both felt that our motivation to persist with
studies at our age, and our determination to succeed, stems from those negative
elementary school experiences. Likewise, Luis attributes several of his characteristics--
hard work, competitiveness, and a desire to succeed--to those early experiences.

The Secondary and High School Levels
Following elementary school, the students’ educational progress becomes more
difficult to describe, in part because the definition of “secondary school” varies by
country. Furthermore, the educational systems in the countries have changed since these
middle-aged adults attended school. In Argentina, for example, secondary school begins
in the ninth grade and concludes after the 11th or 12th grade. However, the participant
from Argentina could not complete secondary school, and was forced to flee the country
due to political unrest. In Bolivia, students complete six years of elementary school, four
years of intermediate school, and two years of secondary school. The participant from
Bolivia completed secondary school (12th grade). In Mexico, students complete six years
of primary school and three years of secondary school. One of the students who was born
in Mexico, and attended school there, completed secondary school (ninth grade). At the
time, this was considered the completion of one's education. The remaining participants
attended high school in the U.S. Two of the students discontinued studies by the 11th
grade. Five of the study participants obtained the Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) in the U.S.

**Reflection.** It struck me as remarkable that all eight of these students, now between the ages of 35-50, were college students. I recalled journal articles that identify predictors of college entrance and persistence. None of those studies would explain how these people, from modest educational beginnings, had followed a path--across decades--that would lead them to college.

Students who attended high school in the U.S. described both positive and negative experiences. Luis, for example, continued in the “lower group” through the eighth grade, but scored high enough on standardized tests that he was able to get into one of the best high schools in his city. By his senior year, Luis said he had some “personal problems,” moved to another state, and ceased studies before obtaining his high school diploma. During this point in his life, when he seemed to be struggling the most, he also found a mentor.

I had an English teacher, who is now passed away, but I kept in touch with him….And he always told me, you're going to be somebody someday. Don't let anybody turn you down. Just keep doing what you're doing and you're going to do good. (Luis)

Like Luis, two of the other men described how they entered high school as engaged students, particularly fond of sports. Yet beginning about the 10th or 11th grade, their behavior changed, they grew “less interested” in school, and started experiencing academic difficulty.
The first two years, freshman and sophomore, I was in [sports] and doing decent in school. Then things fell apart…. just hanging around more with friends and starting to really lose interest in doing good in school. (Carlos)

In contrast to the men, the women did not report academic difficulties. Instead, they talked about other aspects of their high school experience:

[In] high school, it became more diversified. Because of the military, there were more Hispanics and other cultures from the base. There were more Hispanics moving into the area. So I had a nice experience. I had a good high school. (Sofie)

I ended up going to the high school that was public. Another change. It was scary for me. Then it was fine. I knew the kids who were bullies, and I guess they were OK with me. You know kids. Kids like to do stupid things. By then I think I was just ready for school….Like by 10th grade, I remember feeling like I did not want to do anything on Fridays. I did not want to go out with friends. I just wanted to learn, learn, learn (laughs). I know, it's funny, because my friends would say, “What are you doing?” And I said, “I have to do this or that.” For some reason I don't know why, I turned out that way. (Leana)

The five students who obtained a GED shared feelings of pride and accomplishment. One person first had to learn English. All pursued the GED with broader goals in mind:

I started taking classes for my GED. I took my test and I passed up the first time….It was hard work…it was tough with kids and work. But I wanted to do this….Because I knew I couldn't go to college if I didn't have [the GED]. So I did it within six months. The GED. That was like, wow! It was great. It still is. (Maria Elena)
I started taking the [GED] class, but a lot of stuff I had already known. So the instructor said, you don't have to finish the class. If you feel like you can take the GED, then you can take it. So I did. I passed it. (Carlos)

I was walking downtown one day, by the recruiter office, and the guy said, “How would you like to join the [military]?” And I said, “I would love to.” But he said, “You know what? You need your GED.” So I said, “How can we do that?” He said, “You can either take classes for three months…or do you feel confident enough to take it now?” So I went in, took the test…and I passed everything. (Luis)

I finished high school….[but] had to bring all the paperwork here. It was easier to get a GED than to do all the paperwork and have it signed….I got $200 for the highest score, which I used toward my…career. (Miguel)

**Reflection.** Shamefully, I always held an elitist attitude toward the GED—that it was a substandard alternative to a *bona fide* high school diploma. The fact that these students placed such high value on the GED, caused me to reflect about how I defined the term *success.*

**Military Experience**

Two of the participants have extensive military experience. Their stories are similar in that they have both served for many years, started families, have lived in other countries, and enrolled in college while still on active duty. Both talked a great deal about how the military influenced their motivation, work ethic, and other their other life roles. José described a pivotal moment while on active duty:
I started rebuilding out there, and started making plans and goals…You think the worst when you are someplace like that. You think you may never come back…And so when I came back from there, I just started doing what they wanted me to do, the best I can do it. Even though I may not agree with that….I started playing the game…and within a year I was promoted….All of a sudden, I am squared away. I am the “go to guy.” From there I kept on building. I wasn't afraid to say my piece, I wasn't afraid to address things, and I wasn't afraid to ask questions. (José)

By the time of the interviews, one person was retired employed full-time outside of the military. José will be retiring within the next several years, and described himself as planning for his transition to life as a civilian.

Returning to College: Motivation and Life Goals

The participants’ stories revealed a shared belief: That education is “the key” (their words) to better jobs, lives, and futures for their children. Several of them described degree attainment as a life long goal that was never lost, only deferred for a bit. A few returned to college in order to placate family members who were disappointed in their past academic performance.

Even though I didn't do too well both junior and senior years, in the back of my mind, it was troubling me….it was not really hard to decide. I wanted to get my diploma, then go to school and community college. (Carlos)

Every course that you take…counts toward college credit. So I said, that's good. My dad was so mad that I dropped out of school…so I got to graduate with a cap and gown. (Luis)
The in-laws…said bad things about me when we were younger. I still remember that stuff. So it's more, you know, like to shut her up, even though I know I never will. I know when I get this [degree], she can back off some….that's like a silent motivation there. (José).

Without exception, all of the students explained how a bachelor's degree will be an essential step in establishing their respective new careers, or workplace advancement.

We have to go to the classroom to finish with the class so we can have our diploma that will help us get a job….For adults, maybe in their workplace, they are asking them to…finish with their classroom experience so then they can give them the job that they are qualified to do. (Miguel)

Closely intertwined was the desire to serve as a role model for their own children. Pilar’s story most poignantly illustrates this desire:

I am an elementary teacher [in my country]….When I came to the United States they told me, you wanna be a teacher, you have to start all over. And I didn't understand English, so it was worse….I started working in [hotels and factories] because I needed money…. I want to tell you the truth: I hated it. I thought, this is not the truth. This is not happening to me. In the United States, you think you can find a lot of good things. That's our mentality over there-it’s a paradise. But it's different. Reality is different….I got tired….I can't be working so many hours and going home and cook and take care of everything…. I came to this country because I wanted to succeed, get better. But I don't feel like I’m there…. I can do something better here, and I can give my kids a better life and more opportunities. And I can be a role example for them. (Pilar)
The competition in the workplace. There is more younger people with degrees. And you feel the competition. Also because of my children. I told them I was persistent and I always told them, you have to get your education. Well, I told them, you don't want to end up like me (laughs)….If they ever do, it will be to get their Ph.D. or something higher instead of just completing a bachelor's degree…. They see me as a role model. (Sofie)

While his initial interest in college was spurred by two friends, José also sees how he serves as a role model for his children:

When I checked in [to the military] a couple of guys started talking to me….Both of them were going to school at the time and one was getting ready to finish…It took a little bit of coaching. They called me a couple of times, like, “Hey I'm going to school, you wanna come?” So I went along for the ride, and they walked me through the wickets. At this age you do have apprehension and feel stupid asking questions….Now, some of it is also my kids. They're old enough to see what's going on….When I get my bachelors I want to make sure to walk on the stage not so much for myself, but I want my kids to understand where dad was going, and how they can do it. (José)

\[Reflection.\] Even though the participants were talking about their college experiences, the influence of family life is unmistakable. Seven of the participants have children, and at various times during the interview, they all returned to the subject of their children, regardless of the topic at hand. The role of parent seems utmost in their minds.
Determination and Persistence: Participant’s College Attendance Patterns

The purpose of this subsection is to write about the participants’ college attendance patterns. In Chapter 5, I will provide detailed information about their college experiences, using the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model as scaffolding for discussion.

Of the eight students in the study, only three were able to enroll in college right after high school—two in this country, and the third in a different country. The remaining students enrolled later in life. Five of the students initiated studies in community college settings. All five obtained associate degrees and one person acquired a second associate’s degree. Along the pathway to degree completion, three of the students attended multiple four-year institutions. One person attended six institutions1 (a combination of two and four year settings). Figure 7 illustrates how their postsecondary settings varied widely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical or military</th>
<th>Community college</th>
<th>Small private liberal arts</th>
<th>Adult degree completion</th>
<th>Mid size public</th>
<th>Large public</th>
<th>Other country</th>
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*Figure 7. Scope of participants’ postsecondary settings (1970s to present). Students who attended multiple institution types are counted more than once.*

Collectively, the students’ stories show how adult Latinos can persist toward degree completion across decades. The women cited family needs as the reason they decided to leave college at different points in their lives: marriage, children, relocation due to husband’s employment, and parents. The men, in contrast, discussed leaving college primarily for job advancement (moving) reasons. Despite barriers and deferred goals, their stories are positive. They didn’t give up:

1 Adelman (2006) refers to this trend as “swirling.”
We moved away and about a year later, we got married and had a baby. So I put it off. It was always on my mind: I want to go back to school….I gotta go back to school and get my degree….Years and years later…I finished the other half of my community college degree…Got that done. (Leana)

I planned that I was going to be done by the end of December. Well, it’s not going to happen. Like we say, sometimes there's other priorities….there were ups and downs. I had to go through my dad’s sickness and death….I had to go. I had to leave my classes. Class, I can always take over again. My dad is gone. He’s gone. So I’m proud that I decided to go. (Maria Elena)

I stopped thinking about college because I didn't want [my husband] to feel guilty. So I worked like him so we could be on the same level. (Pilar)

**Reflection.** Having initiated doctoral studies eight years ago, I am overly sensitive about terms like retention and stopping out. My preference is to use the word persistence when describing college attendance patterns. I never lost sight of college goals; rather, I have had to make choices that slowed my progress. For me, the term persistence reflects a student’s perspective about progress. In listening to their stories, my conviction—that students persist--grew stronger. For even when these participants were talking about barriers and placing family needs before college, I never sensed negativity. Indeed, their stories reflect optimism and persistence.

One man’s story was significantly different than the others. He described taking breaks for up to 10 years at a time because he “lost interest” in what he was studying. Over the last three decades he has accumulated numerous credit hours and recently earned an associate's degree.
I went a number of semesters early on….Then I stopped going. So I never finished up. And that's basically what happened….once I got married, I didn't go for a couple of years….I came back to the community college, would take stuff for a few semesters, [and] go away. Not take anything for a semester or two. Maybe even longer. Basically just tried to chip away at it. (Carlos)

Reflection. This is difficult for me to admit, but during the interview I became highly distracted trying to understand Carlos’ point of view. I found that I was judging him, and was critical of him because he lacked focus and had no clear plan for degree completion. As the interview progressed, and he shared more about his life, I realize that this was a person that I did not know well. As more pieces of the puzzle started to fit, I reminded myself that this was his journey and his reality. If my goal was truly to hear multiple voices, then I needed to open my mind and be receptive to his.

Their Children

As mentioned in an earlier section, several of the participants identified themselves as being a role model for their children. In fact, Pilar, Luis, and José all mentioned that their motivation for returning to college was in part driven by their desire to have their children see them succeed. During the interviews, several of the participants talked about their relationships with their children, struggles their children were having, and advice they had passed along to them.

Through all of my life, there has been a lot of discrimination. A lot of stereotyping…. I understand my kids now….They would go to school and they would tell me things. Now I look back and I think well, yeah. And I told my kids, “You're at their mercy. There's nothing they can do. Just follow the rules. You're
at their mercy. Find out what they want, and find out what they like, and what
they don't like. And you beyond their good side.” There's nothing they can do.
(Sofie)

My dad and I kind of fell through, and just didn't have the relationship…. I'm
doing more stuff with the kids now….It's the thing down the line that I'm worried
about--the teenage years. [In my job] I'm dealing with adolescents…so that's why
with my kids, I'm trying to stay in tune. I'm concerned about what happened with
my dad, and I don't want it to happen to me and my kids. (José)

Because she had a hard time adjusting to new environment, she felt like coming
back home to me. What stuck in her mind was what I told her, “If you start
something, you need to finish it.” She felt like she shouldn't quit. I told her if she
was that miserable, that she should come back here and go to school. (Leana)

I said [to my daughter], you **better** start thinking about who you are. *Now.* Yeah, I
named you. Your mother named you. But if you want to change your name, do it.
That was who *we* wanted you to be….It’s time for you to become yourself. The
[rule], “Don’t talk back to your Father”? Take it off. Talk back to me as much as
you want because I want to understand who you are, what you want, and what
you have on your mind. And practice with me before you practice with [someone
else]. (Miguel)

My daughter went to a [community college] because of a scholarship program,
but didn't like it. And, I'm sorry, but it's true, discrimination is everywhere….a lot
of classmates were from a rural area. So she felt like discrimination was there.
She said, “I want to go to the city.” (Pilar)
At first they were like, “Dad are you even going to be able to finish school?” Now they know. When I come home, I look at their grades…. I say. “Look at me. I'm 50 years old and I'm involved [in all these activities] and I still managed to get an A. If I can get an A, you can get an A.” So now they're like, “Dad what you taking next?” My son…was taking [vocational courses]. So I said…“You're going to have to take certain classes to get into college.”…I think he's going to follow along in my footsteps…so I think they're looking at me differently than they were in the beginning. (Luis)

**Reflection.** Undeterred by their busy schedules, these parents found time for activities with their children, to help them with their homework, and offer them advice for negotiating life. I was impressed with how tenacious these students were, and admired how they made time for their children. I was never able to achieve this type of a role balance as an undergraduate or later, as a parent.

**The Influence of Work and Financial Support**

When I made the decision to interview students between the ages of 30-50, it was because I wanted to talk to older adults who had multiple life roles and responsibilities. Beyond learning about their classroom experiences I wanted to better understand how they dealt with the pressing demands of family, work, and college studies. In Chapter 5, I will share what they told me about their lifeworlds in the context of *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). In this section, my aim is to provide an overview of the many issues that the students discussed relative to work. As I started to *list meanings* and *create clusters* (Moustakas, 1994) from their stories, the essence of their work experiences seemed to relate to (a) pressures from younger workers, (b)
income and/or tuition reimbursement, and (c) encouraging other Hispanics to seek educational opportunities.

At work, there's some older than me, and a lot younger than me, and some kind of in the middle. And the younger people ridicule me and say, “Why are you going to school? You're not going to go anywhere. You're already retired. You're too old. What are you going to do?” And I told them, “For one, I have a goal to teach my kids that you're never too old to learn.” (Luis)

It's not like the earlier days when you can still get a job without a degree. It's just not that way anymore. The ones who are going [to college], they know how competitive it is. You know you have to get a higher degree. Too bad you can't get more Hispanics to see it that way. Maybe it's their upbringing. (Sofie)

It's competitive. I've been here a while and I know how competitive it is. In order to get a promotion it looks better to have at least a bachelor's, but of course in some positions, they want more. I don't know if I'll get my Master's right now. (Leana)

I am very close to being poor. I don't want that. I really don't want that….And when we see human service videos in class, I see that I am very close. I don't want to live like that. I don't want my kids to have that experience. Even in the United States, there's a lot of poverty. (Pilar)

One of the senators came to our group meeting and said, “The only way you're going to get Hispanics to move up into management positions is that you have to take a step to move up.”...I was in the position where I could move up, but I didn't want to because the pay wasn't there. But I was holding everybody else...
below me from moving up. So last year I took a position and moved up, and that opened doors for two more Hispanics to move up. You can't be selfish about work. My goal is to be a manager someday… but there are certain steps I have to take in order to achieve that goal. There's other people who want to achieve goals….and if I block everybody--if I'm the block to keep everybody else from advancing--then I'm not helping my own people to advance. (Luis)

My first job was housekeeping…in a hotel. It was really frustrating….you'll have to excuse me, but it was true, I felt very discriminated against at work….I worked in a factory after the hotel. Two factories….Work also helped me with my English skills, because I was talking…[to] Vietnamese and minorities there. At [one factory] I felt like I was not improving my English, so I quit. I said, I need a job where I can improve my English. Because they were talking in their language…the radio, music and all of that….So I moved to [another factory] where I could talk in English to Vietnamese and Cambodians. My life has been a journey! (Pilar)

The sixty hours of week…I will make a killing. Money, I will have in the bank, But what about my life?…A person spends most of their life in the workplace with a coworker, and the family is just an appendix [sic]….You go to work from 8-5… you get home, and you need at least one hour not talking to anybody…then you eat…then you have to go to sleep…So, how many hours of interaction with the people you love—the family—really is there? Not much. The workplace is the extended family. People should marry their coworkers and bring their children to work! (Miguel)
Reflective Interpretation. As they talked about work, I was startled at how different their realities were from mine. I was especially taken with Luis’ situation. On a daily basis, he was faced with being the “old” guy. I was stunned that the younger workers harassed him about returning to school rather than being supportive of his life goals. While protecting Luis’s identity, I described his situation to Sofie. She said, “It doesn't surprise me because I've known people that have done that.” She speculated that these were people who “feel bad about themselves” and “just let it out that way” by “attacking the other person who did something about” getting a college degree.

Like Miguel who used his GED award toward schooling, several of the students pointed out the how financial support helped them gain access to college. Those with military backgrounds used the GI bill to help cover costs. Another person used government educational benefits, while others received a graduated tuition reimbursement based on successful course completion.

Another big issue is financial. My mom…really like nursing but she couldn't afford to go… and my dad and her separated. It was financial purposes…..[At this job] we pay for it out front, but we get reimbursed if we get passing grades. Like I said, we had [a big] family. So I decided instead of going to school full-time, I would go to work full-time and go to school part-time. That way I could have money. I could pay for my school. (Leana)

Then I got a job…. they tell me if I wanted to go back to school, they would give me some money for tuition. So I told [my husband] I'm not going to lose this opportunity. I was waiting for this opportunity a long time. And I'm not too old, so I can start all over. I want to. I know it's going to be hard, but I can do it. My
mother always told me, “If you want to do it, you can do it.” So I have this in my mind. (Pilar)

**Reflection.** Having had to pay for my schooling since the age of 16, I could empathize with what the participants told me about needing tuition support and working full time as an undergraduate. Twenty years later, in graduate school, I was still struggling financially, but now with the added burden of being a single parent and working full time. This, too, I shared with some of the participants.

**Culture, Racism, Latino Representation, and Immigration Issues**

At some point during their interview, each one of the participants touched upon culture, racism, discrimination, representation, and/or Mexican immigration issues. I shared some of their comments in earlier sections, but there is much more of their stories to tell—about work, family, schools, and others in the community. Again, my preference is not to filter their voices by summarizing, but to quote passages directly from their diverse stories:

In the [military] it's multicultural….when I saw [Latinos] in a group I would stop them from interacting that way or whatever language they were speaking, because we are all [soldiers]. It's called submission. If you were in a group setting and you have two guys…talk[ing] in a different language, most of the time you'd assume they are saying something they don't want you to hear about. So it's a negative thing, and I try to keep people from doing that….When you're at work, we need to speak a common language and be a team….They say, “That's not right, why can't we show our culture?” (José)
Another thing I want to add is about influences--it's whatever is going on right now with Latino stereotyping. And like I tell my children, the only way you can fight back is getting an education. You have to prove them wrong….So all of my children are going to college….which is turning a negative into a positive. (Sofie)

I have classmates who won't even look at me…. It's something that you don't understand. It’s the young, Black, White, anyone. [They are reacting to] my ethnicity….I had one classmate who was very racist….And now with the immigration problem, they think it has something to do with me. But it has nothing to do with me. I'm here. I'm working--a lot. I'm paying my taxes, so I am legal. I'm doing what I'm supposed to do….Maybe in Florida, Texas, California, it's going to be different, but in the Midwest, if they see somebody or if…they sound like they're speaking Spanish, they automatically think Mexico. (Pilar)

Even in the state government, the population for Hispanic managers is very, very low…And when you look at statistics now, like in the city of Chicago, the Hispanic population is growing and growing…[Hispanics] are getting over-populated, but managers and supervisors are still a very low percentage. (Luis)

A big mistake that I made….I never became a citizen. And I've always had people ask me, “Why didn't you?” I can't really answer it….Most of it is on me, but I feel like my parents didn't push it….as time went by I guess my way of looking at it was, you can vote, but what's that gonna do? That's not doin’ nothin’. That was my way of looking at, so to this day I have never become a citizen. That's kind of no good. I mean, I kind of wish I had become one. Certainly now I see how important voting is….I read a study where [Mexican Americans] don't come out
and vote like they should. Even local elections here...Why don't Hispanics come out in numbers and vote? (Carlos)

It's easier to live through [prejudice] if you ignore it….Acceptance…if you want to be accepted, I'll ignore it….Some of its not just being Hispanic or being White, it’s being female. You have to keep fighting. (Sofie)

Yesterday I was interpreting for someone in [the hospital]. And there was a little table there with…[plastic] bones…. I said, “This is how we look after a while. All the bones are White. Regardless of what kind of flesh you have.” (Miguel)

The whole thing with bilingual, which, a lot of it, I don't even believe in….It's a big issue….this Hispanic lady…said flat out that in her home she doesn't let her kids talk English…..there's probably a lot of other people who think like she does. And they just don't realize that's not good, that they are damaging their kids….I really don't believe in the bilingual program myself. If you keep teaching them two languages, and keep teaching them that way, how are they ever going to learn?....That played into this whole immigration thing. When you come to the border, some people say, “You can learn English or you don't come in.” I'm sure the other side is going to say…. you're creating a big barrier….Especially if they're older, they're not going to learn it right away….And there's some people who are going to say, “It doesn't matter if it's a barrier or not, you need to learn it.” You can see the argument on both sides. It's impossible to say which is more right, especially when you're talking about children. It just makes the argument that much harder. (Carlos)
That’s how people relate to our Latino population: Those Mexicans. But wait a second. We are talking about immigration...in this area we may be talking about Latino people...but when you get to New York, the immigration is different. Some Puerto Ricans, but what about Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmongs...The ones who don’t want to be identified with immigrants, well, you just do not want to be identified at all. What is the paranoia? (Miguel)

Even with my people...I do teaching. They say, “Americans they eat beef, they eat frozen food.”...I told them, “You don't know what you're saying. I know nice people....I tried to make it clear, don't generalize...don't make comments. You better keep your comments to yourself.”...It's teaching all the time. Educating. So I like that part of my job. (Pilar)

There's a lot of Hispanics that are born in this country, I'll just say, Mexican Americans...and they've been here for a couple of generations....They’re not represented, some of it due to outside things, some of it within ourselves. But there's not one the real big force who stand up and say, we’re Mexican American but maybe we're more proud of being American. (Carlos)

\[\text{Reflection.}\] In my second interview with Miguel, I asked him to help me interpret Carlos’s remark and Jose’s similar comment. Miguel said, “Some people call it assimilation, some call it acculturation...you will encounter some people who are not really comfortable with their own identity.” He attributes this to (a) a lack of self awareness, (b) limited experiences, and (c) the assumptions people make by using the TV or Internet for information, instead of becoming engaged in the community. The literature also held varying definitions of assimilation, acculturation, and related terms.
Volunteering and Altruism

Despite their busy schedules, many of the participants also find time to do volunteer work for community groups and schools. Others have plans to volunteer or are working in informal ways to help other Latinos. Sofie is one example:

It's scary because the dropout rate is very high. The children--they are the ones who will keep the country running. I talk to other parents and teenagers. Hopefully to influence them, to keep them in school. Because in the old-time, Latinos did not have to go to college to make good money. You have your house, your car, eat meat every day. Nowadays they can't… there's no more blue-collar, well-paid jobs in this country…all of those jobs are going out of the country. So even with college, a lot if kids don't find jobs….The only way to communicate this is to bring it out to the surface. The only to get it out is by educating and by participating in something. (Sofie)

Before I came out today….I got information about volunteering. Just some information. I think that's what's missing to connect to. I'm studying, I do this reading, and I know I'm not exactly physically putting in any of that into motion. Not getting into the community or doing things like that….basically looking at the Mexican American community. (Carlos)

I organized…the Hispanic club for the area….We've been trying to put the word out trying to get other Latino students that are getting ready to go to college--or at a point in their careers--to see if we can plant the seed in them about this college and how we can help them. There are also grants at this college for Hispanics, so we're trying to pass the word to the Hispanic community. (Luis)
Luis reflected a deep spirit of altruism throughout the interview. He demonstrates his commitment to help other Latinos not only through his work and volunteerism, but also in his post-graduation goals:

I would like to be somebody in my community, like a precinct captain or somebody that when people have a problem, they can come to me. But if you don't have a degree, you can't get those opportunities, or they won't look at you, because they don't think you're smart enough to make decisions or hold an office... (Luis)

One of my goals [is] to secure property for [a Latino nonprofit group]. It would help the community feel that they have achieved something. Through the actions of [that center], people identify themselves, like a church, you go because you identify with that group of people. Pray together…you feel you are closer to God. [That center] is something like that. If we do something good…then people that come to [that center] will feel good also. (Miguel)

Reflection. Luis and Miguel are remarkable individuals, both driven by the desire to help others at home, work, and in the Latino community. They are continually engaged. Several of the other participants also volunteer their time. Sofie is the only one to assist other Latinos on a less formal basis. It is a value that I share with them, but have failed to act upon to the extent that they have. In fact, with the exception of helping my neighbors in small ways, I elected to place all of my volunteer efforts on hold until I am done with my doctoral studies. I truly admire their selflessness, drive, and hard work.
Discussion

The purpose of this final section is to offer a secondary level of data analysis, including personal reflexivity and application of critical postmodernism as a theoretical perspective. In Chapter 2, I defined *reflexivity* as what the researcher reveals about her assumptions, role, and learning during the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). When applied carefully, my personal constructions have the potential to serve as an additional resource for critical data interpretation (Brookfield, 2005). In Chapter 3, I acknowledged the criticisms of blending critical theory and postmodernism, but also showed support and precedence for working amidst the tensions. The core assumptions of *critical theory* are that “Western democracies are actually highly unequal societies” and that through the “dissemination of the dominant ideology” those inequities are sustained (Brookfield, p. viii). In contrast, *postmodernism* generally argues against theory building; it allows for multiple realities and assumes that individual constructions can be contextual and fluid (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). A commonality is that critical theory and postmodernism assist consciousness raising and hold the potential to inspire change (Alvesson & Sköldberg; Brookfield). My discussion resides in this middle ground; I use critical theory as a tool to pose possibilities, but avoid the mistake of assuming one “Truth” or grand narrative about the experiences of older Latino\'a undergraduates.

In an attempt to understand these eight educational journeys in a different light, I followed Brookfield’s (2005) suggestion to employ “traditions of criticality” (p. 12) in my data interpretation process, including ideology critique, analysis of inhibitions, logic, and constructivism. Included in my discussion are how ideology, hegemony, power, gender, alienation, liberation, and democracy might have been influences along the participants’ journeys. My original intent was to structure this discussion by strictly following the
order of the preceding sections. However, I realize the inadequacy of this approach as soon as I began to create clusters of meanings (Moustakas, 1994). When moving across sections with my interpretation, I discovered how the tenets of critical theory were interwoven throughout their stories. For example, the topic of discrimination emerged from their stories about their early backgrounds, work, children, and college experiences. Thus, as I created textural descriptions (Moustakas) of my critical analysis, it made sense to meld these examples. The resulting discussion remains loosely organized around the preceding sections of Chapter 4, with some reference to other sections, as a means to help illuminate interpretations.

Participants’ background. Despite her misgivings, Sofie had the courage to call me and ask what I meant by the term, person of color. I became obsessed with worry that I had misused the term of color. So I returned to the literature, visited Web sites, and talked with PhD students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Now it became clear: I was allowing my White, Eurocentric assumptions to influence my thinking. I realized that it did not matter if I could prove that I had used the term of color correctly. What truly matters is the individual.

Sophie, José, Carlo, and Miguel also taught me how gender, ethnicity, race, culture, class, and regional differences are fluid, and a part of one’s identity. In exploring this lesson critically, I wondered where the term of color originated, why it had been extended--and by whom--and how it became widely adopted as an ideology. Is there a chance that the term of color was somehow distorted by White Eurocentric thinking, and I was a part of it? As another ideology that categorizes people by race (or ethnicity), I must challenge the assumed benefits to individuals and society. For under a guise of
being “politically correct,” the widespread adoption of a new term may also be an
insidious means of upholding the dominant ideologies of our racist society. In my view,
when we reproduce or extend categories and the label, of color, we promote discourse
that remains centered on the White, Eurocentric experience, while persons from
underrepresented groups remain depicted as the Other experience, in contrast to that
norm. Critical reflection (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), ideology critique about our
cultural systems, (Brookfield, 2005), and racialized discourse (Brookfield, 2003; Ladson-
Billings, 2000) about labels and terminology would be most insightful.

Concurrently we must respect individual preferences for terms like Hispanic,
Latino, and American, and understand that these and other labels may not be meaningful
to individuals (Suro, 2006a). In the PEW study, neither the term Hispanic or Latino were
popular with a majority of individuals, but preferences varied by country of origin,
generation in the U.S., and immigration status. From a White, Eurocentric perspective,
researchers must challenge the casual use of labels and groups. My lesson came several
years ago in a discussion with a roommate from Costa Rica, who felt people in the U.S.
were arrogant in claiming to be “an American.” From his perspective, since we are all
from the Americas, we are all Americans. Since that time, I identify myself as someone
from the U.S. A second faux pas I made with my roommate was my reference to
“Central” America: He asked me where I learned geography. I now name specific
countries or use the term, Latin America, when referring to the general geographic
region.

We must also try to understand the diverse ways in which people conceptualize
assimilation and acculturation, and related terms like diffusion, automation conformity,
biculturalism, and syncretism. From my interviews, as well as the literature, it is clear we
do not hold shared meanings about how people, groups, or society change when
individuals live, work, play, or worship together—or even if we change or merge at all.
Possible inquiry questions include: Are individuals losing their identity or becoming
bicultural (Korzenny, 2005)? What are the influences of hegemony, hyperreality
(Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000), and representations in the media (Olivarez, 1998). Similar
to Suro (2006a, b) I believe unprecedented changes are emerging, and we will continue to
learn more as we move forward in life together.

During the interviews, it struck me how the participants’ identities are closely
intertwined with their respective family histories. From the literature I now know that
importance of family--familismo--is integral to understanding Latino culture (Greenhouse
Gardella et al., 2005; Mareno & Guido, 2005). Seven of the eight study participants are
parents, and their respective stories reflect a courage to take risks that is driven by a
desire to make a better life for their children. Imagine moving to a new country—to
“paradise,” as Pilar described—only to find numerous societal inequities brought about
by one’s ethnicity, class, and language differences. Listening about their families, I am
reminded of how privileged I was: Although my parents never had much, they did not
have to face the challenges of immigration and learning a new language in order to
acquire a job and provide a family with its basic needs.

In addition to Pilar’s feelings of isolation due to her ethnicity and language, it also
struck me how she and the other Latinas faced patriarchal oppression and gendered role
inequities. For example, marriage or the military were identified as the only alternatives
for Latinas to leave home. In contrast, while I was similarly trapped by a dominant male
force, I had devised a plan that would enable me to leave home right after high school graduation: work, save money, and move to a college town. My maternal grandfather supported my college goals, even though he had only attained a sixth grade education. In the early 1970s, because I was a White, non-Hispanic child, access to college was a viable option for me. A friend who worked in a bank cosigned a student loan, and I benefited by other societal norms and values of the time. The Latinas’ stories showed how the patriarchal oppression and gendered role inequities persisted. Instead of enrolling or remaining in college, all talked about having to raise babies and complete household tasks. When I discussed this with the women, all noted the cultural differences of being Latina, and told me machismo (their word, not mine) was a way of life for them. Even now, as a middle aged adult, Sofie hid her college enrollment from male family members.

Latino scholars have noted similar gender roles and values across Latino cultures, described in the literature as the interwoven concepts of marianismo, hembrismo, and machismo (e.g., Moore Hines et al., 2005; Moreno & Guido, 2005). As a cross-cultural researcher I need to take care that my critical analysis lens does not obscure cultural realities. In this case, I interpreted their situation as oppressive, but my assessment may hold little meaning for these Latinas.

Inequitable college access has persisted for decades, so we must look beyond Latino\a gender roles to examine historic government and family economic trends, and the influence of hegemony. In the 1970s, adults enrolled or returned to college in unprecedented numbers. As the existing workforce was transformed for a more knowledge-based economy, agriculture lost its laborers. The void was filled by an influx of migrant and undocumented workers, many from Latin American countries. From a
critical viewpoint, education was a potential threat to the labor system. As long as immigrants could not speak English, they could not access education. Without education, workers could not advance to higher-paying positions. Hence, the labor interests of the government (and corporate agriculture) were protected. Gouthro (2002) also makes this point. The unskilled workers enabled the production of cheap, plentiful food, even during periods of steep inflation. Looking at it from their side, Latinos came to the U.S. to earn better wages and send money back home. Jobs in agriculture were plentiful. It had the appearance of a win-win situation. So much so, that by the late 1980s, rather than travel with the changing seasons, more migrant families settled into U.S. communities. The families did not seem to resist the exploitation, but instead acquiesced to a form of oppression—hegemony. Brookfield (2005) describes hegemony as “the process by which we learn to embrace enthusiastically a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming us and working to support the interests of others who have power over us” (p. 93). As a result of hegemony, young Latino adults like Sofie, Carlos, and Luis received little encouragement from either the government or their parents to pursue postsecondary education, and the ideologies of capitalism prevailed.

Based on the families that Carlos knows, and what I learned from the other participants, we felt that it takes at least one generation (25-30 years) to see a shift in parental attitude toward postsecondary education. We concluded that it was easier for second generation Latino parents in the U.S. to embrace both values—hard work and college—for their children. The PEW survey also revealed differences in perceptions by generation in the U.S. (Suro, 2006a, 2006b). However, as Leana pointed out to me, this was not true for her brother, who did not encourage his children (the third generation) to
attend college. She assumed that her brother did not want to pay for their postsecondary education, but added that she was unsure about his reasons. My interpretation is somewhat different than hers: Like the generation before him, I suspect that her brother does not see hegemony in his situation. He works hard and makes better wages than he would in his country of origin; he has strong rationale for supporting this system and passes his beliefs to his children, the next generation of U.S. laborers. From what the other participants said, Leana’s brother is not alone in his “automation conformity;” they have become “cogs in the bureaucratic machine” (Fromm, as cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 169).

Another cluster of meanings from the participants’ stories pertained to Mexican immigration, identity, and Latino diversity. Several times throughout their interviews, I made the inference that Carlos and José wanted to distance themselves from their culture; a third person wanted to be distinguished from illegal immigrants and the resulting discrimination she felt. Further, during Carlos' interview, I grew distracted by the thought that I was talking to a bigot or racist. Re-reading his transcript numerous times, I became convinced of his bigotry, and that some of his comments were definitely anti-Black. I was also confused over his comment that he “sees how different” he and his siblings are from other Latinos, adding that other Latinos view his family as “too White or something.” Carlos’ comments bothered me so much, that I eventually shared them in a round table setting at a national conference, protecting his identity. I did not pass judgment on the quote. As I set it before the group, I expected someone to respond with, “This guy is a racist.” Much to my surprise, instead I learned that my White, Eurocentric assumptions had again clouded my thoughts. Without hesitation, a young African-American woman
said, “He's talking about assimilation. He doesn't know where he fits in.” The group, which represented a diverse group of doctoral students and faculty, agreed.

When I returned to the interview transcript--now looking at it through a lens of assimilation (or acculturation) rather than racism or bigotry--I viewed his comments in a new light. According to PEW (2004) assimilation is a process in which people “change as they come into contact with their host society…but does imply any superiority in the host society’s views” (p. 1). Using assimilation as an additional lens for understanding, I was better able to understand José’s statement that his parents “wanted to fit in, like they didn’t fit in” and how his actions drifted among the currents of his wife’s expectations, military demands, and societal rewards. This notion of flux is also consistent with postmodern view--that an individual can “think and behave in entirely different ways, depending on the situation” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 149). In conclusion, I again realized that my critical perspective may have fogged my interpretation and I should have been more attentive to diverse cultural meanings.

At some level, I also understand how Sofie must feel marginalized in our dominant, White male society. In the 1970s, I worked in predominantly male occupations. During my internship in Washington, DC, a seasoned male professional told me that my role was to “Go home, get married, and make babies.” Twice I was sexually harassed by male superiors. Both times I was powerless to pursue it because other males protected them and exerted authority over me. Through the 1980s, when I worked in the nonprofit sector, it was still a White male world. As the only woman present in an executive level meeting, the men made no attempt to engage me in their “good old boy” conversation. After several minutes, I intentionally interjected a comment about Scottie
Pippin (from the Chicago Bulls). All heads turned; I had achieved a right of passage in that walnut boardroom. During the last 30 years, these types of barriers have diminished, but gender inequities persist. In conclusion, I need to emphasize that I do not equate my class and gender struggles with the participants’ stories of assimilation and acculturation. In many ways, I have been--and remain--privileged. My points are that (a) hegemony can span gender, race, class, and ethnicity, and (b) the preferences and discourse of elite, upper class White males continue to dominate the norms and values of our society.

Learning about the students’ rich familial histories underscored another important point for me: A postmodern perspective accepts multiple realities. On the surface, it was easy to make connections and create “themes” about familial similarities. Yet, as I moved closer to the essence of their experiences, a profound sense of uniqueness emerged. In conclusion, I see that the participants’ respective family histories provided a foundation from which their individual identities would emerge. Their backgrounds could never predict their journeys, or the achievements and dreams that would occur decades later.

Participants’ early educational histories. I am convinced that being a White, non-Hispanic child was to my advantage in early elementary school. Unlike Sofie and Leana, I was never harassed. Further, I had the luxury of concentrating on academics rather than simultaneously having to learn a second language. In stark contrast to Luis’s situation, I was placed in an upper group in early elementary school, and was required to serve as a peer teacher to older students. As he spoke, I had pangs of guilt. While his placement in early elementary school made him feel “dumb,” at the same age, I had self-confidence about “being smarter” than other students a full grade ahead of me. However, when I changed schools twice in less than a year, I fell six months behind other students...
academically. Like Luis, I was also placed in a “dumber” group, and my self-esteem plummeted. With such a strong emphasis now placed on standardized testing, I wonder how many children--especially those from low income and first generation backgrounds--have had similar experiences. Liberation, another concept of critical theorists, encourages us to examine ethics, challenge assumptions, and pose philosophical questions on how the world should work (Brookfield, 2005). When I reflected on our elementary school experiences, I was led to question the wisdom, moral grounding, and ideologies of a stratified educational system where young children lose self-esteem about their academic abilities.

As an adult, I recognize that I was not to blame for falling behind in school. Rather, in third grade I experienced (a) inequitable school funding and (b) White privilege. In the early 1960s, my integrated elementary school was adjacent to a low-income, predominantly (then called) Negro area. We moved one mile across town to a rental unit, housed in a White neighborhood with a new school. Even though I was very young, I knew my parents left the old neighborhood “to get away from Negroes.” What I did not realize until much later was my family was able to move into the new area because of our White privilege. I also benefited from being White because the new school received better funding than the old one. (Ironically, my original elementary school, once closed because it was considered a substandard facility, has reopened and now serves low-income Latino children). To this day, I remain frustrated over those funding inequities, and the lasting educational ramifications it must have had on the children who were my friends. Even worse is the knowledge that 50 years later,
inequitable school funding persists, and far too many children are academically floundering in an unjust, broken system.

Sofie believes that stereotyping creates a “Pygmalion effect” for young Latinos. But is this a case of a self-fulfilling prophecy, or are these children caught up in a form of hegemony? I believe it is the latter, because the values, governance, and bureaucratic processes of our educational system are ingrained in society and continued to be protected by those in power. (The prevailing, dominant ideologies can be further illustrated by the fervor over charter schools, which challenged the existing hegemonic system). Setting their experiences aside, Sofie and Luis are convinced that their children will succeed if they progress through this system of rewards and punishments. In Sofie’s case, she reminds her children, “You’re at their mercy” and to do “what they want.” She accepts this as the way of the system—the way the world works. I come back to the fact that our government has historically failed to address adequately the persistent inequities in our educational system, including the achievement gap and school funding disparities.

Largely, I believe it is the dominant values of policy makers and government leaders who fail young Latinos. Sadly, while Sofie is offering her children a means to survive, she is also sending the message to them not to challenge the injustices of their educational system or society in general. I think it is likely that even if a charter school was an option for her children, the controversies would be sufficient to scare her from taking the risk of leaving the “official” public school system. As she shared with me, it is just “easier” to live with the status quo system and ignore the rest. I do not intend for my remarks to sound critical. I understand that she feels threatened by those in power. I also recognize that being a White, non-Hispanic graduate student, behind the safe walls of the
academy, makes it easy for me to identify injustice, discuss liberating concepts, and call for societal change.

Secondary and high school levels. The participants’ stories reminded me that we do not all travel the same path on life’s journey and there are multiple meanings of the term success. For the students who obtained a GED, there was a huge sense of personal achievement. Beyond being a stepping stone to other goals, through the GED process, they also gained self confidence in their academic abilities. As a White, non-Hispanic child, my high school diploma was merely a right of passage--another luxury I took for granted. In comparison, for these students, the GED was something they truly earned. After reflection, I now understand that without the GED mechanism, many people in this country, including some who shared their stories with me, would never have had the opportunity to pursue their long-term educational goals and life dreams.

However, through criticality, the historic ideologies of our educational system should be challenged. From its infancy, formal education in this country has been led by (and served the needs of) privileged, White males. To protect their status and ideologies, women, people from various racial and ethnic groups, and low income individuals were denied equal access to educational opportunities. It was only as the needs of elite capitalists evolved, did formalized education became more available to Others. However, the primary purpose of education was not to emancipate these individuals, but rather to develop a more literate workforce, which in turn, continued to serve the best interests of privileged, White males. Then, as it is now, the philosophy of education in this country is highly focused on preparing young people for future careers. The GED, then, is part of an institutionalized process that compels individuals to perform to others’ expectations. It is
one step to ensure automation conformity. At its worst, the GED symbolizes power: institutions dictate “what counts” as knowledge and serve as the source of that knowledge.

Military experience. There were fundamental differences in the perspectives of the two people who spent several years in the military, in comparison to the students without military experience. First, many of their constructions were grounded in military jargon and analogies. Second, both were reinforced to be competitive and excel in performance regardless the task. Third, both embraced teamwork and conformity more so than the other students. Most striking was the anecdote offered by José, in which he described making subordinates stop talking in Spanish and discouraged them from gathering in groups. His rationale was that in the military, there should be no racial or cultural differences--that everyone should act as one team. It was not apparent that he had reflected on his own desire to conform. Therefore I could not ascertain if he was projecting his own belief system on his subordinates because he could control their behavior, or if he truly ascribed to an ideology of “color blindness” in the military.

Through the lens of critical theory, his anecdote clearly illustrates how institutions perpetuate dominant ideologies through indoctrination of individuals and a system of rewards and punishments to ensure desired behaviors. In fact, with his statement that he learned how to “play the game,” José shows how he modified his behavior and performed to expectations, even though he was not always in agreement with what was required of him. (In Chapter 5, his story reveals that he has transferred this knowledge to postsecondary settings, where he complied with instructor nuances, even though he disagreed with them.)
Here is how I came to understand José’s view: After September 11, 2001, I accepted the new rules and regulations for air travel, even though I was giving up rights to privacy. I also modified my behavior in airports, because I learned (the hard way) that when I asked questions or attempted to change flight arrangements, I was later pulled out of line for a hand search. This happened three times. So it was not from written rules, but through implicit understanding, that I learned what was expected of me. Now I comply, because I wish to avoid time delays, inconvenience, and embarrassment. I am rewarded with smooth transitions through screening processes. It is automation conformity, or, in Jose’s words, I learned to play the game. My air travel experience helped me critically analyze how effectively the institutional systems in this country can modify individual behavior through the use of subtle--and not so subtle--rewards and punishments. This reflexivity also helps me better understand why Sofie advised her children in the way that she did: “You’re at their mercy, so do what they want.”

Returning to college: Motivation and life goals. For far too long, older Latino undergraduates have been marginalized in literature. When these participants talked about entering college, I immediately realized that they had much to teach me. Their stories--particularly poignant at a time in U.S. history when tensions over Latino immigrants are at an all-time high--also underscore the importance of how qualitative study can help to illuminate the multiple realities of life.

Like the participants in the study, I am a first-generation student. I have three siblings, and all have been fortunate to complete some college coursework. When I learned that very few of their siblings had attended college, I was again reminded of my White privilege and assumptions. Even in the 21st Century, not everyone in the U.S. has
the opportunity to attend college. Despite changes, this remains an inequitable educational system, in terms of academic preparation, fair access, and reasonable costs. These persistent barriers deny participation in postsecondary education to many people, especially those from underrepresented populations and those from low income families.

_Determination and persistence: Participation and college attendance patterns._ It is remarkable that these individuals persisted over decades, past numerous barriers toward degree completion. Their stories remind us not to make negative assumptions about age or other nontraditional characteristics. Due to my age (and now eight years of doctoral study), I was able to understand their view of _persistence_, and did not judge their rate of progress. The exception was Carlos, who, after nearly three decades of attending college, had no clear plan for degree completion. To my credit, because I was continually challenging my assumptions and biases, I was able to bracket my judgment about his fluctuating interests, and refocused on being receptive to his reality for the balance of the interview. Now, as I think critically about his ideas, I wonder about the influence of our postmodern hyperreality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) and Olivarez’ (2005) Latino representations on his goals; it is possible that he is attempting to keep pace with the changing context and expectations of our society.

Often at odds with the concept of persistence is the institutional perspective of retention. I believe that the participants’ voices not only help us understand multiple life realties, their stories reveal a richness of detail that cannot be categorized by retention statistics. The irony, of course, is that adults are invisible in higher education studies, and are not typically captured in detailed demographic data. In fact, these students would be considered “outliers,” because too much time has lapsed between enrollment periods and
their time to degree completion does not fall within the four to six year window normally tracked and reported by institutions. This marginalization of older students makes little sense, because as a group, they still represent nearly half of the U.S. undergraduate population aged 25 or older—a trend that has held steady for nearly four decades. It appears, however, that this age bias will continue. Within the last ten years, scholars have placed increasing attention on nontraditional characteristics, perpetuating the historic research focus on 18 to 25 year old undergraduates, and further marginalizing older adult students.

I can only hope that through sharing stories such as these, institutional leaders, policymakers, and statisticians at U.S. Education will eventually validate middle age students, and look for new ways to describe their experiences and achievements. It is important to point out that after they graduate, most of these individuals will have between 20-30 years left in the workforce. So again, the marginalization based on age makes little sense, as they are conforming to expectations of a dominant White, Eurocentric culture—supporting the ideologies of capitalism, and continuing to perform as “cogs in the bureaucratic machine” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 168). Based upon what the participants told me about goals, their contributions to society will be impressive, and certainly worthy of scholarly study.

Their children. Several of the participants said that their motivation for returning to college was in part driven by their desire to serve as a role model for their children. This manifested in two ways. First, they closely monitored their children's academic performance. On an ongoing basis, they reminded their children of the importance of getting good grades in order to access college. Second, there was a concerted effort to
make certain that their children knew how hard they were working and how well they were performing in college. I was pleased for them, because they hold high aspirations for their children and truly believe that their children's lives will be better with a college education. In my case, the same strategies failed, and I have never been able to understand why. So when these parents were sharing dreams similar to the ones I once held, I had to wonder if they would find more success than I did. Fortunately, I recognize my biased thinking, bracketed it, and did not disclose my feelings or situation to the participants. Yet, I was pleased we shared the value of a college education for our children. Earlier, I pointed out how Leana’s brother did not see the hegemony in his decision not to encourage his third generation children to attend college. Not obvious to me earlier was that by promoting postsecondary education with our children, these parents and I are also sustaining the same ideologies and serving the best interests of capitalism. The only differences are that we (a) ascribe to a different method of preparing the next generation of U.S. laborers and (b) believe that our children will benefit better from the system with a college degree.

A more disturbing theme emerged from the participants’ stories about their children: one of discrimination. In Sofie's case, she revealed that her educational experiences now allowed her to better understand her children's reports of discrimination. To help them cope, Sofie instructed them to follow the rules, find out what the teachers want, conform to those expectations, and remain on the teachers’ good side. Recall that Sophie never admitted to having experienced discrimination, only that she observed it. Yet somewhere in her past, Sofie learned to recognize power and hegemony. She was conscious of the fact that she has modified her behavior to meet the expectations of
others, and has resigned herself to the fact that her children are “at the mercy” of dominant others, and they are powerless to do anything about it. Pilar also reported that her child had experienced discrimination, but her response was to relocate to a different area where discrimination may not be as much of an issue. I felt anger and disgust, and shame that children in this country could be treated in such a condescending fashion. Further, I was surprised how both of these women, who otherwise have strong personalities, advised their children to be nonassertive. Obviously, I have not experienced racial or ethnic discrimination, therefore I had little knowledge to connect to their experiences. However I have a strong sense of moral obligation, fairness, and equality, and it was from that center that I reacted (silently) with indignation.

Encouraging, however, is that Sofie recognized how her age, gender, and ethnicity place her at a disadvantage in our patriarchal society. Further, her identification of power and discrimination show that she is “learning liberation” and possibly “overcoming alienation” (Brookfield, 2005).

The influence of work and financial support. Despite being harassed at work, Luis did not dwell on the negative. Instead, he remained highly motivated and altruistic. This wasn't merely a verbal commitment. Luis had taken a job change that he did not necessarily want, but one that was for the greater good. My principles about employment include professionalism, hard work, reliability, responsiveness, and quality. While I still believe my values are commendable, after listening to Luis, I felt egocentric. I had never thought about what I could do to actively pave the way for others. I am a good collaborator, and help others whenever I can, but I have never made a sacrifice to the extent that Luis has. In fact, in two key ways, I now see that I am part of the system that
oppresses others. First, I know how to play the game (in José’s words)—how to make
contacts and position myself for a job over other applicants. I am not always successful,
but I know how the system works. Second, I have modified my behavior. While I am
unhappy with the system, I have accepted that promises, like change, are highly
susceptible to politics. I try not to “rock the boat,” and now choose my battles carefully.
This also means that I have learned to distance myself from people who challenge the
system, and no longer serve as a champion for people who have been wronged by the
system. Critical theory helps me to understand how I modified my behavior to meet the
expectations of others, and uphold the dominant ideologies of the academy.

Like some of these students, I had to slow my progress in college simply because
I needed to work full-time in order to pay basic bills. The emotional and psychological
aspects of worrying about money takes a toll. In working with older students in a variety
of postsecondary settings, educators need to keep in mind that family economic stability
is a top priority, often above completing a college degree in as timely of a fashion as an
institution would like to report. The financial issues underscore both upper class privilege
and societal inequities; college access has not been a priority of the elite. Rising tuition
costs and increasing student debt load add credence to argument that it is indeed a
capitalist world. The proliferation of online degree programs, adult oriented programs,
and accelerated programs must also be viewed skeptically: Is their purpose to support
adults or make money? Two years ago I interviewed for a position of director of an adult
degree completion program. Their enrollment has skyrocketed, but adult students did not
have a computer laboratory or research resources. Realizing this was a knell in an
interview, I asked if the adult program was being used as a “cash cow” to subsidize their
undergraduate campus that had been operating in the red for nearly a decade. They
admitted that my perception was correct. I was not offered the position, and have often
speculated that their decision was partly driven by the fact that a female had challenged
the ideologies of their White male, capitalist system.

*Culture, racism, Latino representation, and immigration issues.* Even though I did
not ask the participants a specific question about voice, racism, or discrimination, during
secondary data analysis, a cluster indeed emerged relative to these and other interrelated
issues. Some of the participants’ vignettes and interpretations were context specific, so I
included those in other sections such as background, children, or work. However, I did
not want to obscure their voice on this subject matter, either. To me, this section truly
represents the multiple realities of their respective lives. Two students offered two unique
perspectives on discrimination, stating that they had also witnessed discrimination in their
respective countries of origin. Pilar described a contrasting example of discrimination—
Latinos who stereotype and say negative things about other people in the U.S. Pilar
remains adamantly opposed to racism and discrimination, and feels that she can change
people's attitudes through education.

Probably more so than the other students, Sofie talked about hate, discrimination,
stereotyping, and prejudice. She is the only student to identify prejudice at the
intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender. Grounded in her life experiences, Sofie
advised her children to “stay on the good side” of people who treat them unjustly. At
another point, she advised them that the only way they can “fight back” against
stereotypes is by obtaining a college degree. Later in the interview she indicated that she
“ignores” prejudice because it is “easier to live through” and “be accepted.”
Carlos and José held differing realities about Latino culture than the other six participants. To paraphrase their stories, both indicated that they see themselves as Americans first. As mentioned earlier, Carlos feels he is different from other Latinos, whereas José feels Latinos should do more to integrate with non-Spanish speakers. José also said he does not believe that people living in the U.S. should participate in ethnic related celebrations. While these are somewhat fluid, contextual constructions, their diverse stories represent assimilation, plurality, and other critical issues.

From a critical theory perspective, however, I might argue that by striving to assimilate, Sofie, Carlos, and José are being conditioned to conform to the ideologies of a dominant society. At another level, some of the study participants are aware of how the system works. For example, José acknowledged his automation conformity: He learned how to “play the game” in the military, and was rewarded well for doing so, with several promotions in rapid succession. Sofie tells her children to placate others. Later in her interview Sofie said that “to be accepted” she ignores discrimination. Analyzing these comments as a cluster of meanings, my inference is that Sofie has learned to survive by playing the game, much like what José describes. To help her children find success in an unequal and unjust educational system, she is inculcating the rules and expectations of the dominant White, Eurocentric population.

As a member of the majority population, I would be remiss if I failed to analyze assimilation and automation conformity in my own life, and how I benefit from being a White, non-Hispanic person. From this exercise I discovered from a young age, I have developed implicit understanding how I “fit” into a White, lower-middle class society. Further, I recognize that the power, economic structure, and values of this country are
driven by White individuals from an elite upper class, who make considerable investment to ensure that their position and ideologies remain protected. By not raising consciousness or challenging their system, I unwittingly help to perpetuate their dominant beliefs, rituals, rewards, and punishments. I, too, have become a “cog in the bureaucratic machine” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 168). Through a critical lens, I will never be able to fully understand assimilation from a racial or ethnic viewpoint. However, when it comes to class, I gain some sense of the pressure one feels when trying to perform to someone else's expectations. Even in middle age, when I am thrust into social settings with upper-class people, it causes me a great deal of anxiety. Nothing about me “fits” with their lifestyle—from my small, older model car, to my inexpensive, department store clothes. I am not comfortable in these settings, and end up feeling like an impostor.

On a different topic, Luis and Carlos pointed out how Latinos are underrepresented in government. Further, Carlos pondered why Mexican Americans do not vote, even though he does not vote nor has he become a citizen after living in the U.S. for more than three decades. These challenges to the prevailing “democratic” ideologies is an early indication that they are thinking critically, “learning liberation” and possibly “overcoming alienation” (Brookfield, 2005). In fact, the lack of representation has motivated Luis to become highly engaged in Hispanic causes in college and in his community. Carlos also described himself as contemplating about how to work with Mexican Americans in a volunteer capacity. Like Sofie, they are moving toward social action, which, from a critical theory perspective, is highly desirable.

Maria Elena, Pilar, Carlos, and Miguel talked about immigration issues from distinct perspectives. Maria Elena was forced to quit her job and leave school so she
could travel to another country to help her fiancé enter the U.S. She described a demeaning process with unrealistic time constraints and incredible bureaucratic paperwork. Pilar’s story illustrated the reality of leaving one's home country with a dream of a better life in “paradise.” But Pilar experienced isolation because she spoke Spanish, and she was discriminated against because, (in her words), people thought she was from Mexico. Carlos discussed immigration issues in the context of English learning programs. He said he is opposed to teaching children academic content in Spanish, and that children should learn in English. Yet he also believes that the U.S. will create a huge barrier for immigrants if English is a requirement. Having stated his opinion, Carlos added that he sees the validity in arguments that oppose his point of view. As I discussed earlier, despite its controversies, immigration has served the ideologies of our capitalist government quite well. In much the same way, after much ado over the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, international students are still welcomed into this country to pay a premium tuition for the “opportunity” to study in the U.S. Unfortunately, as Pilar noted, “paradise” may not be their reality. Discrimination by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion is widespread; the ugly dominant ideologies of our society permeate numerous aspects of their lives. As Brookfield (2005) suggests, our society needs to “challenge ideology, contest hegemony…[and] overcome alienation” (p. xii) through reflexive learning, critical discourse, and “communicative action” (p. 272). Critical theories help us to identify and social injustice and moral grounding. It is through criticality that we will be able to raise consciousness and hopefully, mitigate our social inequities. Not only for citizens, but also for individuals who enter this country for work, and thus, support capitalist ideologies.
Volunteering and altruism. More than half the participants talked about helping others. In Carlos’ case, volunteerism is an espoused valued, but he not yet taken action. Others, like Luis, Maria Elena, and Miguel, actively volunteer for Latino organizations. Sophie used a less formal approach by working one-on-one with high school students and parents. The altruistic spirit was especially strong in Luis and Miguel, who worked tirelessly to help other Latinos. Both men emphasized how their college degree would enable them to help other Latinos in the future. For me, part of the appeal of critical postmodernism is the usefulness in raising others’ consciousness. However, identifying social inequities is only a first step. These people are taking action and each is challenging dominant ideologies. They show that “achieving liberation” can occur in diverse and subtle ways. I need to do the same.

Researcher’s Role

In this study, my primary role was to understand, to the best of my ability, the essence of the participants’ respective educational journeys. My secondary role was to engage them in reflective interpretation. My edict was to conduct the interviews without bias or judgment, challenging my assumptions and interpretations. Paraphrasing Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a researcher must also continually examine her relationship with the participants. The purposes of this section, then, are to describe how I performed those tasks, and share what I learned about myself as a researcher.

On one hand, because I had more than a decade of interviewing experience in diverse settings, I was confident that the interview process would go well. What I did not know, and worried about, was how my background, biases, presence, and style might constrain, or negatively impact, a cross-cultural interview. Based on what I had read in
literature about interviews with African American students, I made the assumption that my gender, class, race, and education might create barriers and I would fail to sustain an open dialogue with the participants. I have to admit that when I decided to narrow my study to Latino participants, some of my tension over racial differences eased. Looking back, I am a bit frustrated with myself that I (a) allowed the literature to undermine my self-confidence about a cross-cultural study, and (b) so narrowly defined the term race.

On the other hand, the literature prompted me to more carefully examine my assumptions and intended approach to the interviews. For example, one caution from the literature was that a researcher should not confuse similarities or camaraderie with being an “insider” with participants (Ryen, 2003). During an interview with a woman, I found that I was feeling like an insider, not so much from a cultural standpoint, but certainly by gender. However, I attempted to be reflective throughout the interview process. Because I was challenging my assumptions and interpretations, I recognized fairly quickly what I was doing. I was able to bracket my feelings, or set them aside, and refocus on each woman’s story. Had this been a different study, and I intended to generate collaborative data, I would have proceeded differently (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

One of my interview aims was to try to encourage a “natural” discourse and avoid any appearance of a hidden agenda. I used open ended, guiding topics (Appendix D) to give participants leeway on how they preferred to tell their stories. While this is a sensitive interviewing approach, the result was that a few of the transcripts meandered in circles, through memories, constructions, and life roles. This made it difficult to create a coherent textual description (Moustakas, 1994) of what they shared with me without filtering their voices too much. In the end, I did not include as many quotes as I originally
intended, but I felt that I captured their stories accurately. I suspect that with additional research experience I will finesse my skills in this area.

In previous sections of this dissertation, I candidly shared my reactions about what Carlos told me. More correctly, what I thought I heard Carlos say. Of all the interviews, my role in his was the most challenging. First, I was troubled by his constant references to Black people, and I inferred he was a bigot. Second, I grew frustrated over what I perceived to be his lack of discipline and focus. However, I did a good job in recognizing my biases and interpretations during his interview. I was able to bracket my feelings, set aside my judgment, and refocus on his story. I felt very confused at the conclusion of the interview, yet, when I reread the transcripts, I realized that Carlos has many strengths and freely shared his personal experiences and reflections. He is becoming a critical thinker and will be a lifelong learner. I truly value my experience with him, as it taught me much about myself, and helped me hone my skills as an interviewer. I plan to contact him again to discuss his views on Latino culture, and his perspective about the concepts of assimilation and acculturation.

In addition to my experience with Carlos, I also found that I needed to challenge what I assumed about my role as they researcher, and how I might be perceived by the participants. I observed that when recalling her childhood, Sofie repeatedly used the words *hate* and *discrimination*, but she only relayed observations about *other* children. In other words, she never told me that she had personally been discriminated against in early childhood. Leana, on the other hand, described how other children harassed her, but tempered her comments by adding, “You know how kids are.” Even when I attempted to engage her in an interpretation of those events, her response was, “You know how kids
are.” I understood and accepted that these women did not feel free to share their deeper feelings or interpretations with me. At the time, I suspected any reticence I was perceiving was attributable to (a) having inadequate time to get acquainted, (b) me being an outsider, and/or (c) them being conditioned to hide true feelings about discrimination. Now, based on what I learned from the literature about Latino culture, another possibility is *simpatia* or “the ‘good face,’” which roughly means that Latinos avoid “confrontation and anger toward others, hiding true feelings when they are negative, and creating smooth relationships” (Mareno & Guido, 2005, p. 94). Leana’s life story, especially, seemed to reflect this desire to mask negative feelings and avoid confrontation with others. Two other values noted in the literature, *respeto* (respect) and *dignidad* (dignity) might also be influencing Leana’s discourse (Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005).

After a more critical analysis of my role (Oleson, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1998) I must also acknowledge my position as a cross-cultural researcher. It is likely that despite my efforts, I still represented a dominant, White, Eurocentric approach in my questioning methods and comments. However, I tried to lessen that effect by reminding them that I was interested in learning about them as individuals and about their culture. Yet, I was a doctoral student from a large research institution, so it is plausible that they perceived me as holding a position of power over them. Despite the fact I assured these participants of confidentiality, it is not hard to imagine that they could be leery about a negative comment finding its way back to an instructor or administrator. As researcher, I need to remember that we do not all see the world through the same filter.

It also troubled me that as an interviewer, I benefited by taking information from the participants, but had little to offer in return. I was candid with them about this
imbalance of beneficence. Before the interviews, I asked faculty members and graduate
students from underrepresented groups how I could correct the imbalance. All assured me
that I was making a contribution by sharing what I learned with others. Frankly, I already
accomplished that and it still feels empty: It was the easy path out from under my
dilemma, and in reality, I benefited from making the presentations. My desire was to be
selfless, like Sofie, Luis, and Miguel, and truly give of myself to others. One step will be
to help a Latino nonprofit organization with their grant writing needs, but I will do more.

Miguel, who values real world experience and engaging with others, offered me
another viewpoint on my role as a researcher. When I told him I was “just an observer” in
this study process, he said,

But through this research, look at all the people you are meeting. Look at all of
the work you are doing….you already deviated 100% from [your] path—that
routine that you had. If it wasn’t for that…you would not be here….somehow you
have become part of the community, you’ve become part of the world. So then
you have a different kind of an opinion that is more reliable from the one who
doesn’t do anything other than what they think it is the right thing to do. (Miguel)

In conclusion, I learned that feminist inspired, postmodern, interactive
interviewing methods can quickly produce feelings of being an “insider.” In my case, I
tried to build confianza (trust) through personalismo (personal approach) that included
reciprocity, candor, verbal reinforcement, and nonverbal cues. With the women, I
especially felt a connection. We laughed together, became teary, and shared feelings
about men, raising children, sacrifices for family, and roles. With the men, I felt less of a
connection, although we laughed together and shared confidences about family, work,
and college. That is not to say that the interviews with the men were not as good as the ones I conducted with the women, it is only my reflection that the nature of the discourse was different. Overall, I felt good about the interviews, and what I learned about the participants and myself.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an introduction to the eight Latino students who participated in this study. All were between the ages of 35-50, and had completed at least two years of college coursework at institutions in Illinois and Missouri. Their family origins included Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Pseudonyms were used in an effort to protect anonymity and confidentiality. I invited the participants to select a time and location to meet. My interview style was relaxed and interactive, therefore, I shared pertinent stories from my past with them, and encouraged them to ask me questions. Also during the interviews, I attempted to engage them in reflective interpretation.

Initially I organized this chapter around my list of guiding topics (Appendix D). Topics pertained to their early educational histories, entering college, and their classroom experiences. However, their stories also revealed anecdotes about parents, children, and work. During data interpretation, two additional clusters of meanings emerged from their stories. The first revolved around the intertwined topics of race, ethnicity, discrimination, representation, and immigration, while the second cluster pertained to their volunteerism, engagement, and altruism. Because these are their stories, I extended the list of topics to include those aspects of their lives. To illustrate the dynamics of our interaction and other
“postmodern sensibilities” (Fontana, 2003), I also shared reflections and joint interpretations that occurred during the interview process.

The purpose of the discussion section was to share findings from my secondary level of data interpretation, which included reflexivity and the application of critical postmodernism to the student stories. As data interpretation progressed, I discovered how the tenets of critical theory were interwoven throughout their stories. Therefore, my textural descriptions are loosely organized around the preceding sections, supported by reflexivity and the student stories across data reporting sections (e.g. background, education, work). From a critical perspective, my resulting interpretation clusters pointed to ideology, hegemony, assimilation, patriarchal dominance, and discrimination.

I concluded this chapter with a critique of my role as researcher. My interpretations are emergent (Finlay, 2002) and evolving. Generally, I am pleased with how the interviews progressed; I also recognize that I made mistakes along the way. To my credit, I did not allow my critical analysis to overshadow Latino\as’ cultural norms, beliefs, and values. I engaged in careful reflexivity, and was able to bracket biases and assumptions as they occurred. It is humbling to have to admit errors in my thinking, but I believe it is important for me to report my feelings and reactions honestly, as it helps to establish my credibility and trustworthiness as a researcher.

The purpose of Chapter 5 will be to focus on their current collegiate experiences. As a framework for discussion, I use Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) A Model of College Outcomes for Adults. My approach is a bit more positivistic, but I believe the application of a second perspective (lens) helped me to achieve a deeper understanding of the participants’ educational journeys.
CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANTS’ LEARNING, CONSTRUCTIONS, AND OUTCOMES

Introduction

I envisioned a dissertation study that would help me understand the classroom experiences of older Latino/a undergraduates on predominantly white, non-Hispanic campuses. With my interview transcripts in hand, I made a startling discovery: the participants’ stories described their educational journeys, not just their classroom experiences. Being of a postmodern mindset, I accepted their realities. I decided to rethink my approach to data interpretation, and share their stories a bit differently than what I had originally planned: two chapters of interpretations. I dedicated Chapter 4 to their educational journeys, with an attempt to allow their voices to be heard first. Even though I applied critical postmodernism as a lens to interpret their stories, I also emphasized the centrality of ethnicity, gender, family, lifeworld, culture, and values.

My aim with Chapter 5 is to illuminate the data from an entirely different perspective. Specifically, for this chapter I used A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) as a framework for data interpretation and reporting. The approach is fundamentally different from Chapter 4. In this chapter, I used the six key elements from the Donaldson and Graham model to code the data into clusters for textural description, placing emphasis on the participants’ postsecondary experiences. There is some overlap with Chapter 4, particularly in the areas of their personal biographies, psychosocial value orientations, and lifeworld environments. Yet, for the most part, this chapter contains new excerpts from their stories. The reader may also find my tone is different in this chapter. Here I am a bit more structured and have removed
pseudonyms from their stories. This was not to silence their voices but to protect anonymity. The participants were highly concerned that an instructor or administrator would be able to identify them and that they might experience ramifications for their comments. In some instances, they apologized for being candid with me, or stopped in mid sentence to redirect what they were saying. Thus, I believe I have a moral and professional obligation to protect their rights and honor their request for anonymity. Ironically, withholding the pseudonyms may even be advantageous as it allows us to focus on their voices without regard to gender or personalities reflected in Chapter 4.

It was for this portion of the study that I selected the age range of 30-50. I wanted to talk with students who had rich life stories and lessons learned across several decades. My assumption was that younger students, between the ages of 18-24, had limited experience in multiple life roles, and therefore would attach meaning to their collegiate experiences somewhat differently than older adult students. Further, I was also interested in learning about the motivation, persistence, and goals of older Latino students who did not have the opportunity to complete college at a younger age and now were managing many life roles concurrent to persisting in college. This chapter begins with an overview of the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model. Subsequent sections of this chapter describe each of the model’s constructs, followed by excerpts from the students’ stories.

A Model of College Outcomes for Adults

Following an extensive review of literature from the 1990s, Donaldson and Graham (1999) developed *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* as a tool to reconceptualize the adult undergraduate experience and learning outcomes. Pointing out that the extant literature was highly focused on younger students, they argued that the
findings were not necessarily applicable to older students. Their position was supported by scholarship that suggested older students perform quite well as undergraduates despite managing other life roles. Further, they found data that suggested interaction with faculty, classroom engagement, and college outcomes can be different for older students. In sum, Donaldson and Graham's premise was that learning, and the processes by which learning occurs, is likely to differ for students over the age 25.

The model (Figure 8) presents six nonlinear, yet interrelated components including (a) prior experience and personal biographies, (b) psychosocial and value orientation, (c) adults’ cognition, (d) the connecting classroom, (e) lifeworld environment, and (f) outcomes. At the time of my dissertation research, the model had not yet been tested in its entirety, although this work had been cited in several other studies (see Chapter 2). Before proceeding, I need to underscore four important points about A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (Donaldson & Graham, 1999):

1. The model should not be misconstrued as a positivistic approach to predict a logical flow of activities that lead to predetermined college outcomes. Donaldson and Graham (1999) presented their model as dynamic and nonlinear. Outcomes are defined by the student.

2. The bidirectional arrows between select elements of the model are not meant to represent precise cause-effect relationships but rather depict fluid and ongoing interactions between elements.

3. The six elements of the model are shown as boxes, which visually leads one to an assumption of distinguishable, clearly delineated boundaries. The authors.
Figure 8. Full version of *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Used with authors' permission.
explained that the elements are not necessarily discrete and may overlap or interconnect with one another.

4. Straight, solid lines connect the elements. Yet when one reads the narrative explaining the model, it becomes clear that the authors acknowledged that the pathways among the model elements may not be as straight as what is represented in the graphic.

Because the model is nonlinear and constructs’ boundaries permeable, data interpretation was more difficult than I anticipated. I read through each transcript several times, attempting to cluster the students’ meanings without filtering their voices. Eventually I was able to select excerpts from their stories, loosely organized around elements of the model. However, as I started to write, I reinterpreted many of the quotes and recognized that they could be discussed in the context of two or more of the model’s constructs. At times I have pointed out how their excerpts illuminate multiple dimensions of the students’ lives. In other cases, I did not draw attention to the interconnections. This is not an oversight on my part, but simply a decision I had to make in order to achieve the best possible writing clarity.

Finally, my overarching intent with this chapter is not to defend or refute elements of the model. Instead, I focus in on the participants’ stories. *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) is my tool for data interpretation and provides a visual anchor for my discussion about the multiple ways these older Latino\a undergraduates experienced college, attached meaning to those experiences, and how they made connections with what they learned across various aspects of their lives.
Prior Experience and Personal Biographies

Prior experience and personal biographies include one’s family history, culture, educational history, life roles, and real world experiences. According to Donaldson and Graham (1999), adults’ prior experience and personal biographies can influence their cognition and psychosocial orientation and values. Further, as the model shows, one’s background also establishes a foundation by which adults assess and choose to participate in their lifeworld environment. The early histories and background experiences of the eight study participants helped me to better understand who these individuals are, what drives them to achieve in college, and the influences of their lifeworld environment. In Chapter 4, their stories about school revealed themes of isolation due to language and discrimination, determination, and achievement. They also presented insight into their motivation, work ethic, values, perceptions, self-efficacy, and life roles. The following excerpts help to illuminate how the participants’ prior experience and personal biographies have influenced their personal philosophy, cognition, values, and perceptions about themselves and others.

I think I may have gone to summer school once. It was for algebra. Even now, I have problems with algebra. It's just something I didn't pick up.

And when I earned my certificate, my GED, I knew that I was going to do it! So I applied for it, and I went through the review and all that fun stuff. But I did it. I got into college. Now I say, I don't care. I don't care if the next day of classes I die because this is my dream.

It seems almost impossible. First of all, different language. No high school. I mean if we work little by little, it can be done. Nobody can say “Oh no, piece of
cake. Just go to college, have a seat there, and everything will go in.” No. You have to work hard for it. But it's worth it.

I remember the first contact that I had with an English-speaking person. I answered like Tarzan. My English was like Tarzan. (Grunting sounds). So it didn’t matter if I started [learning English at an early age] and I was a good student…When they asked me a question, I answered (grunting sounds)….a few weeks ago…[a former coworker] said, “Your English is getting much better than when I met you.” It was a good compliment. From Tarzan to now, a lot of work.

I learned through the years that if you want something, you have to go for it. But if I am not confident, if I don't trust myself, nobody else is going to trust me. So I learned that.

I try to be everything to everybody, but I know I can't do that. [The military] makes you believe that you are indestructible, and you will be there until the day that you die. But the case is, the mission is complete, they kick you out the door.

Now you're on your own….you have to change….I know that a college education is an important thing. Opens more doors for you.

Like my dad said…don't let people hold you down, don't let them tell you what you can’t do. He always reinforced that. Like if you fail, it's your own fault because you didn't try hard enough. You're smarter than that.

I am not too old, so I can start all over…I know it is going to be hard, but I can do it. My mother always told me, if you want to do it, you can do it. So I have this in mind.
Being torn away from the family, and trying to cope with going to school at night, and 12 hours of shift work, it was kind of hard. But I was determined because there's no one else in my family who was going to college….so I wanted to be the first to show everybody, hey, you know, I'm going to college….I was determined to get this degree.

**Past college experiences.** Some of the participants revealed how earlier college coursework prompted them to assess their abilities. A few readjusted their grade expectations based on their prior academic performance.

At first, I felt like I didn't fit in. Some of classes had five or six in my age group, and the rest were kind of young. And I was like, am I really here in the right place, or am I just too old to take these courses?

I work really hard to get a good grade. I don't feel like it comes natural for me, like other students get As and Bs. I worked very hard to get an A or B. I spend a lot of time, long hours and late nights, whatever. I'll settle for a C if it's really hard, but I always push to get an A or B in my classes.

I'm one of those, it's my memory. I take a test, and I go blank. I study and study, and when I take a test, it's all lost. And then when I walk out, I think, oh no, this question was this and this. It comes back to me. It was stress. I'm just not a good test taker.

[Grades] are the hardest part. I know when I first started, I had to settle for Cs. That's another thing--a hard-hit when you come here--you think you're going to get As and Bs….When I started, I had a 4.0 (laughs). Then you learn, I'll be happy to get a C (laughs). But you work hard.
I still talk to people and they are like yeah, I gotta B or I gotta C. That's not the way I think. And sometimes I worry myself too much or put too much pressure on myself. I do stuff over and over and over. But to me, I need to get that A. I don't know why. Sometimes certain things come up, and I won't be able to get the A, but most of the time, like I said, I'm able to get mostly As.

I'm not that good in math. I've had math. I need math to finish my degree and I'm not looking forward to it. But I know that if you have the mindset that you are not going to like something, you are not going to be good at it. I’ll have to change that.

I guess I never thought, I never felt, like it was a competition. I felt like others were trying to compete, you know (laughs) perhaps with me. I never felt like I had to compete. It was just me. I'm making myself happy and, okay, I can do this! I never thought I could.

Once I started going to school [and] started getting As, I thought, man, I can do this. I can do this. I think I’ve only had a couple of Bs the whole time. So I know I can do it.

I didn’t have any idea what GPA meant….I just did what I needed to do. I knew that I had to pass the test, and that there was an A, a B, a C, and a D, and get out of there. So if I had a high GPA, it did not matter to me or not.

It's been tough. The way I see myself is like a turtle. I'm going waaaaaay too slow, but I'm getting there. I’m getting there.

*Influence on current lifeworld.* In these next statements, the students describe how
their prior experience and personal biographies have helped them learn and make meaning of the real world, including their current life roles:

I didn’t have the drive or discipline….I needed something steady, and something that would keep me driven….I tell you, the first two or three years I hated [the military]. I was going to get out. I cursed it….[but] I was forced to deal with my issues and man up on everything.

I had an English teacher, who…always told me, you're going to be somebody someday. Don't let anybody turn you down, just keep doing what you're doing, and you’re gonna do good.

It's whatever is going on right now with Latino stereotyping. And like I tell my children, the only way you can fight back is by getting an education. You have to prove them wrong…. so that's an influence which is turning a negative into a positive.

I realize that when all the times I quit, I was giving up on myself. Who…[can] stand in front of your dreams? So you just get by and maybe not get a good grade, and you know could do better than that. But other people are control of your destiny, so you have to get by.

Psychosocial and Value Orientation

As shown above, one’s background serves to influence the development of psychosocial orientations and values. Donaldson and Graham (1999) explain that this dimension of the model includes the “various social conditions, the values, and the psychological motivations that influence adults’ abilities to learn and remain in college” (p. 29). This section extends the excerpts from their background histories. Here the
students describe the multiple--and sometimes intertwined--influences of their current lifeworld on their motivation, perception, persistence, and goals. The first set of excerpts help to illustrate how the students portray the multiple dimensions of this construct as it pertains to learning:

If you are in a middle-class or upper-class White family I believe there's a push [to get a college degree]. I'd say my family...is like a minority...because we have gotten degrees. If you don’t, you're really an outsider. But like in a Mexican family, I think it's the opposite. Emphasis is on work...if you decide to go to school you’re like an outsider. In an opposite kind of way, really, going against the grain.

I'm the one who is interested in a bachelor’s now. It's competitive. I've been [in the workforce] a while and I know how competitive it is.

I came to this country because I want to succeed....I can do something better here. I can give my kids a better life and more opportunities. And I can be a role example for them.

If [Hispanics] don't do something about getting educated...if the people or companies or schools are using it as an excuse that we are not educated enough to hold [management] positions...we are given opportunities like grants and services...so we can take courses to better ourselves.

Just be determined. Don't listen to negative things because those can bring us down. Just know what you want. Set your goals...and just do it. Because people are always going to be like, you can't do that. You cannot do it.....You just have to know what you want and that’s it....Look for the positive. There's already a
million negatives…we have to trust ourselves…e have to trust ourselves [and] believe in ourselves regardless. Sometimes the price is very, very high, but it's worth it.

The Model of College Outcomes for Adults also shows how students’ classroom experiences can interplay with psychosocial and value orientations.

When I first went to the school I was so excited and everything. But once I started math, I felt really stupid. My memory is not as good….So it was a struggle. It was a struggle. It was very demotivating.

The teacher that we had was expecting us to be the best--that we were in college, and we were adults. We were expected to know how to write. It was hard. I know people who go back to school and just say forget it, I'm not going to put up with this, I'll just drop it. And just not go back.

If you look around, you’ve got more students that look like you. I would think it would make you want to stay longer and do good.

In the classroom you have peer pressure. You don't wanna be the one asking the stupid questions. Or the teacher says something that makes you look stupid and everybody laughs and makes you feel like what ever. I just don't care anymore. If I need to know something, I raise my hand.

The students’ stories also illustrated how their current lifeworld (stress, external support, roles, work ethic, and expectations) can interact with the psychosocial and value orientation construct:

So I told [my husband], “Do not tell them that I'm going to school”…I hid [my college enrollment]. I noticed that some of my friends are the same way and they
are not Latinas. They were older, female, with family and a husband…. just being an older female. We are supposed to be home cooking and cleaning.

Now some of it is also my kids. They're old enough to see what's going on… when I get my bachelor’s, I want to make sure to walk on stage not so much for myself but I want my kids to understand where dad was going and how they can do it.

Adults’ Cognition

Another element of the model is adults’ cognition. Donaldson and Graham (1999) identified “three discrete forms of cognition: (a) declarative and procedural knowledge structures, (b) metacognitive or self regulatory processes, and (c) cognitive operations (e.g. accretion, transformation)” (p. 32). Cognitive processes are influenced by one's prior experience and personal biography. The model (Figure 8, page 184) shows how adults’ cognition can influence three different elements including psychosocial and value orientation, classroom experiences, and outcomes. In the center of the model, bidirectional arrows depict a dynamic classroom experience, where adults apply and shape their cognitive skills and psychosocial and value orientations.

Preferred learning methods. On several occasions, the participants touched upon their preferred learning styles, and revealed that they have learned how to learn. As their comments show, they employed the skills that worked for them in and out of the classroom.

I have to dedicate a lot of time to learning. You have to sit down and dedicate so many hours per credit hour. Regardless. I pay attention. I go there and sit down right in front, no distractions whatsoever. I try to get everything I can. It's hard.
I got frustrated again because of my English. It is a second language, so I still have problems. I have to use a dictionary a lot. It takes a longer time to do homework and to read a book. I read the books in advance. I prefer to get my books 2 weeks before the session begins because then I have time to read it.

[I am] a visual learner. I like to look. It's easier for me….so I take notes and look. That’s my learning. Because I have a lot of notes and review my notes. If I don't have notes, I am lost….I waste my time if I don't take notes.

*Declarative and procedural knowledge processes.* As a result of adopting or adapting their respective cognitive schemes, these students attempted to comprehend and retain new academic concepts in and out of the classroom. Procedural and declarative processes are closely intertwined and may occur simultaneously with or without metacognition.

[The instructor] was like, just remember everything. *Remember everything.* And he would not let us have little cheat card formulas. That would've helped us. We needed to memorize the formulas.

There's a lot to learn a lot in the classroom that is explained by the teacher. I understand the subject matter, but they also leave a lot of it for you to do the research. If you don't do the research, then you go to class, you won't know what's going on. You can't do one without the other. There might be one or two classes I felt was self-taught, like the teacher didn't even have to be there (laughs).

I kind of learn from the instructor. I can sit there and listen to a person talk for five hours and stay awake. And if you give me a test about what's gone on, I'll probably pass that test. But if you tell me to take this book and read the material
or take the online course, I'm going to be lost and not going understand it. I'm not going to be able to ask questions.

I took a few [courses] to learn how to teach. So that helped me as an adult learner….In fact, if I don't like the way a teacher teaches something, I can help myself. Sometimes I do have to rely on somebody else to give me the information, to bring it in another way around, so I can understand it.

I like journalism. Actually, almost too much. I’ve got stacks and stacks of newspapers and magazines. Somebody may see a *U.S. News and World Report*, and think, that's boring. For me, I'll probably read it cover to cover. You know. I find that interesting.

You *know* through what you see, what you hear, what you touch, and what you smell. That’s all. Then whatever you study and read in the books, that will explain what those senses are. Put it in writing. That’s mainly what it is….You can have a lot of information in your intellect, but the only way to *know*—to learn is one thing—but the only way to *know* is to put that into practice.

*Tutoring.* Two students hired tutors to help them learn new concepts. In the following excerpts, they described their initial fears and how tutoring facilitated both learning and motivation.

I had never taken algebra….I was scared, but the teacher was just great….Plus they had a tutor and I hired a tutor because it was a weak area for me. I ended up loving it.
For me, I looked at it as a competition. I looked at it as, I'm going to get this done and understand it….Before I went in there, I thought, oh God, am I going to pass this class? And I just tried, like I said, through tutoring….I thought it was great. I went to every session they had.

*Connecting Classroom*

Donaldson and Graham (1999), along with a few other scholars, described how adults use the *connecting classroom* as a “springboard for learning” (p. 30). As they explained it, the classroom offers many opportunities for students to make connections. First, because many adults work full time and attend college part time, they do not tend to engage in student activities, and the classroom becomes their “focal point” for learning experiences (p. 30). Second, when in the classroom, adult students are able to make connections with the instructor and other students. Third, when adults learn new concepts in the classroom, they are able to connect their newly acquired expertise to their lifeworld. In other words, they apply declarative and procedural knowledge at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Fourth, their classroom experiences may help them to reflect on their psychosocial and value orientations and prompt metacognition. These internal processes help students make meaning and connect their values and goals to their experiences in and out of the classroom. Finally, it is also possible that students make connections between declarative and procedural knowledge and their intended learning outcomes. The balance of this subsection is organized around those five dimensions of the *connecting classroom*, as described by Donaldson and Graham.
Many adults work full time and attend college part time, so they do not tend to engage in student activities. In the first selection of excerpts the participants discuss their engagement, focus, and impressions of college.

Like I said we had [a big] family. So I decided instead of going to school full-time, I would go to work full time and go to school part time. That way I could save money. I could pay for my school.

It's been hard but it's been worth it. Every single little bit. Every day I went to school…. I'm just going, even though I'm so tired after work. I’m like, I wonder what I'm going to learn today?

My mother-in-law said…just stick it out, you're going to pass. You just show up, you gotta be there. I realize that a lot of the other people in the classroom have this same mentality for whatever reason. Some of them may work harder than I do….I'm sticking it out, but I still wanna get an A.

I was pretty much afraid of everything! Back then, I was afraid because of my accent, so many things. Was I brave enough to face what I had to? The language. Math. All the basic skills. It was a completely different world than what I was used to. But everybody was so nice, so supportive. The counselors, the math tutors. Every little bit helped me and made me believe more than ever that I wanted to keep on going.

I know people who go back to school and just say forget it. I'm not going to put up with this and just drop it, and not go back. At that time it was the way it was being taught, and there was no help….The same embarrassment. The feeling that, I can't be treated this way…
Maybe I have too many things going on in my mind. Sometimes when I am in the classroom I am thinking about how are the kids. So my mind flies. They are okay. I need to be here. This is time, money, everything. So I need to focus. I try.

It’s really funny. At the same time, I’m writing proposals, working, doing research, whatever. But when I’m in the classroom, I’m a nobody (laughs). I love it! Because there I am, like, “What am I doing here?” I just want to get out of there.

I wrote a paper and sent it in, and they gave it back with a 66. I was so disheartened….Then I had to revise it. A friend of mine was visiting…[I said], “You have to help me do this paper. I’m dying here. I’m quitting that class.” I acted like a 7 year old. No worse. A 15 year old. Finally I finished the paper. It ruined my day…So I go back and ask [another student] what was on yours? “I got a 67.” That was ok, I said, I got a 66. “Oh. You got a B.” What do you mean? “A 66 out of 80.” Oh, okay. So, first read the assignment! (Laughs).

Another dimension of the classroom experience is the nature and scope of interactions, which includes the instructor-student relationship and student-to-student dynamics. First, a few excerpts on instructor interactions:

I guess I had, um, I think most of the teachers I had were pretty good…. I just did not like [one] instructor. The way he talked. The way he came across. He seems like a nice guy. I didn't think he realized it, it's just that sometimes when you ask a question, he made you feel stupid. And that's my only bad experience. That's the only instructor that I can think of right now, you know, that I really felt he doesn't give you straight answers sometimes when you ask a question. I don't know
whether it’s a matter of bad timing he was going through…(pause) I don’t know….I got through it. I ended up getting an A. I just, for some reason, did not care for the instructor.

My English teacher was awesome….she was talking nice about the students and the Mexicans….and that made me feel good. Made me feel welcome.

You give all you've got to paper, and then they give you a D. The teacher was, at the time, she treated us like kids. And she would say, you should know this, like we were idiots. I'm sorry for my language.

In [one class] it was like self study. He went over the syllabus and the class did everything. It was mostly lecture….And I was like, I could've put a recorder on this, and I could've listened to it, and done my homework. It was kind of boring…. the course needed to have more interaction….the course had too much information and we kind of breezed through it. You just had to rely on reading the material yourself.

In this last class, the teacher was very open….I have one classmate who is very racist. And [my teacher] told him, if you are going to work in this community, then you have to accept everyone. The teacher told him you're going to have to accept [diversity] even if you don't want it. And I liked that. I like that thinking. I thought it was good that the teacher told everyone that, because that's the reality.

Somewhat related to their interactions, the students also shared what they liked and disliked about instructor characteristics and teaching methods:
It's helpful when the instructors tell you what they're going to test on, and what to study.

And then, the literature. That was very demotivating because there was a lot of grammar. And the teacher that we had was not (pause) she was expecting us to be the best--that we were in college and we were adults. We were *expected* to know how to write, and grammar…it was hard.

There I am, a student, listening to the teacher and looking at those PowerPoints, and blah, blah, blah, blah. Wondering what I got on my test. Did I get a B? Whatever.

The individual style of some of the teachers (pause) sometimes they would come into the classroom with some kind of personal issue.

A lot of the teachers--the hard ones, the bad ones--they had knowledge like a computer chip up here [points to head] but they couldn't teach. They just didn't have the patience to focus on us.

Some of the instructors just feel like, okay, we spent too much time on chapters one, two, three…and now he rushes through eight through fourteen. And then yet, they want to test you on it. Why do they have to cover all of that?...It's just too much, especially if the instructor is falling behind with chapters and rushes through and you can't comprehend.

The college seems to have a lot of good instructors…. one of my instructors is a judge; another one teaches at [several colleges] and has written books.
Also under the umbrella of classroom connections are student-to-student interactions. Below are several comments that help to illustrate the nature of those interactions:

At least where I'm going to school, the classes are smaller, which I like. I was really surprised. There's only maybe 10 students, which is really, really good.

When I went to [another institution] it was great, but sometimes there were 400-500 students. When I compare that to [this institution], I have more interaction with the instructors and the students now. It is more like home. That makes me feel so good. So welcome.

I like to think we are offering a wealth of knowledge to younger students in the classroom.

We got along because we had a lot of interaction. Classroom projects. We had to do projects together. So there would be a couple of older and a couple of young, and we got to know each other. It was like a happy family.

When I start a class, I know some of them are going to discriminate. Like, there goes the Latino or Mexican. So when…I introduced myself, I say I am a Latina, but I am not Mexican. And every class I feel that discrimination.

Distinct from interaction were their observations about younger students in the classroom:

When taking the test, I noticed I was the last one. I had a great instructor for math. He was very patient and then I talked to him about it. He laughed and said, “Do not feel that. Some of these kids, the younger ones, walk out early because they
just don't finish the problems--they just leave them blank. Don't feel bad. You're doing your best. They're not.” After that, I didn't worry.

One thing that I did notice is cheating. It bothered me. At first it didn't because sometimes everybody needs a little bit of cheating, in order to pass the class. Then I realized I was up until three in the morning studying for a test, and somebody could easily cheat.

Adults apply their newly acquired expertise to their lifeworld--home, workplace, and community. These eight participants revealed a range of perspectives on how they connected new knowledge with their current life roles:

*I understand my kids now…. they would go to school and they would tell me things. Now I look back and think well, yeah. And I told my kids, “You're at their mercy. There's nothing they can do. Just follow the rules. You're at their mercy. Find out what they want and find out what they like, and what they don't like. And you be on their good side. There's nothing they can do. I think my influences are my children, and I'm not a quitter. And also I notice that we have another thing in common. We talk about school, work, and different issues, and me keeping up with them and they keeping up with me….They see me as a role model.

I've put in for a job change which was a little bit harder for me to get into because it involved [technology]. I had the scores for it….it worked out. I got the position….Schooling got me to where I knew I could do it if I applied myself and just put forth the effort.
I was going to rush to be done….but then I thought, why should I do that? I've already waited so many years, I can wait a few more months. I'm getting so into my job. I love to be dedicated. Focus on what I'm doing. Because if I try to do too much in both places, I'm not going to do anything. I tried that before. It doesn't work.

Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) graphical depiction of *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Figure 8, page 184) shows bidirectional arrows between the connecting classroom back to psychosocial and value orientations and cognitive processes. This group of excerpts illustrate nonlinear dynamics across the model from the classroom to the other constructs.

In the beginning I was little nervous that I didn't fit in. But then, after two or three classes, I began to know the students. I felt like a part of the team and that I was able to contribute. I did not feel any age difference at that time. In most groups I was the oldest one. I felt like the dad. But they all worked with me, and they respected me.

I also had…to do this speech in front of the class. I was scared….I didn't have my English, so I thought, oh my goodness, how can I do this? So I was talking slow in case the students did not understand me because of my accent…so I tried. It was a good experience. All of my classes were good experiences.

I learned to play the game. Like with certain instructors… they don't necessarily care about content, it’s like feeding their own ego….[but] now I know what she wants, so I’m more proactive. As soon as she gave a handout, I got in a group,
even though I'm more of a solo person. I don't trust anyone else's work, but I knew I had to get it over with.

Maybe one or two instructors… want to follow a strict regimen and they don't want to vary from the syllabus. They care what it looks like on them to follow the syllabus.

Most of them understand it from where we are sitting… they want more interaction so that you have an understanding and grasp the material. They're not necessarily wanting you to worry about… the test or paper, whatever. That's why I think I do so well. The teachers don't review the materials you need to pass, but they grade you on content of the interaction. So I think [those are the ones] with a little more understanding. I think that is why it's been a good experience for me.

Many of the students in accelerated programs described-- with mixed emotions-- the pressure of having to comprehend a considerable amount subject matter in a short amount of time.

Sometimes the only thing I don't like is when you have the midterm, and you have 12 or 13 chapters that you have to cover. That's a lot of material. You know, to try to study to keep up with homework, study, projects, or whatever you got going. It's just too much to try to read that many chapters and test on that many chapters. Why do they have to cover all of that? I don't know. I'm sure there's a reason. But it's just too much.

The reading portion is what really kicks my butt. [The instructor] wants you to read so many pages out of this book. And in a short period of time like eight weeks, you don't have a lot of time.
Going 16 weeks felt like forever to me….It was hard to adjust.

I like the eight-week crash. I like working under pressure. I've taken 16 week courses at [another college] and I don't do good in them. The eight-week courses, you get everything out of the way. You get your syllabus and you know what you are going to do. There's a test every other week. I just seem to work a lot better even though it's a five-hour class.

Finally, some students make connections between their classroom experiences to their intended outcomes and goals. Here are two examples:

I told my wife, I would like to be somebody in my community, like a precinct captain or somebody that when people have a problem they can come to me. But if you don't have a degree, you can’t get those opportunities, or they won’t look at you, because they don't think you're smart enough to make decisions or hold an office.

I know my English is not fluent, but I understand. Sometimes I have a problem talking to people. But if I don't practice, and if I don't read the books, and if I'm not there all the time, I'm not going to improve. I have to go to school to improve myself.

Lifeworld Environment

A unique feature of the Donaldson and Graham model (1999) is lifeworld environment. This element acknowledges the many roles that adults manage between family, work, and their community. As described by Donaldson and Graham, the lifeworld presents opportunities for adults to learn outside of the classroom as well as to
“construct meaning” with their newly acquired knowledge. The model shows how the lifeworld environment also contributes to learning outcomes for adults.

Reinforcing agents. One aspect of the lifeworld environment is “reinforcing agents that support adults returned to higher education” (p. 33). The authors concluded that “support not only is needed to return to higher education and persist but also is required for adults to make meaning from their concurrent experiences in school and out” (p. 33). The following participant quotes reflected some of their perceptions about reinforcing agents:

For us Latino women…we have to have the support of our husbands or it cannot be done….We women can do more than just cooking, doing the dishes, taking care of babies. We are smart! We just need a chance and we just need support. Go from there. It can be done.

When I told him about college he said OK, but he never supported me….Because I think if I would have had more support, I would have started back then….So I didn't feel that support, he was busy all the time. Working, working, working. So I took care of everything….He is Latino and Latino men are that way….They do the work, they bring the money. The woman has to do the rest.

My daughter….went for her bachelor's. And that was influential because I thought if she could do it I can do it. She couldn't just have her bachelor's, I have to have one too! And then I could see she was like, “Mom, I'm so proud of you because you decided to go back to school for your bachelor’s.” Because I always taught her, “When you start something, I want you to finish. I don't want you to quit.”
I have a hard time when (pause) I was telling my wife that I have this girl in my group, and we are meeting in the library with other students. Sometimes I feel like my wife might be jealous or something because I'm meeting with (pause) most of my classes, believe it or not, there are more females than there are males.

*Financial realities.* Another theme in Chapter 4 was family finances and the need for financial support. Here the students again discuss the financial realities of their lifeworld environment.

It was always my dream to earn a degree. In [my country] I just couldn't do that. We were too many kids--financial issues--not enough money.

Another thing about the college that I chose, is that it’s not so expensive….I remember looking at the other schools before deciding on this one and they were just outrageous. I think some of them just try to suck you in. They are trying to make money. They are pricey.

Then I got a job… they told me if I wanted to go back to school they could give me some money for tuition. So I told [my husband] I'm not going to lose this opportunity. I was waiting for this opportunity for a long time.

I never forgot about my children and being a wife and mother… I told him, “I'm trying to bring in more money, so you need to pick up your plate, cook sometimes when you're off”…But he didn't like that. He said, “Why do I have to do this? You are my wife.”
I spent about a year there working…and they started asking people if they wanted to go into [a program] that will pay for schooling…so I applied and they accepted me.

I tried to get enrolled in school…. then I got my second daughter and it was even harder. I had to stay home with the babies and help with the financial. I stayed home with my daughter, and I got a job at a church. I got a job housekeeping.

My daughter went to a [community college] because of a scholarship program, but didn't like that. And I'm sorry, but it's true, discrimination is everywhere. A lot of her classmates were from a rural areas, so she felt like discrimination was there. She said, “I want to go to the city.”

**Priorities.** Several of the students noted that at times their family or lifeworld took precedence over college. Others described how their need to care for family caused them to cut back on the number of credit hours they were pursuing in a given semester or session. Their stories also illustrated how they managed concurrent life roles.

I planned that I was going to be done by the end of December. Well, it's not going to happen. Like we say, sometimes there's other priorities. Like I said, there were ups and downs.

There were days [when] I could not get out of bed.... and I did not want to take a chance of going to school and fail, or miss the class. Hardly. So I guess my medical condition would be part of the negative things….But then I started feeling (pause) when you're in that state (pause) you feel like you're worthless.
I took classes for a year. Then I went back on and off. I would take a class, but then, my kids were young and my boys were still in school. They were involved in school activities and sports.

He was feeling guilty, so I stopped thinking about college because I didn't want him to feel guilty. So I worked like him so we could be on the same level.

I wanted to do other activities like bowling, hunting, and fishing. And one class I had problems with…I failed twice….My wife said, you are going to have to drop all of your other activities, because you can't do everything all at one time. So I dropped all my activities and I got an A. I felt pretty good about that.

I started going to school in the evenings. I made arrangements for babysitters. I worked, I drove to school every day. Do homework, stay up late.

I would study for class in the morning. Then at noon--I used to take my sandwich every day--I didn't drive, so I had to take the bus. I took my child to day care. I dropped her off every day, then I walked to the school. I stayed there from 8:30 to 3:30 every day….After lunch, I listened to tapes and did my homework. Then I would pick up my daughter at the day care and ride the bus back home.

My big issue with school was probably family. Taking care of my husband and taking care of my kids. Even though they were older, they still needed my support because they were in high school and elementary school.

Outcomes

The sixth construct of *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) is college outcomes, which can include changes in students’ knowledge,
attitude, emotional development, and/or behavior. Outcomes can be intentional or unintentional as well as positive or negative. Donaldson and Graham cited literature that suggests how adults differentiate between various types of learning (e.g., academic knowledge, application to work and world, or that which benefits society.) They also allowed that adult students define the term *outcome* in a variety of ways. The following excerpts illustrate multiple perspectives on those points.

I have gained so much confidence in myself. I have learned how to deal with people all over the world, which I think is very important. I have learned so many things, that it would be hard to explain. But confidence is one of them.

The big difference is I'm not as shy. Definitely when I first started out, I did not speak up as much….I think I'm a little more confident. I guess that comes with being an older adult. Maybe too, from reading so much. Not a “know it all,” but knowing more than I did before.

It's learning about yourself. Developing and learning about yourself and how you learn….because [now] I don't care what anybody thinks. I don't care whether you like me or not. I don't care. When you go through high school, it's all about image… now I am in school because I *want* to. I have goals. I wanna get done, and I'm not having a bad time doing that.

Back then I was afraid because of my accent…so many things….it was hard, very hard, to leave the kids instead of staying at home and watching the movie. Going out in the cold, when it is winter. All of the little things are tough. But when I look back, I'm glad I did it. I am so glad.
I want to give something back to the community, as well as my kids. I want to show them, if I can do it, it's open to everybody, everybody can do it....And with me being bilingual, I am able to help a lot of people get better jobs or a better life. Now I am starting to think more about like, what's taking place in my life, and the things I'm interested in….maybe one that would have an impact--like with immigration.

Once I have my degree, I'm hoping that I can get a management position. And I'm hoping that I can create programs, or figure out a way I could be part of the political community that can set up programs in the community that will help not only Hispanics, but other nationalities. You can't be one-sided.

It's my dream. It's something I've always wanted. And I know that it's already opening a lot of doors…even though I still don't have the degree….Every single time you move up, it's going to open doors….The more we know... it's always going to be like discovering a new world. I just love to learn.

I've changed my thinking. I told my family, don't hate other people. I am proud of people who come to this country to study in this country and go back to work for the school or whatever. You have to accept people. Be nice. Because when you think that way, you think everybody thinks that way. And I don't think that way. I think that there are people like that because they don't know there's another world out there. They only believe in their own world. And I used to think that way, too.

Some of the other outcomes participants identified included (a) two of the Latinas indicated they are “treated good” and “more positive” at home and in the workplace; (b)
six of the participants indicated that they would pursue a master's degree; and (c) seven described motivating their children and/or siblings to enroll in college.

Discussion

In Chapter 2, I reported that Donaldson and Graham's (1999) conceptual model had not been tested fully. At the time I was especially concerned about the connecting classroom component. Specifically, I wanted to learn about the experiences of older Latino\'a students in predominantly white college classrooms--to understand their realities. The purposes of this discussion section are to (a) interpret the students’ stories using the framework of A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) and (b) illuminate the interactions across the model based upon what I have learned from these Latino\'a undergraduates.

During the interviews I began to appreciate the dynamic and nonlinear nature of adult learning and outcomes. The participants’ stories tended to be circular, rather than sequential. For example, when talking about classroom experiences, some of the students returned to their personal histories to make connections, while others talked about psychosocial values or their life roles. At the time of the interviews, this did not occur to me, as I was absorbed in their experiences and constructions. It was not until I initiated the secondary level of data interpretation did I begin to understand the importance of viewing them holistically.

When I began to write, I attempted to capture their growth and development. I wanted to accurately reflect the ebb and flow of their goals, motivation, perceptions, and values. But when I attempted to follow the circular patterns of their stories, I found that my writing lacked clarity. This was highly problematic for me. My writing aim was to
share their stories without filtering their voices. I also possess an implicit sense of obligation to the participants to reach a broader audience with their stories. Therefore, I decided that some structure to this discussion section could facilitate teaching and learning. This is the premise from which I approached this chapter’s discussion section. I have no desire to use *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* to pigeonhole ideas, explain experiences, or create theories. Instead, I am using the model as a tool to organize the flow of this discussion and provide a visual anchor to facilitate learning. It is my hope that the reader will still be able to hear the participants’ voices and appreciate the powerful influences of their pivotal moments and epiphanies, as they shared them with me.

*Prior Experience and Personal Biographies*

Donaldson and Graham (1999) described how adults have “fertile and abundant” (p. 34) experiences that influence their cognition, psychosocial and value orientation, and lifeworld environment. The personal histories and educational journeys of these eight students are rich in detail, showing how both barriers and achievements significantly shaped their constructions and self-efficacy. In the first group of excerpts (pp. 186-188), the students shared how their past educational, familial, and lifeworld experiences influenced their present attitude and motivation. Several of the participants mentioned the need to learn English, improve verbal skills (e.g., “Tarzan”), and lose their accents. This theme re-emerged during their classroom stories. I previously mentioned (Chapter 4) that Luis and I engaged in reflective interpretation about elementary school experiences and how many of the characteristics we possess as adults can be traced back to disheartening experiences we faced as young children. Sofie described similar feelings. Luis and I had
suffered the shame and guilt of being placed in a classroom of slower learners because we were labeled as being academically behind our peers. We felt that our competitive nature as adults stemmed from those early years of striving for academic excellence. This group of excerpts revealed similar themes of self-reliance, goals, motivation, and determination.

Included in the participants’ background stories were observations and constructions about their previous collegiate experiences, which I included in the second group of excerpts (pp. 188-189). From these quotes, one begins to see how adults assess their past performance and relate that to their potential performance, just as Donaldson and Graham (1999) explained. Six of the eight students were focused on grades. Initially they expected to earn As and Bs, and when each received a C, it was a bit of a shock. It is highly interesting to examine how they internally processed the lower-than-anticipated-grade. All of the students reported that they will continue to (a) work hard and (b) attempt to get all As or As and Bs. However, two of the students re-examined the standards they had set for themselves and made a concession that they could “settle” or “be happy” with a C--especially if it was a “hard” course. Another student (contrasting himself to other students who accepted Bs and Cs) acknowledged that “certain things come up,” and earning an A is not always possible. While the students seem to be redefining their performance goals, none of them indicated that the lower-than-anticipated-grade made them feel inept or that they would be unable to get As in the future. Even those who had expressed self-doubt about their abilities due to language, age, lack of math skills, or memory, at no time expressed that a lower grade made them doubt their potential to earn As.
One student told me the assignment of grades was not meaningful and stated that he never paid attention to his grades. In fact, he told me that when learned he was on the Dean's List and eligible for a scholarship, he had to inquire “what it meant to be ‘on the Dean's list.’” When I offered my congratulations about his academic achievements, he shrugged his shoulders and repeated that grades did not really matter to him. As he explained it, he is in college to learn so that he can ultimately help other people. What matters to him is how he can be of service and how he might make a difference in the world. Critical postmodernism helps me to understand the context of his values and appreciate his differing reality. Grades are not symbolic or tangible to his learning effort or educational outcomes; he has rejected the dominant ideologies about the purpose of a college education.

In the third group of excerpts (p. 190), we see how the participants’ backgrounds “influence the valuation and the use of “their current lifeworld environments, which in turn helps them to “make meaning of their experiences in college” (Donaldson & Graham, 1999, p. 29). Based on their past experiences, these students developed philosophies and filters that they use to survive, persist, and achieve in the world around them. In some cases, they talked about parents or mentors who gave them words of encouragement that remains with them to this day. For these students, it is clear that past life events have shaped their perception of their current life roles.

In previous scholarship on A Model of College Outcomes (Donaldson & Graham, 1999), the strength and significance of identity, culture, and ethnicity have not been fully explored, a trend also noted in the literature about adult learning (Merriam, 2001). Thankfully, scholars who contribute to the broader adult education knowledge base seem
to be moving rapidly in that direction. From the stories of these participants, we are beginning to learn how three dimensions of their personal biographies--identity, culture, and ethnicity--can serve as a filter or layer through which these participants perceive, navigate, or negotiate their lifeworld.

Psychosocial and Value Orientation

As described above, adults’ prior experiences directly influence their beliefs, perceptions, norms, and values. The excerpts listed in this section help us to better understand their unique and diverse orientations, and how this element of the model is interconnected with cognition, the college classroom, and their lifeworld. Within the first group of excerpts (pp. 191-192), the students discuss barriers, stereotypes, and situations that have shaped their attitude toward learning. In Chapter 4, some of the students’ constructions are similar.

Overall, I believe this cluster of meanings suggests that psychosocial and value orientations can spring from their class, work, ethnic, and family environments. Further, that for some of these students, their social class, work, and ethnicity intersect, and it is at this junction where additional orientations to learning emerge. One example, that also illustrates the social construction of knowledge, was the shared belief of four students that a college education “opens doors” and “is the key” (their words) for Latino\as to achieve a better life, higher paying job, and representation in the community. The discourse is also revealing in this sense: many of the participants refer to “us” and “the people” rather than talk in the first person about experiences, goals, and voice. I am beginning to believe that my Eurocentric lens is quite egocentric, and that I have much to learn about people from other races and cultures.
The second group of excerpts in this section (pp. 192) shows how students make meaning of their classroom experiences, and how those constructions shape psychosocial and value orientations. Donaldson and Graham (1999) identified this interaction with bidirectional arrows between the connecting classroom and psychosocial and value orientation (Figure 8, page 184). Here, one student described entering the classroom excited about learning, but in “struggling” and “feeling stupid,” found the experience “demotivating.” Another student described not wanting to “look stupid,” but had set aside fears in order to learn. Their realities appear quite different. One student is internalizing the problem and blames it on memory, while the other attributes this to “peer pressure” and external perceptions. Embedded in all three of the comments is the role of the teacher. From two of them we infer that the teacher played a direct role in shaping their self-efficacy. With the third comment, the instructor’s role is less clear, but later in the interview, this participant stated the class was “demotivating” because of “the way it was being taught.” Alarmingly, one student observed that other students had left college because of the instructor. Together these stories help us challenge the assumption that classroom experiences always shape values and strengthen student motivation to learn in a positive sense. These voices tell us that classroom experiences can also yield just the opposite effect. Beginning on page 224, I extended my discussion about the participants’ classroom experiences, where clusters of meanings emerged about teacher expectations, characteristics, and methods. Overall, the participants’ observations offer us insight as to how they experienced and interpreted these college classrooms interactions.

The influence of family is prominent in the lives of these eight Latinos, as extant body of literature attests. At numerous points in the interviews, the participants returned
to stories about their parents, siblings, and children, revealing the multi-faceted contexts, constructions, tensions, and contradictions that postmodernism allows. For example, in the last group of excerpts (p. 192-193), the Latinas described balancing the tensions between their husband’s role expectations and serving as a role model for their children. Earlier in this section, one person described how college learning created an insider-outsider tension in the family, as well as with other Latinos.

The final excerpts of this section also show the interconnection of a student’s lifeworld environment, college attendance, and socio-cultural norms and values. Especially poignant: How all of the Latinas were determined to complete college and had persisted across decades to do so, despite a lack of support from their husbands and other male family members. Instead, the Latinas refused to allow patriarchal dominance to become an absolute ultimatum, and continued with studies while trying to sustain gender assigned duties at home. One Latina coped with male harassment by hiding her college enrollment. Two of the other Latinas described having the freedom to return to college after their divorce, but both also pointed out that it was more financially difficult to do so.

Of the four Latinas, it was the oldest one who hid her college enrollment. The others were eight to ten years younger. She was the only one who identified how her age, gender, and ethnicity intersect; it is here her life role tensions reside. However, a few sentences later, she reinterprets role expectations as being a cross-cultural phenomenon. Since I was about the same age, and had experienced the same type of gender assignments and lack of support, I agreed with her that this is not exclusive to Latino culture. But when critically thinking about her reinterpretation, I wondered if she was
concerned about how her “cultural” comment sounded to me and perhaps that I would perceive Latino males in a negative light.

Overall, these excerpts illustrated Donaldson and Graham's (1999) point that the elements of the model are not necessarily discrete, and that the interactions are dynamic rather than static. Using the model to better understand the oldest Latina’s experience, we can see a cyclic, nonlinear pattern of how her initial values led her to pursue a college degree, but she lacked familial support. Her participation challenged her to balance her roles, which influenced her college attendance patterns. When she attended classes, she was harassed by male family members, who held differing norms and values about life roles and the need for college. As a coping mechanism, she hid her college attendance. In essence, pressure about her life roles trumped her goal to complete college in a timely fashion. Her values (and actions) changed from overt to covert.

*Adults’ Cognition*

This construct, adults’ cognition, is grounded in the voluminous body of literature on adult learning theories. Within the scope of this study, it would be an impossible task to try to reinterpret the students’ stories through one or more of those theories. (That was never my intent, but I recognize that mid-level theories hold potential for future study.) Instead, in this section I will discuss cognitive processes in a very broad sense, referring to what the students told me in order to help illustrate my interpretations.

Middle-aged adults bring with them decades of lessons learned from real world experiences. In Donaldson and Graham's (1999) words, they have a “complex cognitive schema, rich with previous knowledge and experience [that] generally allows them to connect new information to something they have already experienced” (p. 32).
Collectively, the excerpts I clustered in this section are congruent with Donaldson and Graham’s point that adults’ prior experience prepares them for future learning. As I anticipated, schemas are as unique as the individuals.

I subtitled the first selection of excerpts preferred learning methods (pp. 193-194), because the students related their study skills to their learning processes. Although they did not attach their comments to specific academic content, they are revealing that they know how to learn. For example, several of the students described time management skills, including how they block specific periods in each day to study and complete homework assignments. One student made extensive use of a dictionary while studying, to improve comprehension. For this student, the challenge of learning English concurrent to academic content meant that additional time had to be dedicated to studies. Other students shared similar comments about the mechanics of studying and learning. It is unclear whether they acquired their skills through trial and error, reflection, or upon the advice of others. Yet, at the time of the interviews, all seemed confident that they knew how to make use of resources and apply study skills both in and out of the classroom. Many seemed to believe that the quality of their formal classroom learning is contingent upon the time and effort they dedicated to learning outside of the class. However, as the section on connecting classroom will show, several participants assessed their classroom learning and experiences solely on their perceptions of instructor performance. In Chapter 6, I use their candid disclosures to identify practice implications for adult educators.

The second group of excerpts is organized under the broad umbrella of declarative and procedural knowledge (pp. 194-195). Beyond their study skills, the students also shared multiple viewpoints on cognitive processes including memorization,
the “banking method” of learning (Freire, 1972), declarative and procedural knowledge, and metacognition.

Perhaps not apparent in these quotes, yet clear to me during the interviews, was the theme of self-study. In fact, they attributed so much of their learning to self-study, that I asked many of them a follow-up question such as, “For you, how does learning occur—in the classroom, through self-study, or in other ways?” One said self-study, but later said “both classroom and self-study.” The others I asked said it was about “50/50” between classroom and self-study. My resulting impression was that they faithfully completed homework, but relied heavily on their instructors as a key source of knowledge for understanding concepts. Further, based on their comments across all constructs of the model, I felt that they valued what they learned from instructors over their knowledge gains from self-study. Kasworm (2003a) would label these students as having an entry voice. Another example of metacognition was unique. After completing a teaching methods course, one student described how he reflected on his newly acquired knowledge as it pertained to his own learning style and academic needs. As a result, he said he now better understands himself as an adult learner and is able to help himself learn. However, he was quick to point out that he “sometimes” needed an instructor to explain concepts further. Later in the interview, he placed more emphasis on learning from the instructor and any other form of knowledge acquisition, but I do not want that to overshadow what he learned through metacognition. For me, contradictions in his story help to represent the postmodern claim that meaning making is both contextual and fluid.

Citing Lave and Wenger (1991), Donaldson and Graham (1999) described in-class and out-of-class contexts for learning. The two students with military training
described numerous instances of learning from real-life experiences, particularly as a result of living in countries outside of the U.S. (specific quotes are not included). They shared how their experiences had helped them mature, acquire new perspectives, build depth and breadth in their technical knowledge, and create life lessons for future learning.

Another student valued learning from his senses and for him, true knowledge resulted from praxis. At multiple points during the interview this student offered examples of how he “learned with [his] hands” through his diverse life experiences. When this student studies, he prefers books and journal articles written by those with vast first-hand experience in the real world, otherwise, “they don’t know what they are talking about.” As example, he said rather than discussing the poverty in El Salvador, it is more important to fly to that country in order to observe the ramifications of poverty. “Then you will understand,” he said. For this student, college is a means to an end, merely a step he must complete before he can commence with his life’s mission. I do not intend for this to sound judgmental or negative, but am noting his unique perspective among the participants. However, Kasworm (2003a) would label this student as having an outside or cynical voice, or both.

One student shared how he enhanced his learning by reading newspapers and magazines such as *U.S. News & World Report*. In fact, at several points during the interview, he talked about current events, and was especially interested in immigration issues. He demonstrated that he had reflected on what he had learned, and was the only student to describe this type of cognitive processes outside of the classroom. This is an example of what Kasworm (2003a) called the adult student straddling voice.
Finally, as it pertained to adults’ cognition, Donaldson and Graham (1999) summarized findings from the literature that showed how older adults “attempt to comprehend the meaning of material rather than…reproduce material for the purposes of academic assessment” (p. 32). I am not certain that this statement is wholly applicable to several of the students. First, as discussed earlier, half of these participants were highly focused on grades. Second, several described wanting to memorize content, and that they wanted guidance from the instructor about the specific questions that would be listed on examinations. Another participant did not understand why an instructor would not allow “cheat sheets” during examinations. Third, during our conversations the students did not describe how they attempted to make meaning of material beyond trying to grasp overall concepts in order to “pass a test.” That is not to say that they do not make meaning of material, only that they did not discuss the process extensively during the interviews. The exceptions were the three students who worked in social service-related disciplines, who seemed (at times) to be moving toward Kasworm’s (2003a) inclusion voice.

The final two excerpts in this section pertained to tutoring (p. 195-196). Several students described using tutoring services, but I selected these comments because they also help us understand the interaction between cognitive processes, values, and motivation. Both of these students expressed initial doubts about passing college algebra, yet remained motivated to learn. At considerable personal expense, both hired tutors, and one attended additional tutoring offered by the college. Through tutoring, they were able to understand the academic content better, but, importantly, their self-efficacy also improved. In other words, through cognitive processing, their fears and anxiety diminished, and both students felt highly motivated to learn. I clustered these comments
separately because I feel they have important implications for adult educators, which I discussed in Chapter 6.

Connecting Classroom

My original questions about the *connecting classroom* were prompted by the literature relative to the collegiate experiences of African American students, primarily women, who shared instances of overt and covert discrimination in the classroom. I could not comprehend how “connecting” a classroom could be for students who had been marginalized or those who felt that Eurocentric curricula did not meet their needs. My challenge to the model was fueled by the fact that the researchers did not interview students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds about their classroom experiences. It also appeared that the literature from the 1990s, referenced by Donaldson and Graham (1999) to develop their model, was primarily (if not exclusively) based upon the experiences of White, non-Hispanic adult students. Obviously, the literature nurtured some bias in my thinking, but it also helped me to frame my research questions.

The Latino/as who participated in this study with me offered considerable detail about their classroom experiences. Bolstered by my postmodern mindset, I am comfortable sharing these divergent constructions without assessing whether or not the concept of a connecting classroom or Kasworm’s (2003a) voices are meaningful to these (or other) adults from underrepresented groups. Rather, what was (is) important to me (and, as it turned out, also for these participants) was that I tried to understand how they experienced the college classroom, and shared what I learned in an effort to inform future practice. My discussion of their stories circles five facets of the connecting classroom, including (a) the classroom as center stage; (b) interactions with the instructor and other
students; (c) application of newly acquired expertise to their lifeworld; (d) connections to psychosocial and value orientations and cognitive processes; and (e) linking classroom learning to intended outcomes.

*The classroom as center stage.* Many adults work full time, attend college part time, and do not fully participate in student activities. For these and other reasons, scholars have surmised that the classroom becomes a “focal point” for their learning experiences (Donaldson & Graham, 1999, p. 30). From the perspectives of these eight students, we learn that realities vastly differ among students and can be in sharp contrast to some of the conclusions reported in the literature. I clustered the first selection of excerpts (pp. 197-198), under *engagement, focus,* and *impressions of college.* These eight Latino students held diverse perspectives about of their collegiate experiences. The first two quotes are from students who are employed full-time in support of their families. I have long believed that the nontraditional label has a negative connotation and is one example of the nature of our discourse: We tend to center on a norm, and everyone else is Other. In this case, the traditional-nontraditional dichotomy has been redefined, but comparisons and contrasts are persistent in the literature. As Donaldson et al. (2004) concluded, older students should be viewed holistically. For example, the second person described feeling extremely tired after the end of a full day, yet remained highly motivated to attend evening classes. Thus, as I reinterpreted their stories, I began to see their basic needs, paternal instincts, work ethic, and values associated with work and community. Despite full time employment, these students persisted with studies. They should not be unjustly depicted as nontraditional or Other, but valued in their own right.
For the person who is highly motivated to attend class after a long day of work, it seems that the classroom is making a connection. In comparison, the third person, who is also employed full-time, depicts college as a means to the end. Specifically, he told me that he has adopted his mother-in-law's philosophy just to “stick it out” and he will eventually complete college. Attending courses is a task or a chore that he needs to complete, and he seemed to equate the succession of classes to an endurance test, rather than as a focal point of his learning. He is an example of Kasworm’s (2003a) entry voice.

Still another perspective is the student who looks at college more broadly and credits both in and out of the classroom experiences as contributing to learning and motivation—Kasworm’s straddling voice. No interpretation of the fourth excerpt is necessary: This student explicitly states that the classroom was a disconnect for some students, and they departed college as a direct result of experiences in the classroom. As Carlos pointed out in Chapter 4, a large number of Latinos leave college and we should learn more about their reasons for doing so. He’s right. Numbers do not teach us about the multiple reasons students leave college. While qualitative study is time consuming, it helps us achieve better understanding and moves us toward the possibility for change. Because these adult students have already left college, we have missed another opportunity to learn about their realities. It is a moment that cannot be recaptured.

In the final comment of this section, two students describe being physically in the class, but mentally distracted by thoughts of family or work. The classroom is not so “focal” for these students, who tried to redirect attention back to learning. I also have to admit to my gender bias: it was a woman who was distracted by thoughts of her children. She is trying to stay connected in the classroom, but her life remains centered on her
home and family. Because I had been a working single parent in college, I identified with her attempts to stay engaged. Her story was insightful to me because it challenged my tendency to interpret the term connecting strictly as Donaldson and Graham (1999) had defined it. The other student claimed to be a “nobody,” but asserts he is comfortable with that role in the classroom. However, the invisibility he feels, and his desire to escape, should cause us concern as adult educators. His position prompts me to question if Kasworm’s (2003a) voice labels (e.g., outside, cynical, straddling) are at apt or just.

These perspectives and labels help to demonstrate how students’ realities can differ vastly from what researchers and instructors envision. While scholars acknowledge some tension between the classroom and life roles, they need to challenge their old assumptions and grand narratives about adult learning and accept that some students do not ascribe to dominant White, Eurocentric ideologies. The participants’ voices tell us that the classroom could be a focal point for some, but not for all. Further, negative sounding labels based on ideologies can depict adult students as marginal or needy, and that simply may not be the case.

Interactions with the instructor and other students. Another dimension of the connecting classroom is the nature of the instructor-student relationship and student-to-student interactions. While these adults talked about their instructors and other students, they tended to label their classroom experiences as “good” or “bad” based on their satisfaction with each instructor’s organization, teaching methods, level of support, and understanding of their educational needs. In fact, one student attributed the only “bad experience” to the instructor. Gravitating for a moment to more positivistic language, this interpretation is highly consistent with Donaldson and Graham's (1999) writings about
the criticality of the instructor-student relationship. During the interviews, only one student talked about contact with the instructor outside of the classroom, and that was in the context of how institutional size can reduce access to instructors.

In the group of quotes about instructor interactions (pp. 198-199), one student reported how the classroom experience was welcoming because the teacher spoke well of Mexicans. Another participant described how a teacher had confronted racism. I was pleased that these instructors seemed to be culturally sensitive, but was left wondering if other instructors had made disparaging remarks or simply ignored cultural diversity altogether. Unfortunately, these were not the only students to imply teacher biases. Conversely, several students reported satisfaction in a classroom because they felt “welcome” or “at home.” When discussing class projects, another student described feeling “like family” with younger students. My interpretation is that the students’ psychosocial and value orientations intersected with their perceptions and constructions about classroom experiences. Due to their strong ties to family--and familismo--analogies of the classroom feeling like home are understandable. These students are connecting their positive feelings about family and home with positive experiences in the classroom. Collectively, their considerable attention to classroom climate--connecting or not--has several implications for educators, which are listed in Chapter 6.

The next group of excerpts (pp. 199-200) illustrated other ways in which instructors’ characteristics and teaching methods might fail to connect with students. Specifically, most of the participants wanted their instructors to have variability in teaching methods and more interaction in the classroom. Many--too many--of these students revealed that their instructors “made them feel stupid,” or “treated them like
kids.” Others discussed a concern with accelerated course delivery when instructors did not spend enough time teaching and “breezed through” content. Several of these themes reappear in other sections of this chapter. For example, students revealed multiple realities about instructors’ characteristics and teaching methods. Beyond the themes noted above, they also talked about instructor expectations, methods, ability, credentialing, and bringing “personal issues” into class. Their voices are telling us why they are able to connect with some, but not all, of their instructors.

Also from their stories about self-study: Three of the participants said that when the only method of delivery is lecture or a “canned PowerPoint presentation,” then self-study became the primary means of learning the course content and preparing for exams. One student felt that one or two classes were entirely “self-taught, like the teacher didn't even have to be there.” Another one indicated that if lecture was the only method used, then it was just as easy to set up a tape recorder and take the presentation home, rather than sit through class. They also voiced frustration when instructors did not help them learn and resorted to additional self-study when they felt an instructor lacked clarity. Donaldson and Graham (1999) noted these types of self-regulatory processes are brought about by metacognition. The researchers also pointed out how students combine processes (self study, classroom experience, and instructor interaction) to enhance learning. This interaction is represented by the bidirectional arrows between the connecting classroom and adults’ cognition elements of the model (Figure 8, page 184).

The next selection of quotes (p. 201) encompasses student-to-student interactions, which occurred primarily with small group projects in and out of the classroom. Donaldson and Graham (1999) identified how adults “adapt to multiple communities of
practices” including at school, home, work, and in the community. As it pertains to college, a few of the students described positive experiences. In contrast, most of the students did not like their small group experiences, but offered different reasons why:
One person wanted to avoid the risk of discrimination, one was afraid that language would be a problem, and another indicated it was too hard to place trust in someone else's work. Another student, who reported a positive experience, portrayed a very different perspective. He initially anticipated that his age might be a barrier for younger students i.e., that they would not be able to relate to him. Contrary to his assessment, his first group project was a success and he felt that he had earned the respect of the younger students who recognized his knowledge and skills. This student, and a few others, noted teaching and learning in settings outside of the classroom, including at work and in the community.

The last two comments of this section (p. 201-202) are clustered separately because participants shared their observations about younger students, rather than their interactions with them. To some degree, their comments reflect distinctions about age and comparisons with younger college students. In the first case, the student believed that the younger students were performing better, and talked to the instructor who dispelled that assumption. The second comment pertained to cheating, but the observation contains a contradiction. On one hand, the student indicates being troubled by cheating but then acknowledges that “everybody needs a little bit of cheating in order to pass the class.” The student never admits to academic dishonesty. Upon further reflection, the student decides that cheating is not fair because of a disparity of effort between those who study and those who cheat. Frankly, I mentally framed it as an ethical issue and attempted to
engage in reflective interpretation. In response to my query, the student simply responded with, “I don’t know why they cheat.”

Application of newly acquired expertise to their lifeworld. A third facet of the connecting classroom represents how adults apply procedural and declarative knowledge to their lifeworld (pp. 202-203). The excerpts from the first two students showed that they have somewhat different constructions, but both focused on their children. One reflected on classroom experiences, but did not disclose what happened or cognitive processing of events. What we can see are the influences on her psychosocial orientation, and that she applied her knowledge and constructions to guide her children's behavior. The second student's comments were similar to most of the other participants. The connection with their children is at two levels. For those with older students in high school or college, their student status gives them a common ground. They also believe they are role models for hard work, perseverance, and college goals. I included these quotes because they also illuminate the dynamics of the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model (Figure 8, page 184). In this case, the students revealed how their classroom experiences interacted with their life roles, which in turn, influenced their values and motivation.

While the third student shared similar views about his children, he also used newly acquired skills and knowledge for job advancement. Several of the students also talked about how they would apply their expertise in the workplace and many hoped that some type of a promotion would be the result. Earlier, we also learned that these participants are pressed to compete in the workplace and recognize that many jobs require advanced degrees. I interpreted their meanings in two ways. First, that they remained highly oriented to their work settings and believed that a bachelor’s degree will
offer them job security. Second, that they retained a strong work ethic that has been passed down for generations. Earlier I offered a more critical analysis of their stories as it related to their perceptions of work. There I questioned if family economics and capitalist ideologies promoted a form of hegemony in our labor force (see Chapter 4).

The last excerpt in this section offered yet another perspective that merits close attention. This person described the tensions between lifeworld and college, and is comfortable focusing on one or the other, but not both. The value of quality over speed comes through. Although another student also described trying to do too much and not excelling at either college or work, that student continued to simultaneously manage both roles. In contrast, this student refused to make a concession on quality in either role, and for now, chose to focus on work and deferred her degree attainment to another semester.

*Connections to psychosocial and value orientations and cognitive processes.* In the next section of comments (pp. 203-204) I found clusters of meanings similar to what I have already discussed. This group of excerpts shows how students’ classroom experiences gave them self-confidence and motivation as well as influenced their declarative and procedural knowledge processes. In the first two statements, both of the students express initial self-doubts, yet both pushed themselves in ways they hadn't before, which resulted in “good experiences.” One student was concerned about age and the other about articulation. Both had to confront their fears by interacting with other students, and their self efficacy soared.

On the surface, the next student appears jaded about classroom experiences, but in reality, has learned some of the academy’s implicit norms. During the interview, I discovered that this is the second time he enrolled in this same class with this particular
instructor. Believing that the instructor failed to focus on important academic content, the student dropped the course the first time. The context of this excerpt pertains to the second time he enrolled in the class, which was not a matter of choice. He needed the course to graduate, and when the course was made available the second time, he was discouraged that it would be the same instructor. Reflecting on his prior experiences in and out of the classroom, this student let go of his principles and accepted that he would not learn as much in this class as he would like. Instead, he determined how to receive an A, set out to perform exactly as the teacher expected, and was rewarded with an A for his efforts. His story demonstrated how covert and implicit dynamics are at work in the classroom. As educators, when we open ourselves to learning, students’ voices can be quite insightful, reminding us to rethink labels, categories, knowledge, and power.

Further, because this student had shared his personal history with me, I could see a parallel pattern in his performance at work--he was rewarded for compliance. A few other students described similar patterns. I included these excerpts because they show tensions between value orientation (learning) and classroom experience (performance) as well as mental processes. These students were cognizant of the choices they made, as opposed to subconsciously adapting behaviors due to a system of rewards and punishments. Chapter 4 provides a more critical perspective of this phenomenon.

Stress or pressure also needs to be considered as a part of students’ connecting classroom experience. In the next selection of excerpts (pp. 204-205), an earlier theme reemerges: having to comprehend too much material in a short amount of time. Two of these students participated only in accelerated, eight week courses. The other two students attended multiple institutions, and compared and contrasted the eight-versus-
sixteen week sessions. Nearly all of the students described how difficult it was to manage their multiple life roles, complete homework assignments, and prepare to take examinations under eight week format. However, all of the students who are currently enrolled in an eight week format indicated that they were pleased they could earn credit hours in a short amount of time. This could be interpreted two ways including (a) adult students respond favorably to timeliness between effort and grades, and/or (b) under an accelerated format, they progress faster toward their goal of earning a degree. Either way I interpreted their willingness to subject themselves to stress, their stories seem to indicate that these students are highly motivated by extrinsic rewards. In fact, many of these students were the same ones who indicated that they were striving to receive A’s in their courses. Only one student indicated working better under pressure.

*Linking classroom learning to intended outcomes.* Although outcomes are represented separately in the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model, I included two excerpts in this section (page 205) to illustrate how two of the participants made connections between their classroom experiences to their intended outcomes and goals. The first student holds a deep desire to help others in his community but recognizes that without a degree he will not achieve his aspirations to move into leadership roles. Importantly, he identifies that he knows that he *already* possesses the declarative and procedural knowledge prerequisite to making decisions or holding an office, but that he is *perceived* as being not “smart enough” or qualified because he has not yet earned the credentialing of a bachelors degree. He did not say, and I cannot infer, whether his meaning making arises from observation or if he has faced rejection or oppression because he did not hold a degree.
The second student talked more broadly about self-improvement. This excerpt shows a student who is highly driven to obtain knowledge in order to achieve life goals. There is also some indication that being a Spanish speaker is somewhat of a barrier, but not a deterrent. Based on the comment, “but I understand,” I question if this student has been treated with disrespect, or native English speakers doubt the cognitive ability of someone whose English is not fluent. Unfortunately, I think both scenarios are possible. However, I wish to conclude this section on a positive note and reiterate that this student, and most of the others, in some manner, connected their classroom learning to their dreams, goals, and aspirations.

**Lifeworld Environment**

Donaldson and Graham (1999) defined the lifeworld environment as “the different contexts in which adults work and live and are defined by the roles they occupy in their various work, family, and community settings” (p. 33). Many of the themes in this section have been discussed elsewhere, reflecting that the model is nonlinear and that the constructs are interrelated. To avoid redundancy, I narrowed my discussion topics to three clusters of meanings including reinforcing agents, financial realities, and priorities.

*Reinforcing agents.* Donaldson and Graham (1999) emphasized the importance of reinforcing agents—individuals who socially or psychologically support or “undermine” adult learners’ pursuit of a college degree (p. 34). However these participants revealed that the nature of their relationships is much more complex than a supportive-undermine dichotomy. This is especially true for the Latinas, who strongly desired their husbands’ support, yet were also reflective about why support was not always available. As shown in the first two quotes, (pp. 206-207) the women identified that culture and gender
influenced men’s values and family roles. One woman had remarried and was able to compare and contrast the level of support she felt from each husband. She indicated that her current husband is supportive because he (a) shared her goal of a college education and (b) completed many household tasks so that she can dedicate more time to studying. As Donaldson and Graham identified, she believes that Latinas “need the support of their husbands or it cannot be done.” In fact, on more than one occasion, she asked me to “publish” this message for her.

The second Latina also defined support as needing her husband to help in their home. Her husband simply says, “Okay” when she tells him she wants to attend college. Yet he seems more ambivalent than accepting because he dedicated himself to work and refused to help at home. She explained his reaction by saying, “Latino men are that way.” Earlier in this chapter was a quote from a third woman who left college so that her husband could feel like he was “on the same level.” Her husband never asked her to quit school. She said she understood her husband’s machismo and felt guilty. From a cultural perspective, (as explained by the literature), it is likely that her sacrifice was also prompted by gender roles and the values embedded in marianismo and hembrismo (Moore Hines et al., 2005; Marenco & Guido, 2005). In contrast, with my non-Hispanic, Eurocentric lens, I felt it was ironic that his need for a reinforcing agent caused her to abandon her quest for the same thing from him.

The final excerpt (p. 207) is from a man who told me that group work--especially in the evening--was somewhat problematic for him because his wife questioned when his study activities involved other females. He wanted his wife to be “less jealous” in order to be supportive. What he did not mention, nor did any of the other men, is whether his
wife was at home, completing the same cooking, cleaning, and childcare roles described by the Latinas in this study. None of the men in the study indicated that they performed these routine daily tasks. I wondered if the women in their lives performed those gender-assigned roles. Perhaps these men did not view childcare and household tasks as a form of support because of cultural norms and values. In the same vein, the Latinas did not state that their husbands needed to do their share of household duties, only that the husbands needed to help them. Based on these comments, it appears that the students’ expectations somewhat varied by gender, but their underlying values or assumptions were quite similar (Moore Hines et al., 2005; Marenco & Guido, 2005). However, because the burden of the home tasks fell on the Latinas, the study time available to them was greatly reduced.

Beyond their partners or spouses, reinforcing agents can also be present in the workplace or local community, as Donaldson and Graham (1999) identified. Two of the men talked with me about how their coworkers responded to their student status. One felt highly supported by his coworkers, some of which he considered his mentors. The other man described how he had been harassed by his coworkers who told him that he was too old to be in college and that he would not be able to “prove anything” by obtaining a college degree. (He indicated that their bias was aimed at his age rather than his ethnicity). Only one of the women (unquoted) identified a reinforcing agent in the workplace, and that was a new supervisor who placed her in a tuition reimbursement program and gave her a more flexible schedule so that she could attend college and care for her children. During the interviews, one of the men shared that he attends community-
sponsored seminars for Latinos. There he has met individuals, including a state representative, who reinforced his degree ambitions and vision for the future.

In conclusion, I learned that the concept of the reinforcing agent held different meanings for the men and women of this study. Further, as Donaldson and Graham (1999) noted, their reinforcing agents came from the home, workplace, and community and were either supportive, or “undermine[d] their efforts” (p. 34). That said, I have to take exception to Donaldson and Graham's observation that support “is needed to return to higher education and persist” (p. 34). These Latinas taught me that they returned to college and persisted despite a lack of support and in some cases, what I interpreted as their husband’s passive-aggressive attempts to deter their efforts.

Financial realities. The higher education journal literature yields an abundance of research findings on students’ financial needs—including Latinos. Again, the literature focus tends to be on the needs of younger students (ages 18-24), with an embedded assumption that older students, many of whom are employed full-time, have fewer financial needs. The next selection of excerpts (pp. 207-208) helped to illustrate the financial realities of middle-aged Latino undergraduates. The first student, like others in this study, has several siblings, and indicated that there was “not enough money” to attend college. Another student described comparing tuition costs across colleges, and selecting one that was “not so expensive.” It important to point out that the student did not use the word “affordable.” Several of the students shared with me that they had to work in order to meet the basic needs of their families, and that these needs took precedence over a luxury of paying college tuition. More than half of the students told me
that they took advantage of tuition reimbursement programs and scholarships in order to help finance their schooling.

In conclusion, the costs of attending college not only influenced these participants’ decision to attend college, it was often another reason why they had to return to full-time employment and defer studies. According to the literature, Latinos’ access to postsecondary education has been fraught with numerous barriers. At a time when the public policy agenda is focused on the high cost of tuition, it is my hope that the needs of older undergraduates are also taken into consideration.

**Priorities.** Throughout their interviews, another re-emergent theme was priorities, as represented by the third set of excerpts (pp. 208-209). I prefer to use the term, priorities, because it more closely reflects the students’ perspectives on lifeworld choices they have made regarding family, work, and college. Their multiple realities teach us that terms like “stopping out” and “student departure” are a disservice to students who must analyze the context of their lifeworld, weigh consequences, and make difficult decisions about whether to pursue or defer their goals. For example, one student needed to leave the U.S. to tend to dying parent, and later left again, to help her fiancé with his visa. Another student was diagnosed with a disabling condition and was finally forced to make a difficult decision about leaving college. She did not leave college because of her medical condition, but rather because she valued being a good student, and felt her performance would be lacking if she tried to continue. It was a very emotional decision for her, and she told me she felt “worthless.” Again, in this section, the theme of their children emerged, this time related to their rate of progress in completing coursework. The Latinas reiterated the need to care for their children and that this priority took
precedence over college. Three of the men described social and recreational activities
with their children. One man indicated that he had to curtail his activities because his
academic performance had declined. Another man balanced his studies with full time
work and caring for a family member who had been seriously injured in an accident. For
this Latino undergraduate, his priority was—and remains—his family.

Outcomes

The last set of quotes and meanings (pp. 210-211) were clustered around the sixth
element of the model, outcomes. Importantly, Donaldson and Graham (1999) emphasized
that adults generate multiple constructions from terms such as outcomes, learning, results,
success, and achievement. Further, while outcomes may flow directly from classroom
events, they may also be created (or filtered) through cognitive processes or experiences
in their lifeworld. The students’ quotes across Chapters 4 and 5 help to illustrate
Donaldson and Graham’s stance. Postmodernism allows us to explore and embrace these
multiple meanings students attach to their experiences.

To this point, I have discussed the participants’ stories loosely organized around
the other five elements of A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (Donaldson &
Graham, 1999). I especially tried to convey the cyclic nature of the participants’ learning
and constructions, as well as the malleable nature the model. The purpose of this last
section is to provide a description of what they told me about their outcomes. To improve
my understanding, I also interpreted what they told me, but tried to discuss their
meanings without silencing their voices. Like the other elements of the model, the
outcome element is not a discrete box, but dynamic and intertwined with the other
dimensions of Donaldson and Graham’s model.
Quotes from the first four students show how they have reflected on their experiences and outcomes, and how, through introspection, they recognized that they have grown (developmentally). The first student was so enthusiastic when talking to me, she had difficulty articulating how she had changed, but emphasized gaining confidence. A second student also described gaining confidence and overcoming shyness, which she (in part) attributed to being older and the accretion of knowledge through reading. Another student said he better understands his values and motivation and has changed from when he attended high school. The fourth reflected on initial fears of attending college, and the tension between her heart, which was at home with her children, and her mind, which led her back to the classroom. Through reflection, she assessed those difficult choices and her hard work, and is pleased with herself for pursuing a college degree.

From the next three students, we see projected outcomes, specifically, how they intend to use their newly acquired expertise to serve the Latino community. One participant felt that being bilingual will enable him to help others “get better jobs or a better life,” while another believed he might be able to “have an impact” on immigration issues. The third person shared bifurcated goals—one personal, the other altruistic. Throughout the interview, one person talked primarily about helping other Latinos, but here reflected the value of diversity in wanting to help “other nationalities.” I cannot infer that his thinking is a result of learning in college; it could be that diversity and helping others are long held values.

However, with the next student, we do see transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000) through reflection and reflexivity. This person described being discriminated
against and candidly admitted discriminating against others. Coming to the U.S.
presented several disorienting dilemmas—language, culture, socialization, and academe.
Through work and school experiences, this person challenged ingrained assumptions,
reassessed values, and began to critically analyze ethnicity and discrimination in other
contexts. The result was a perspective transformation (Mezirow): “I used to think that
way too.” Now, this person is action oriented and attempts to teach family members,
faculty, students, and others in the community about the importance of cultural diversity
and respecting others.

One of the ideologies in adult education is lifelong learning. The last quote in this
section is from a student who entered the U.S. as the Spanish speaker. Like many of the
other participants, this person believed that earning a college degree will “open doors” to
additional opportunities. Yet we also see how intrinsically motivated she is to learn. In
the broader context of our discussion, the comment, “like discovering a new world” was
another indication of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000). The student knows that
new knowledge has reshaped her values and perspectives. I concluded that this person
has developed a remarkable thirst for knowledge that will never be quenched—a lifelong
learner.

Overall, I interpreted the students’ stories as reflecting both intermediate and
more global outcomes. I clustered course grades, self-efficacy, motivations, persistence,
and job advancement together as intermediate outcomes for two reasons. First, these
outcomes resulted from the students’ progress and processes to date. Second, the
participants immediately applied these outcomes to their cognitive schemas and life roles.
Intermediate outcomes have a cumulative effect, leading to additional learning, meaning
making, and outcomes. I distinguish them from more global outcomes, such as goals and aspirations or perspective transformations that reshaped the students’ thinking or worldview.

Impressions of two students’ outcomes. Throughout my dissertation process, I have negotiated the murky, yet interconnected space spanning modern and postmodern thought. In this summary, I again attempted to balance that tension. Since I resisted the urge to make constant comparisons with the Donaldson and Graham (1999) model in this chapter, I felt it would be inconsistent to summarize what I learned by relying on their model or some adaptation of its elements. I wanted to share what I learned about these adult students in their own right. My contradiction was that I rejected *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* to synthesize my ideas, yet during data analysis, I was creating my own sketches to enhance my understanding of concepts, reflections, and interpretations. Thus, as a conclusion to my discussion on outcomes, I have included two sketches that reflect my interpretation of the students’ stories, incorporating the elements of Donaldson and Graham’s model. While I am describing and explaining, I am not trying to create new models or convey a grand narrative about adult Latino/a learning outcomes. I also want to reiterate that I am not attempting to depict their realities, only my interpretation of what they told me. This is my way, as a visual learner, to teach others about my understanding and constructions.

One of the most striking examples of both intermediate and global outcomes emerged from Sofie’s story. As a result of her background and prior experience, she created a tri-faceted lens of age, ethnicity, and gender to view her world and make
meaning of it. I visualized her learning and outcomes like a Venn diagram, where cognition, psychosocial and value orientations, and lifeworld are intertwined (Figure 9).

![Venn diagram](image_url)

Figure 9. Interpretation of how Sofie described learning and outcomes

The classroom is somewhat removed from her reality. As a result of an undisclosed classroom experience, Sofie reprocessed her mental schema, which influenced her psychosocial and value orientation. Her intermediate outcomes occurred as she applied her new knowledge and filters to her own classroom experiences concurrent to guiding her own children’s behavior with her new mental schema, values, and psychosocial filters. Her global outcomes included community action and aspirations to earn a Master’s degree. She also described being “treated better” at home and work, because she had just earned a college degree.

Miguel’s story I visualize differently (Figure 10). His personal history created a more permanent filter which guided his lifeworld, learning, and aspirations. While the contexts
of his life changed in remarkable ways, he held fast to his values and beliefs. It is through this filter that he engaged in metacognition and assessed authentic learning.

![Diagram of Miguel's Lifeworld Environment]

Figure 10. Interpretation of how Miguel described learning and outcomes

The classroom is in his peripheral vision, of secondary importance to “learning with his hands.” He made one concession about formal educational settings: a practicum, where he engaged in real world, experiential learning. The essence of Miguel’s life is giving to others, and he is consistently dedicated to this principle in his home with family and friends at work, and in the community. He measures his outcomes by how well he serves others.

Chapter Conclusion

Over the last ten years, adult education researchers have increasingly acknowledged the centrality of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and identity to one’s
learning processes and lifeworld. Still, we have had few opportunities learn directly from underrepresented students, especially middle-age Latino undergraduates. These voices help us move toward a better understanding of how they experience college and the meaning they attach to those experiences.

Specific to the connecting classroom, these students tended to weigh their “good” and “bad” experiences by how satisfied they were with each instructor’s organization, teaching methods, level of support, and understanding of their needs. This was highly consistent with what Donaldson and Graham (1999) and others described in the literature. In my initial challenge to their model, however, I referenced the extant literature on African American adult students and raised the question, “What happens when an underrepresented student becomes marginalized in the classroom?” These voices tell me that was a good question to ask and that we have much more to learn.

In discussing their model, Donaldson and Graham (1999) concluded,

Once in college, they struggle to connect their present and emerging lifeworld knowledge structures to their academic knowledge structures. The extent to which they are able to make these connections influences the value of their college experiences (p. 33).

I am unclear about why the authors included the verb “struggle,” because college may not be a struggle for all students. To me, struggle has a negative tone and implies that adults may lack metacognitive skills, which is not Donaldson and Graham’s intent. I believe their sentence should read, “Once in college, most students learn how to connect…” In sum, we must expand our understanding of the dynamic and diverse realities of adult
students from underrepresented groups, and remain vigilant about the nature of our discourse.

Researchers must also exercise caution with terms and labels that reflect value judgments about adults’ college experiences. I used Kasworm’s (2003a) voices (e.g., outside, cynical, straddling) and Hagedorn’s (2006) last chance label as examples. In Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) quote above, a better choice of words might have been “…influences the value that adults place on their college experiences.” Despite our good intentions, we must continue to challenge the White, Eurocentric assumptions embedded in our thinking and reflected in our scholarship.

Donaldson and Graham (1999) grounded their work on existing studies of adult students. Collectively, the limitations of those studies were that (a) most, if not all, were focused on the experiences of young, White, non-Hispanic students and (b) students’ voices were often nonexistent. Because Donaldson and Graham did not discuss race or ethnicity specifically, I wondered if they held an assumption that this model was applicable to the experiences of all older students. At the time, I concluded their model was positivistic—the design too explanatory. However, in the light of what I learned from these participants, select model constructs (e.g., background histories, lifeworld, and psychosocial and value orientations) and its dynamic nature do provide allowances for diverse racial and ethnic postmodern understanding. I truly believe it is the limitations of the graphic depiction that are problematic, not the authors’ intent.

But had I simply force-fit the students’ stories into their model, failing to challenge my own assumptions? Hopefully not, for three reasons. First, I reviewed my interpretations with outside scholars on and off campus, and at national meetings—
processes that helped me to clarify my thoughts and constructions and challenge my biases. Second, in diagramming what I learned from their stories, I was able share the students’ undergraduate experiences in a new light. I now view them holistically, as extremely busy adults who also persist with college studies. Finally, I deferred a key segment of my literature until after data interpretation. Specifically, I waited until after I developed clusters of meanings to return to the literature in order to learn about Latino culture and values. The substantive literature review taught me that I (a) had listened to their voices and (b) would be remiss to attempt a critical analysis without considering cultural influences and values. In conclusion, I continue to believe that *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) is an exceptional tool for learning and discussion, and can help us bridge modern-postmodern understanding. In my case, the model provided a visual anchor for my interpretation of the multiple ways these eight older Latino undergraduates experienced learning and college, attached meaning to those experiences, and how they made connections with what they learned across various aspects of their lives.

My purpose with Chapter 6 will be to provide a synthesis across Chapters 4 and 5. Rather than summarize, in this last chapter I (a) described what I learned about myself as a researcher, (b) explained how reflection and reflexivity influenced new meanings, and (c) drew connections between the participant stories across the previous chapters.
CHAPTER 6
SYNTHESIS ACROSS CHAPTERS

Introduction

Perhaps it was the personal reflections back to the 1970s that prompted me to use a lava lamp as a metaphor for this research project, but its characteristics fit well with what I experienced. Briefly, the lava lamp was a tear-drop shaped vessel filled with clear fluid and a thick, viscous-looking mass on the bottom similar to bread dough. When the electricity was flowing, the fluid became illuminated and eventually, the mass would percolate, take shape, and move. The effect was mesmerizing: undulating, rising, breaking apart, drifting, and returning to the bottom to assume different, unpredictable shapes across time and space. Reflecting on the interview process and my data interpretations, I see how the development of my cross-cultural dissertation was much like the motion of the lava lamp. I started by gathering information and examining this curious learning experience. As I became warmed up, my ideas began to take shape, then shift, cluster, regroup, and at times, float. I was captivated by the participants’ stories, trying to understand, interpret, and make meaning of my new knowledge. Critical postmodernism and *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) helped to illuminate the contexts, contrasts, and contradictions within and across the participants’ stories. Over time, using these two sources of light, my constructions continued to percolate and assume new meanings. Chapters 4 and 5 serve to represent my thinking at select points. Given additional time, I suspect that I will view these stories in a new light, and my interpretation of the participants’ voices will appear quite different from what I captured on these pages.
The overarching purpose of Chapter 6 is to make connections across both chapters of interpretation. My intent is not to summarize the key points, but to highlight (a) lessons learned from my research process, (b) the tensions of critical postmodernism, (c) what these stories contribute to the literature, and (d) implications for the practice of adult education.

Lessons Learned

While I am most comfortable with interactive interviews and reflection, I found that postmodern and feminist inspired methods can be risky. For example, I never intended to generate data from my autoethnography, but use it as a tool for reflection and reflexivity. I wanted to be aware of how I was reacting to the participants’ stories and be able to bracket my biases and assumptions during the interview process. I needed to understand why I arrived at various interpretations and themes over other possibilities. However, these dyadic encounters (as they were called in the 70s), can quickly lead to candid disclosures, painful memories, and emotional moments. During my interviews with the women, I found myself thinking how much we had in common; I feared I was crossing the line and perhaps believing I was an insider (Ryen, 2003). At times, I shared similar life experiences with the men, but I never moved to the emotional level that I did with the women. Perhaps, under a different qualitative approach, this blurring of roles would be acceptable, but because I was attempting a cross-cultural study about their phenomena, it was important for me to remember the distinction of whose story I was sharing. I found the same tension during writing. While it was important for me to include candid reflections and reflexivity, I did not want to be the focus of Chapters 4
and 5. My aim was to describe how I was coming to understand what the students were
telling me.

Interpreting and writing lead to another problem. I had intended to remain in the
background and allow the students’ voices to emerge—to avoid filtering their stories by
piecing quotes together, and assessing what I thought was important to tell. This was my
most difficult task. To compromise, I shared excerpts from their stories first, without
much introduction or transitions, and reserved summarizing and interpreting for my
discussion sections. After writing the chapters, I also returned to the recordings, to make
certain that I shared the excerpts in the context of what the students told me. Finally, I
shared my interpretations with several others, and asked them difficult questions about
race, identity, culture, and assimilation. I explained to them that I was in the process of
learning to challenge my White privilege and accept that my White, Eurocentric
ideologies (Brookfield, 2005; Manglitz, 2003; Scheurich & Young, 1997, 1998) biased
how I listen, interpret, and made sense of the world. Not one of the individuals that I
talked to seemed offended at my pointed questions, and all reassured me that they were
willing to help me learn. I have grown personally and professionally as a result of this
study, and no longer believe that my vision to conduct a cross-cultural study was
idealistic or misguided.

_Tensions of Critical Postmodernism_

About ten years ago, I offered what I now recognize as a counter-narrative during
a class discussion. Rather than promoting discourse as I had hoped, another student
shouted at me, “I am so sick of that _postmodern_ bullshit!” I was frustrated that my point
was lost and baffled because I had no idea what he meant. It proved to be a pivotal
moment in my graduate studies, prompting me to shift degree programs in order to learn more about the application of theory. Of course, now I understand his shouting--I admit to a postmodern mindset. However, I am also an idealist, with a strong ethos of justice and equality, so I find critical theory most intoxicating. Reflecting on what happened in that class, I decided that it must be too hard for some people to listen when trying to make sense of the world from only one perspective.

Conceptually I understood what Alvesson and Deetz (1996) meant by “working with the tensions” of blended theories such as critical postmodernism. Yet I was naïve and did not appreciate how difficult it would be to toil in the nebulous, fluctuating space between two paradigms. At times I was using one lens or the other to compare and contrast ideas. In other cases, I was mentally negotiating. I struggled with how far to take interpretation without summarizing too much, creating themes, or launching into a narrative about “The” adult Latino undergraduate experience. After ten pages, I grew unhappy with the rote nature of my writing, lapsing too much into a positivistic tone while attempting to sound credible and scholarly. Through reflection, discussion, and rewriting, I “discovered” the complementary nature of modern and postmodern thought: By analyzing, interpreting, and explaining, I began to comprehend. Thus, explaining and understanding are inseparable. Further, the more ways in which I illuminated the data, even if the methods were positivistic, the richer my understanding became. In this case, the theoretical underpinnings of either Chapters 4 or 5 could have served my dissertation in its entirety, but the second analysis taught me considerably more about my assumptions and the participants.
These participants are wonderful people who shared their remarkable educational journeys with me. I strived to make my writing approachable so that the reader could hear their voices, feel the warmth of their personalities, and understand the robust nature of their motivation and persistence. I hope that my writing now resides in a place that reflects a bit of both paradigms (critical theory and postmodern thought) and embraces their shared purposes of raising consciousness and offering hope for change.

My other writing aim was to strive for what Donaldson et al. (2003) called a *multifocal* approach, defined as a style of scholarship where adult undergraduates are considered “holistically and relationally” (p. 4). To accomplish this, in Chapter 5 I avoided comparisons with younger students, by race or ethnicity, and previous findings in the literature (with a few exceptions). Toward the end of Chapter 5, I again struggled with the tension of describing and summarizing when my goal was to underscore multiple realities. This led to three decisions. First, I did not critique *A Model of College Outcomes for Adults* (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Rationale: My purpose was to understand their stories, not to defend or dispute the model. Second, I used the elements of the model simply to organize the excerpts and anchor my discussion. Rationale: By forcing their stories into discrete model elements, I would not be allowing their voices to be heard. However, without a tool for discussion, I may have lacked clarity when attempting to describe the revolving nature of the participants’ learning and constructions. Third, since I was not adapting or adopting the model, I needed to devise a means of teaching others what I had learned. Rationale: The participants shared diverse perspectives on their beliefs, families, lifeworld, educational experiences, and outcomes.
Limiting my discussion to one model would be a disservice to their stories and meaning making.

Because of these decisions, near the end of Chapter 5, I included two sketches that helped improve my understanding of the participants’ stories. These sketches are not models and do not represent the realities of all eight students. I offered the sketches only as examples of my understanding and interpretations of two of the participants’ stories.

**What These Stories Contribute to the Literature**

In the 1990s, researchers redefined the nontraditional label from an age distinction to an expanded term that included student characteristics such as delayed enrollment, full-time work, having dependents, and part-time college enrollment (Choy, 2002). While the expanded definition blurred some of the distinctions between younger and older students, it also made the marginalized adult population all the more invisible to the academy. Under the new definition, the nontraditional label became synonymous with the term at risk. The literature aptly demonstrated that the more nontraditional characteristics a student acquired (regardless of age) the more at risk a student became for attrition. In the positivistic realm, there is utility to the at risk variables as they help statisticians describe and predict the progress of undergraduate students. Under their classification system, statisticians would label all of the study participants as highly at risk. From a postmodern perspective, however, the concept of at risk is a grand narrative. This label has little to do with the multiple realities of these Latino/as’ stories. These participants teach us that despite being at risk, they have persisted across decades toward a college degree. Their stories do not depict them as problematic non-persisters (Clevland-Innes, 1994), only that they followed different paths in higher education. The
complexity and richness of their personal biographies illustrate that aspirations, persistence, and degree completion are not easily predicted or explained by positivist inquiry. These students are indeed tenacious persisters, as Hensley and Kinser (2001) identified.

Clearly, this is not a homogeneous group, which underscores Wircenski et al.’s (1999) point that “few generalizations can be made about older students, due to differences in adult lives” (p. 493). This statement rings true for Latino\a adult students (Moreno & Guido, 2005), and can be illustrated by the participant who emphasized that Latino did not mean Mexican. Paraphrasing for a moment, this participant raised three points. First, that many Latinos come to this country legally, to work, attend college, and make a better life for their families. This participant emphasized that not all Latinos are illegal immigrants from Mexico. Second, that many people who live between North America and the tip of South America identify themselves as being Latino. Third, people in the U.S. do not understand that Latino cultures are diverse, including uniqueness by country of origin. It is easy to agree with all three points. In this country, we perpetuate a White Eurocentric discourse and ideologies that keep underrepresented individuals invisible. Collective ignorance continues to fuel the racism and discrimination that polarizes this country. We have much to learn about diversity, but refuse to do so. I had hoped that these stories could increase adult educators’ understanding. I now believe that to raise consciousness and combat generalizations, I have a professional and moral obligation to (a) share these students’ stories beyond the academy and (b) confront racism and bigotry regardless of who is making assumptions or sharing a derogatory joke. These voices convinced me that I must, at the very least, take these actions.
Cleveland-Innes (1994) made the rash generalization that students who leave college are a “loss of human potential” (p. 423). However, I learned that when not attending college, these adults led complex and meaningful lives, caring for extended family members, managing multiple life roles, working in their communities, and advancing in the job force. From the participants’ perspective, they never abandoned college goals and remain motivated to return to school despite moving, raising children, medical conditions, and financial difficulties. This observation is especially poignant for the Latinas, who faced patriarchal oppression and cultural expectations about their roles as women, yet held fast to their dreams of college. Unfortunately, some generalizations and negativity toward older undergraduates persisted in the literature (e.g., Kasworm’s (2003a) voices) or scholars ignore adults altogether. These students teach us about potential, motivation, persistence, and goals. Hopefully Cleveland-Innes and others are beginning to understand the changing contexts of adult students’ lives will continue, and that multiple realities should be valued equally. These voices contribute much to our understanding.

I am also concerned that the dominant discourse in this country reinforces generalizations on another level. These Latino\as described their identity in numerous ways, which included race, gender, country of origin, length of time in the U.S., familial history, community ties, assimilation, life roles, and learning styles. Two of them described trying to assimilate or acculturate with a White, non-Hispanic culture. Others described trying to meet the expectations of others in power positions, including their college instructors. I do not know the participants well enough to ascertain if the
hyperreality of U.S. culture (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) or media representations (Morín, 2005; Olivarez, 1998) pressured them to assimilate, but it merits further thought. Although scholars use concepts such as assimilation and acculturation to explain and theorize, I found I could not ignore the importance of illuminating our understanding from multiple (however positivistic) perspectives. For example, when writing Chapter 4, I reflected on two of the participants’ descriptions of assimilation, using first a lens of dominant ideologies, then hegemony. Later, I incorporated Latinos’ cultural norms, beliefs, and values into my critical analysis. Hence, my meanings were fluid, contextual, and even a matter of perception. The analogy of the lava light to my thought process is apropos. I will continue to examine how my ideologies and White privilege have biased my thoughts, and continue critical discourse with others from diverse backgrounds. More than ever, I appreciate Seidman’s (1998) recommendation for multiple interviews, and having an opportunity to engage in reflexivity with participants. However, as Finaly (2002) suggests, I will remain mindful of my position, and the “contingent, partial, tentative and emergent qualities” (p. 226) of my work.

A decade ago, Quinnan (1997) prompted the academy to think critically and abandon the pattern of “repackaging hypotheses” (p. 1). At the time of his article, there was dearth of theory applied to the study of adults. Thus, assumptions were seldom challenged, voices were filtered, and understanding somewhat constrained. Following Quinnan’s cue, I have attempted to move my research in that direction. In Chapter 2, I cited examples of repressive tolerance (Brookfield, 2005), but did not reveal how I had witnessed this phenomenon. Because I do not have a complete picture from the
participants’ stories, I will share how I came to understand the concept of repressive tolerance:

My experience happened in the classroom of an instructor who I truly admire and believe to be sensitive, caring, and culturally aware person. It was a diverse class of international, domestic, White, and African American graduate students between the ages of 25 to 50. More than half of the students were outspoken and freely engaged in small group and class discussion. Throughout the semester, differences became a huge crevasse that swallowed the soul of the class. A small group of White, non-Hispanic students dominated conversations and were so aggressive with their comments that the voices of the African American students were eventually silenced. This was more than a matter of failure to listen and devaluing differences of opinion, it was a tension I could feel. Most of the African American students stopped talking in class. To compound the unfortunate dynamics, a majority of the students aggressively portrayed liberal ideologies. Those students with a more conservative viewpoint were also silenced. In a private moment, I apologized to a conservative student for what was happening in the class. He simply shrugged his shoulders. Ashamedly, I did not engage in a racialized discourse with the African American students, or apologize to them for what had happened. I was never brave enough to confront the dominant group in or out of class. The instructor realized the dynamics, but felt somewhat powerless to rectify the situation. Thus, the instructor created and reinforced the repressive tolerance in our “democratic” classroom.

Again, this was my reality and interpretation of repressive tolerance. I have no way of knowing the details or dynamics of the participants’ respective classroom experiences. However, their voices send us a clear message that many of them have
experienced discrimination and other disconcerting classroom events. From the literature, we already know that some adult African American students described instances of overt and covert racism. These participants, also from a marginalized group, provide additional insight about classroom experiences from their unique perspectives. Based on my experience, I inferred from both Chapters 4 and 5 that many of the participants’ classroom experiences were indicative of repressive tolerance. Thankfully, these voices will generate insight and begin to fill a void in the higher education journal literature that has been long neglected.

*Overall Impressions from Chapters 4 and 5*

With the same spirit of understanding I described in Chapter 5, I created a third sketch to help my understanding and interpretation. Because I listened to their voices, I began to view these participants holistically, merging what I had learned across Chapters 4 and 5. Again, I did not intend to develop a grand narrative about “The” adult Latino undergraduate experience. My aim with this cross-cultural study was to understand the essence of who these eight people are, how they experienced learning, and interpreted outcomes. Informed by the literature, I made assumptions that primarily negative themes would emerge from their stories.

What I learned was that these Latino\'a students held differing realities about college, as well as their lifeworld, learning opportunities, and outcomes. They shared both accomplishments and challenges in and out of the classroom. I initially attributed their multiple realities to their diverse backgrounds and the varied contexts of their educational settings. Through data interpretation, I also found that their respective identities, culture, prior experiences, and life roles permeated their sense of self,
influencing their learning, reflection, and meaning making across all aspects of their lives. Figure 11 will help me to share my understanding with others. It is not representative of all the participants, nor did I generalize about the U.S. Latino population.

In Chapter 4, the participants described the essence of self: family, ethnic/cultural identity, gender, spirituality, altruism, and a strong work ethic. I believe that this is grounding from which these participants learned and made meaning. On the left side of Figure 11 are concentric circles representing self and their lens for viewing the world.

Figure 11. Viewing the participants holistically, with busy lives and multiple goals.
With concentric circles, I am attempting to show that (in most cases) it is their lens, not their identity, which they adapt to various settings. The core circle has a solid border, because six of the students reflected an unwavering sense of identity (self). Closely attached to that core is their lens for learning, perception, and meaning making, represented by the outer circle with the dashed border. The open border indicates that they modify the lens following reflection on new knowledge and experiences.

Intertwined with their lens is their lifeworld, which I interpreted (for most of them) as the center of their learning, participation, and goals. Because their lives are constantly changing, I drew their lifeworld with a dashed border, allowing for flux and other influences to shape their learning and meaning making. Although their engagement and perspectives were different, all of the participants described work roles and community involvement. The solid borders around the action and work circles depict that I conceived these roles as distinct yet integrated parts of their lifeworld--not always connected to their other life roles. Another reason the borders are solid: all but one of the participants shared goals for work and helping others. With other dimensions of lifeworld, their goals were not as clear to me (but perhaps were clear to them).

From the excerpts in Chapter 5, I concluded that for most of the students, the classroom was not the focal point of their learning and meaning making, because far too many had disconnecting experiences. Many emphasized self-study and tutoring more so than formal classroom learning. I also considered how Miguel explained knowledge and that, for him, authentic learning results from his using his senses and hands--experience in the real world. Further, while many of the students shared “good” (their word) experiences with me, I never interpreted their classroom as a center stage for them, but
rather a setting with a revolving door, as represented by the four-way arrow in Figure 11. The students passed through the revolving door as needed to acquire knowledge or (for some) perform the task of course completion. Each turn of the door was a different experience, with classroom periods of both discontent and engagement. Some also portrayed themselves as a vessel (hence the shape), seeming to prefer the “banking” method of learning from instructors (Friere, 1972).

From both Chapters 4 and 5, I felt that these students processed most classroom learning through the lens surrounding self and then applied knowledge to their family, work roles, and community engagement. With new schemata, they returned to the classroom for additional learning experiences. To a lesser extent, the students applied learning directly in the work place and to help others in the Latino community. This direct (less filtered) application of knowledge is best illustrated by the students who work in health-related and social service fields. In Figure 11, one the lines from classroom outcomes passes through work, to reflect those students who described helping other Latinos through their current employment. Students’ shorter-term goals pertained to completing college; longer-term goals encompassed their lifeworld, employment, and social action. They persisted in college toward these longer term goals, but their student role is merely what they need to do, not who they are.

Implications for Practice

Brookfield (2005), Huber and Cale (2002), and others have pointed out how instructors’ methods in proclaimed democratic classrooms can (unwittingly) create repressive tolerance, a concept that is grounded in Freire’s (1972) pedagogy of the oppressed. Even if one rejects the notion of repressive tolerance, these Latinos’ voices
tell us that discrimination festers in many classrooms, student-instructor expectations are not always clear, and teaching methods do not always meet their needs. Recognizing that my implications for adult educators are not necessarily new (see Donaldson, 2003; Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005; Kasworm, 2003c; Ross-Gordon 2003b, 2003c), they still must be underscored. These Latino students are telling us that they need

1. explicit directions to resolve discrepancies in expectations about assignments, grading, assessment criteria, and classroom learning versus self study;
2. thorough explanations of rationale behind syllabi, work load, and content delivery pace--especially in accelerated classrooms;
3. immediate linkages to tutoring and other resources to enhance their study and test-taking skills;
4. recognition of cultural differences, especially by country of origin;
5. extra time to read and study, because many are concurrently learning English;
6. reassurance about their accents, verbal skills, and being understood by others; and
7. validation that they are intelligent and capable of comprehending new concepts, even though they may not be proficient English speakers.

Further, new knowledge must be meaningful to their multiple lifeworld realities. To help them achieve this connection, which is different for each person, writing assignments should be flexible enough to allow them to interpret learning and constructions in and out of the classroom. Student-instructor interaction is also critical. It is especially meaningful to them when instructors help them address their fears about age, performance, and memory, and acknowledge their multiple life roles and needs of their family. Formalized mentoring by upper class students might also help (Greenhouse
Gardella, et al. 2005). Two students told me that by the end of the session/semester, they “forgot” to include their concerns on teacher evaluation forms. In the spirit of promoting interaction and student satisfaction, instructors should consider an anonymous feedback form for students to complete early in the semester or session.

Historically we can see how our capitalist society has viewed the purpose of education: To prepare young people for the workforce. Power and knowledge are tightly enmeshed, and hegemony assures that alternative educational philosophies remain suppressed. While many institutions now espouse values of diversity and globalism, it seems that mission statements rarely include learning liberation or overcoming alienation (Brookfield, 2005; Kumashiro, 2000) as student outcomes. Further, transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) does not assure that students will be able to identify hegemony or challenge the dominant ideologies of a White, Eurocentric society.

I believe that these participants see inequities and injustices of U.S. society, but not all of them connect learning with social action. However, it would be arrogant and disrespectful for me to suggest that they made the wrong decision to “ignore discrimination” or distance themselves from other Latinos. I respect their values and right to make choices. That said, educators shoulder an obligation to support students while they make meaning of new knowledge—meanings that are defined by individual students. I believe it is ethically possible to move adult education to a new level, without indoctrination, while protecting both students’ rights and academic freedom by:

1. encouraging critical thinking, reflection, and reflexivity;
2. introducing students to critical theories;
3. providing Latino students with an opportunity to discuss issues and current events relevant to them;

4. integrating service learning into course content (allowing the students to define if this includes social action); and

5. facilitating respectful, civil discourse about values, diversity, racial and ethnic identity, ideologies, privilege, power, and discrimination with all students.

Across Chapters 4 and 5, we also see implications for researchers, administrators, and policy makers. The issues include, but are not limited to:

1. The need for additional qualitative study to illuminate motivation, goals, and persistence from students’ point of view.

2. Employing new variables in quantitative studies about departure, based on the multiple realities of underrepresented students (e.g., discrimination, repressive tolerance, lack of institutional resources, culturally-insensitive curricula).

3. The ongoing need for the inclusion of multiple voices and critical perspectives in adult education research.

4. Transfer of credit across multiple U.S. institutions and from other countries.

5. Rising tuition costs, financial support, tuition reimbursement, and financing options for middle age students with dependents.

6. Comprehensive evaluations of teachers, including “safe” environments for underrepresented students to share views without fear of negative consequences.

7. Challenging our dominant discourse that is centered on White, Eurocentric ideologies. This includes educational philosophy, terminology, unintentional negative messages, assumptions, and generalizations about adult students.
The participants’ voices also hold implications for the broader community. Many professionals who work for state agencies and community-based groups seem to scramble to improve literacy and promote the GED so that workers may find better jobs to serve the best interests of our capitalist economy. Too often the media focuses our attention to the controversies around illegal immigration and polemics on ESL programs. It is time for the bigger picture from the participants’ voices:

It seems almost impossible. First of all, different language. No high school. I mean if we work little by little, it can be done.

Who [can] stand in front of your dreams?

I came to this country because I want to succeed. I can do something better here. I can give my kids a better life and more opportunities.

Despite “odds” and “barriers,” five of these students are first-generation (PEW, 2006) immigrants to the U.S. who initially came here for work-related reasons. The other three participants are second generation Latinos (PEW) whose parents initially came to the U.S. for work-related reasons. Although it has taken several decades, all eight of these participants are nearing college completion and seven hold professional positions. Life journeys such as theirs are not prevalent in the media, (or the higher education journal literature), but should be. Their marginalization reinforces stereotypes and representations (Olivarez, 1998) and constrains thinking about the future of recent Latino(a) immigrants.

It is my hope that these stories will help achieve visibility for older Latino(a) undergraduates, raising the collective awareness of the broader community. Sofie’s point—about Latino stereotyping as a self-fulfilling prophecy—is a powerful lesson. It is a
disservice to immigrants when we focus solely on polarizing issues and short-term solutions like ESL and the GED. These students help us to grasp their vision and perseverance despite “odds” and “barriers.” Given time, each has flourished, and so will others.

Chapter Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this Chapter was to establish connections across both chapters of interpretation. In Chapter 4, I shared excerpts from their stories in a sequential fashion by following them from early childhood to college. I included my reflections and reflective interpretations with the participants. To interpret their stories further, I discussed my understanding from a critical postmodern perspective. In Chapter 5, I elected to utilize A Model of College Outcomes for Adults (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) as a visual anchor to organize and interpret their stories a second time. By employing two different strategies to understand and their stories, I was not “locked into” one philosophical perspective (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2000, p. 247), which helped me extend my learning across chapters. I also tempered my critical analysis with the inclusion of cultural norms and values from current literature on Latino families. Even so, I accept that my work remains “contingent, partial, tentative, and emergent” (Finaly, 2002, p. 226).

This chapter synthesized my constructions. After ascribing to the utility of multiple perspectives in Chapters 4 and 5, in this chapter I resisted (for the most part) the urge to compare the students’ stories to previous findings in the literature and Donaldson and Graham’s (1999) model. As an alternative, I offered a sketch of my interpretations to teach others what I have learned. I did not pretend to speak for the participants. Instead, I
prompted the reader to hear their voices and view the participants holistically, with rich, fulfilling, and busy, lives. What I learned is not necessarily new (e.g., literature on adult learning, marginalized students, or Latino culture). However, because older Latino/a undergraduates are invisible in the higher education journal literature, we need to achieve a deeper understanding of how gender, age, race, ethnicity, cultural, identity, and economics intersect with Latino/as’ educational experiences in and out of the classroom. My reinterpretation of their stories was performed in the spirit of (a) creating awareness, (b) informing adult education practice, and (c) supporting the call for action to rectify social injustices and inequities in our educational system.

Like the motion of the lava lamp, my ideas percolated, took numerous forms, and shifted positions. Despite its tensions, critical postmodernism illuminated my thinking. My greatest lesson was this: Under the ideology of pluralism, we highlight differences, and risk polarization, segregation, and discrimination. Yet, when we blur distinctions, ignore diversity, and generalize, we perpetuate marginalization and dominant ideologies. Willing or not, we live in a world of contradicting and complementary paradigms. This dissertation, Voices Yet to Be Heard, provides us with an opportunity to learn how multiple realities coexist in our world and how much we can benefit by listening to others.
APPENDIX A: RECRUITING EFFORTS

2004

Re-contacted my institutional representatives.
Sent packets for hand-delivery to eligible students.
No response from students.
Email discussion with 2 other out of state PhD students on their recruiting successes.

2006 Jan-Feb

Talked with institutional reps.
Talked with "minority" students.
Made recruiting plans.

2006 March

No responses from students. Panicked.
Sent reminders to institutional reps.
Reflected. Looked at lit. Talked with adviser & Latina faculty member.
In person visits to new IL contacts.
One student calls, got her feedback.
Asked her to contact others. She did.
Created flyer. Obtained positive feedback from two others.

2006 April

Late response from an earlier institutional contact. Sounds positive, so initiated human subjects review.
Reminded students I interviewed to let others know about study.
Prepared new IRB amendment for broader community distribution of flyer & to add another institution.
Obtained ideas from Latino faculty member with statewide contacts.

2006 May

Visited 5 offices at KC community college
Flyers at second Latino conference
Worked through Latino nonprofit
Snowballing with new Latino acquaintances
Final interviews.

2006 June

IRB amendment, distributed flyer at statewide migrant conference. Talked with attendees.
Additional reminders to original contacts.
Three more students called to participate.
Conducted three interviews/4 people/1 no show.
Received feedback that flyer should be translated.
Asked students-they disagreed.
Follow up contact with three new institutions.
Offered to conduct workshop at community college. Nothing new materializes.

2006 Fall

Broadly distributed Spanish & English flyers to community contacts in MO & IL.
Maintained regular contact with institutional reps who "forgot" to help in Feb/March.
Set appointments for new student interviews.
Continued snowball technique with IL interviewees & contacts.
A PhD student from Missouri is seeking ten 

**Hispanic/Latino Students Ages 30-50**

to participate in

**interviews about your college experiences**

---

**Eligibility for participation:**

- Hispanic/Latino, age 30-50
- Pursuing a bachelor’s degree
- Already completed 2 years of study
- Willing to discuss college experiences

---

**5 Easy Steps:**

1. If you are interested in participating, you must contact me (Robin Thompson-see below). At that time, I can answer any questions you might have and send you additional information.

2. If you would like to meet, you and I will select a time and place to get together (e.g. college, library, coffee shop) between July 16-22.

3. When we meet, we will informally discuss our college experiences for about one hour. If you wish to meet more than once, we can arrange another meeting. Evenings and weekends are also okay.

4. After we conclude the interviews, I will be able to give you a total of $35 to help you pay for your expenses.

---

Hello. My name is Robin Walker Thompson. I grew up in the Waukegan/Gurnee area. At age 51, I am just now completing a doctoral degree. I study adult students and am very interested in learning more about the college experiences of older Hispanic/Latino undergraduates. I plan to be in your area in mid-July to meet with students. Sharing your college experiences can be most helpful to other Hispanic/Latino students!

If you would like to meet or need more information, please send me an email note: ThompsonRW@missouri.edu or call 573.882.5169. Thank you!
A PhD student from MU is seeking eight

**Hispanic/Latino Students Ages 30-50**

to participate in

**interviews about your college experiences**

**Eligibility for participation:**

- Hispanic/Latino, age 30-50
- Pursuing a bachelor’s degree
- Already completed 2 years of study
- Willing to discuss college experiences

**5 Easy Steps:**

1. If you are interested in participating, you must contact me (Robin Thompson-see below). At that time, I can answer any questions you might have and send you additional information.
2. If you would like to meet, you and I will select a time and place to get together (e.g. at your school, a coffee shop, library).
3. When we meet, we will informally discuss our college experiences for about one hour. If you wish to meet more than once, we can arrange another meeting. Evenings and weekends are also okay.
4. After we conclude the interviews, I will be able to give you a total of $35 to help you pay for your expenses.

Hello. My name is Robin Walker Thompson. At age 51, I am just now completing a doctoral degree at MU. I study adult students and am very interested in learning more about the college experiences of older Hispanic/Latino students. By telling your story, I believe we can help other Hispanic/Latino students and inform both educators and policy makers. Please share this flyer with anyone who might be interested and eligible!

If you would like to meet or need more information, please send me an email note: ThompsonRW@missouri.edu or call 573.882.5169. Thank you!
Estudiante doctorado de Missouri busca ocho hispano/latino estudiantes mayores, edades 30-50 para un estudio de investigación sobre su experiencias universitarias

Elegibilidad para participación:
* Hispano/Latino, 30-50 años de edad
* Personas que completaran su diplomatura
* Que han completado dos años de estudio
* Complaciente a hablar de su experiencias universitarias

4 Pasos:
1. Si desea participar en el estudio, necesita hacer contacto conmigo, Robin Thompson (ver abajo). Si tiene preguntas o necesita más información, tome la oportunidad a comunicarse conmigo.

2. Si quiere una cita en persona, podemos escoger un lugar a reunir y tiempo conveniente para usted. (por ejemplo, su colegio, un restaurante o una biblioteca)

3. Cuando nos encontramos, hablaremos informalmente sobre nuestras experiencias universitarias por una hora, más o menos. Si desea más que una reunión, podemos arreglar otra reunión. Por supuesto, las noches y fin de semana son bien tiempos para mí.

4. Después de la(s) entrevista(s), participantes reciben $35.00 para gastos incurridos.

¡Hola! Mi nombre es Robin Walker Thompson. Por fin, a los 51 años de edad, estoy a punto de terminar mi doctorado en MU. Mi estudio de investigación es sobre adultos mayores que han regresado a sus estudios con el deseo de cumplar una diplomatura. Estoy muy interesada en las experiencias universitarias de estudiantes en este categoría. Creo que la información que recibo en mi estudio puede ayudar a otro hispanos/latinos, educar y informar educadores y políticos. Por favor, si conocen alguna otra persona que quizás estar interesada en participando y es candidato apto reparte este folleto.

Si quiere una cita o necesita más información, por favor mandeme una nota por correo electrónico a ThompsonRW@missouri.edu o llamame a 573-882-5169. ¡Muchas gracias!

(**Las entrevistas están solo en inglés.**)
February 20, 2006  

TO: Prospective Research Participants  
FROM: Robin W. Thompson (Student from the University of Missouri-Columbia)  
RE: Letter of Introduction about Participating in a Dissertation Study  

Thank you for your interest in this dissertation study. I am seeking to meet with students of color between the ages 30-50--especially Hispanic/Latino students--who are pursuing a four-year degree at Columbia College. The purpose of this letter is to tell you a bit about me and the purpose of the study. After you read this letter and the attached summary sheet, I would like you to contact me if you think you might be interested in participating in the study. My contact information is at the end of this letter.

I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia, in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. My emphasis area is in Higher and Continuing Education, and I am especially interested in the undergraduate experiences of adults. I became interested in studying adult students through courses at the University, where I learned that there is very little available information about adults who start or return to school later in life. Although I completed my bachelor’s degree at age 22, I did not start graduate studies until I was 39. After being away from college that long, I had a lot of doubts and anxieties about being able to succeed in college again. However, I found I did much better in college as an older student and completed my Master’s degree in less than two years. After another break, I commenced PhD studies in 1998. Since then, I have completed all my courses and other requirements to conduct research. My educational journey has been a bumpy road, but I am determined to finish my degree in 2006.

You also need to know that I am not a person of color. As a white researcher, I am conducting this “cross cultural” study because I want to better understand the classroom experiences of students of color--especially adult Hispanic/Latino students--ages 30-50, a group that has not had much prominence in the literature. In fact, I have entitled this study *Adult Students of Color: Voices Yet to be Heard*. My goal is to work with you and 15 other students of color to discuss college experiences, our feelings about those experiences, and try to interpret what it all means. I believe, and I hope you agree, that our gender, racial, and/or ethnic differences will lead to extremely interesting discussions.

To help you in your decision to participate, I would like to explain your role in this study. In fact, it will be our joint study. Rather than a strict question-and-answer interview, this will be a two-way conversation in an informal setting of your choice. You will be able to guide the conversation and ask me questions about my feelings or similar experiences. I am hoping we can meet two or three times, for about 1.5-2 hours each time during the week of March 12-18. This is flexible, based on your other commitments and schedule, and what you would like to discuss. We can meet at Columbia College of Missouri or other location of your choice in Lake County. I will also send you the transcripts of the interviews and my data interpretation, so that you can review them and can make certain I recorded your information correctly. In addition to my dissertation, I plan to teach others about the diverse college experiences of the students of color who participate in this study. Any information and/or quotes appearing in my dissertation, presentations, or journal articles will not be attributed--or traceable--to you.

If you choose to participate, I will be able to give you a total stipend of $35. I know this is not much, but it is my hope that you will be able to use it as partial reimbursement for your time,
transportation or child/elder care expenses. There are no real benefits to you other than what you and I may learn together about the college experiences of adult students of color.

One of the most important rights you have is the right to refuse participation. You will not “ruin” the study or upset me if you choose not to participate. Even if you choose to participate now, at any time, you may later choose to stop participating in the study. You also will have the right to refuse to answer questions without giving me an explanation. While an interview does not seem “risky” on the surface, I would like you to think about the emotional aspects before you agree to participate. For example, if you have had a negative experience to share, once you begin telling me about it, you may find that re-living the experience may be emotionally taxing or stressful. Again, that is another reason to remember that you may withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer questions. I am a very open person, and I invite you to tell me if you uncomfortable with my approach, attitude, or any of my methods.

With your permission, I will need to take notes and digitally record the sessions. This is to help me remember what we discussed when I get back home. No one else will listen to the recordings or see my notes. Your name and personal information will be kept at my home in a secure location, separate from the interview transcripts, notes, and other documents. I will store your interview information by a pseudonym, or code name, to help ensure your anonymity. If you have a pseudonym preference, please let me know. When I am finished with my dissertation, probably by the summer of 2006, if you like, we can meet again to review my completed dissertation. I plan to write a brief executive summary, but you will be welcome read to the entire dissertation, and any journal articles I may write.

Please contact me by mail, email, or phone by March 8, 2006 if you think you might be interested in participating in the study, or if you need to learn more before you make a decision. Again, you must be a student of color between the ages 30-50 who is pursuing a four-year degree. If you contact me, I will not automatically assume that you want to participate. I will get back in touch with you right away to answer any questions you have about me, your role, or this study. If you are still interested in participating after we talk, then we can arrange for a local place and time to meet during the week of March 12-18. After we meet in person, you can let me know for sure if you want to participate or not. Again, you will not “ruin” the study or upset me if you choose not to participate. Also, if you drop out of the study at any time, and I will erase your interview recordings.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of this study. I look forward to hearing from you and answering your questions.

Sincerely,

Robin Walker Thompson

Work address (envelope included):
Robin Walker Thompson
M101 Student Success Center
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211

Email and Office Phone:
ThompsonRW@Missouri.edu
573.882.5169

Web resume:
http://myprofile.cos.com/ThompsonRW

Enclosures: Summary sheet, self-addressed stamped envelope
TO: Prospective Research Participants  
FROM: Robin W. Thompson, PhD Candidate, University of Missouri-Columbia  
RE: Letter of Introduction about Participating in a Dissertation Study

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If you choose to participate, I will be able to give you a total stipend of $35. I know this is not much, but it is my hope that you will be able to use it as partial reimbursement for your time, transportation or child/elder care expenses. There are no real benefits to you other than what you and I may learn together about the college experiences of adult students of color.
One of the most important rights you have is the right to refuse participation. You will not “ruin” the study or upset me if you choose not to participate. Even if you choose to participate now, at any time, you may later choose to stop participating in the study. You also will have the right to refuse to answer questions without giving me an explanation. While an interview does not seem “risky” on the surface, I would like you to think about the emotional aspects before you agree to participate. For example, if you have had a negative experience to share, once you begin telling me about it, you may find that re-living the experience may be emotionally taxing or stressful. Again, that is another reason to remember that you may withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer questions. I am a very open person, and I invite you to tell me if you uncomfortable with my approach, attitude, or any of my methods.

With your permission, I will need to take notes and digitally record the sessions. This is to help me remember what we discussed when I get back home. No one else will listen to the recordings or see my notes. Your name and personal information will be kept at my home in a secure location, separate from the interview transcripts, notes, and other documents. I will store your interview information by a pseudonym, or code name, to help ensure your anonymity. If you have a pseudonym preference, please let me know. When I am finished with my dissertation, probably by the summer of 2006, if you like, we can meet again to review my completed dissertation. I plan to write a brief executive summary, but you will be welcome read to the entire dissertation, and any journal articles I may write.

Please contact me by email or phone by March 27, 2006 if you think you might be interested in participating in the study, or if you need to learn more before you make a decision. Again, you must be a student of color between the ages 30-50 who is pursuing a four-year degree. If you contact me, I will not automatically assume that you want to participate. I will get back in touch with you right away to answer any questions you have about me, your role, or this study. If you are still interested in participating after we talk, then we can arrange for a local place and time to meet during late March or early April. After we meet in person, you can let me know for sure if you want to participate or not. Again, you will not “ruin” the study or upset me if you choose not to participate. Also, if you drop out of the study at any time, and I will erase your interview recordings.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of this study. I look forward to hearing from you and answering your questions.

Sincerely,

Robin Walker Thompson

Work address:
M105 Student Success Center
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211

Email and Office Phone:
ThompsonRW@Missouri.edu
573.882.5169

Web resume:
http://myprofile.cos.com/ThompsonRW

Enclosures: Research summary sheet
APPENDIX C:
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Before we begin, I would like to review this “informed consent statement” with you. It serves as a checklist for me to make certain that I have explained my research fully, including risks and benefits, and given you the opportunity to ask any remaining questions you might have about me, the study, your role, and who will see the final papers. When we are done reviewing this form, I will ask you to sign it if you choose to participate in the study. This form is required by the government and helps to protect the rights of research participants. You may keep a copy.

☐ As you know, I am Robin Walker Thompson, and I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia. This interview is a part of my dissertation research on the college experiences of adult students of color on predominantly white campuses. I became interested in studying adult students through courses at the University, where I learned that there is very little available information about adults who start or return to school later in life. My goal is to work with you and 15 other students to develop my dissertation and articles to teach others about the diverse college experiences of adult students of color.

☐ One of the most important rights you have is the right to refuse participation. Even if you choose to participate now, at any time, you may later choose to stop participating in the study. You will not “ruin” the study or upset me if you choose not to participate, or withdraw at a later date. You also have the right to refuse to answer questions without giving me an explanation.

☐ Before you decide to participate, I would like to explain your role. Rather than a strict question-and-answer interview, I hope this can be a two-way conversation. You can guide the conversation as easily as me, or ask me questions about my feelings or similar experiences. I hope we can meet two or three times, for about 1.5-2 hours each time. But this is flexible, based on your schedule, and what you would like to discuss. I will send you the transcripts of the interviews and my data interpretation, so that you can review them and can make certain I recorded your information correctly.

☐ If you choose to participate, I will be able to give you a total stipend of $35. I know this is not much, but it is my hope you will be able to use it as partial reimbursement for your time, transportation or child/elder care expenses. There are no real benefits to you other than what you and I may learn together about the college experiences of adult students of color.

☐ While an interview does not seem “risky” on the surface, I would like you to think about the emotional aspects before you agree to participate. For example, if you have had a negative experience to share, once you begin telling me about it, you may find that re-living the experience may be emotionally taxing or stressful. Again, that is another reason why it is important that you remember that you may withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer questions. Your emotional well being is important to me, so please do not hesitate to tell me if you are uncomfortable with my approach, attitude, or any of my methods.

This informed consent statement is continued on the next page.
□ With your permission, I will need to take notes and digitally record the sessions. This is to help me remember what we discussed when I get back home. No one else will listen to the recordings or see my notes.

□ Your name and personal information will be kept at my home in a secure location, separate from the interview transcripts, notes, and other documents. I will store your interview information by a pseudonym, or code name, to help ensure your anonymity. If you have a pseudonym preference, please let me know.

□ When I am finished with my dissertation, probably by the summer of 2006, if you like, we can meet again to review my completed dissertation. I plan to write a brief executive summary, but you will be welcome read to the entire dissertation, and any journal articles I may write. I will also present the results to my dissertation committee and hope to make national presentations about what we learned. Again, any information and/or quotes appearing in my dissertation, presentations, or journal articles will not be attributed--or traceable--to you.

□ Now it’s your turn. Could you please explain to me your understanding of this study and your role? Do you have any other questions? Concerns?

Even if you have questions later, you will be able to reach me at Thompsonrw@Missouri.edu, or Robin Walker Thompson, Student Success Center M101, University of Missouri-Columbia, 65211, or at 573.882.5169. My adviser is Joe F. Donaldson, who can be reached at 573.882.8221 or DonaldsonJ@Missouri.edu. If you have complaints, you can contact Michele Reznicek, who is a Compliance Officer with the MU Institutional Review Board. Her number is 537.882.9585 or ReznicekM@Missouri.edu.

We have jointly reviewed both sides of this informed consent statement and have asked and answered all questions. By signing this, I am consenting to participate in this study. I understand my role, and rights to privacy, respect, withdrawal, and confidentiality.

______________________________________________________________ Dated ____________________

We have jointly reviewed both sides of this informed consent statement and have asked and answered all questions. By signing this, I agree to uphold this participant’s right to privacy, respect, confidentiality, and refusal to participate and/or answer questions.

______________________________________________________________ Dated ____________________

Robin Walker Thompson, Interviewer
APPENDIX D: GUIDING INTERVIEW TOPICS

Question about early educational experiences:

1. Please tell me about your early school experience-- elementary, junior high, and high school.

2. What is your most pleasant memory of school?

3. What is your most unpleasant memory of school?

4. Questions about the higher education experience:

5. When did you decide to go to college, and why?

6. Why is it important to you to earn a higher education degree?

7. Tell me about when you first arrived on campus. What were your impressions?

8. Please tell me about your classroom experiences--what’s that like?

9. Who or what were your most important influences? (If needed, prompt: on & off campus)

10. Who or what were your negative influences? (If needed, prompt: on & off campus)

11. How do you see yourself as a student?

12. How has your educational endeavor affected your personal relationships?

13. Do you think your life will be different once you have your degree? Why or why not?

14. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that I have neglected to ask?

### APPENDIX E: LIST OF CODES

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<td>work roles work goals financial</td>
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**Model of College Outcomes...**

background histories psychosocial orientation cognition classroom connection/not instructor characteristics teaching methods student interaction lifeworld outcomes learning work goals community goals multiple perspectives multiple realities multiple values validation
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APPENDIX F: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red and yellow, Black and white
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world

By the time I was in third grade, the ugliness of discrimination entered my world. I remember events quite clearly, including my hurt and confusion over adult actions and words. Even though I was very young, I am convinced that my passion to learn from others and about others’ lives started in those early years.

1961-1963

As a young child my world was small, but rich indeed. We lived on a short block in the heart of Waukegan, IL, in a small white bungalow with a green roof. My backyard was adjacent to the elementary school, but separated by a fence. I hated having to walk the half-block to the corner to get into the schoolyard--climbing the fence made much more sense. But at age seven, I was responsible for taking a younger sister to school, and so we walked together. We also walked to vacation bible school at the Lutheran Church, which was just across the street from our school. The tiny Cape Cod house directly across the street from mine house backed up to retail shops on one of the busiest streets in Waukegan. My playmates and I could climb under bushes and squeeze between the brick buildings to sneak to the main street. One day the Planter’s “Mr. Peanut” character was standing in front of the five and dime, and he waved at us. It is odd how clearly certain events stay in one’s memory.

I remember only “good things” up until third grade. Maybe I was just too young to comprehend all that surrounded me, but from what I remember, life was good. I was a
White child in a predominantly Negro\textsuperscript{19} school, (Figure 12) yet race was not an issue for me. After school I was permitted to play with friends regardless of where they lived. It was such a thrill to visit other homes: the food smells were different, talk was different, and traditions were different. I loved every minute. Religion was not an issue, either. My playmates included a girl from a Jewish family and a boy from a large, affluent Catholic family--both homes right across the street. I especially loved going to the Jewish home for matzos and seeing their lighted Menorah at Chanukah. Class was not an issue. I am sure my parents did not have much, but I never recall feeling rejected back then. However, I sensed the boy in the small house down the street must have been poor. He was always kind of dirty and had lots of brothers who drank beer, got into fights, and cussed. To this day, I have never told my parents about trying cigarettes, playing with knives, tormenting cats, or listening to the older brothers with girls in their rooms. At age seven, life outside that house was as entertaining as eating matzos and jumping on the trampoline that the affluent family purchased.

Until that time, Sunday school songs like \textit{Jesus Loves Me}, reinforced what I was instructed at home: “Color is only skin deep” and “You are no better than anyone else.” Then, three disturbing events crudely uprooted my teachings. One summer day, while three young Colored boys were riding bikes down our street, our dog barked at them, scaring them so badly that they left their bicycles in the street. Our dog was in the pen, so

\textsuperscript{19} As a period piece, I have included the terms Colored, Negro, and Nigger, as these were embedded in the discourse of my childhood--at home, school, and in the community. I am striving to accurately documents events, and do not intend to be disrespectful.
Figure 12. Mrs. Presley's third grade class 1963-64. Whittier Elementary School, Waukegan, IL. I am the first girl in second row.
I was not worried about the boys’ safety; I was highly concerned that a car might run over their bikes. However, I was instructed to leave their bikes in the street. Later I remember hearing my mother retell that story several times, laughing that the “Nigger boys were scared of a dog in a pen! That will keep them from coming down our street again.” There it was: the “N” word. Even though I was little, I understood that color did matter after all. The inference I made was that because of their color, the boys were stupid. It also was the first time I realized no Colored kids lived on my block.

The second incident happened after school. I had walked a friend, Brenda, part of the way to her house instead of taking my sister home. Being Colored, she lived on the north side of the school, which, I finally learned, was where all the Colored children lived. As I turned to head home, I saw two boys beating up my sister. Because my Dad had taught me how to fight with my fists, I dropped my books and ran to my sister’s side, punching at the boys until they ran away. Neither of us were hurt, but my sister was very upset. When my mother relayed the story to my father that evening, the words “Nigger kids” was again in her description. My interpretation of her story was that my sister was beat up because she was White. This made no sense to me. I assumed that my sister did something to make them angry.

I do not recall how much time elapsed between events, but the third event that dramatically shaped my life was selling our house and moving to a new school. My parents underestimated how much I listened to adult conversation. I overheard my Mother tell someone on the phone that they could not sell our house because we lived “too close to Coloreds.” My parents finally sold our house to a Colored family. I distinctly remember the neighbors screaming at my parents, the slamming of the front
door, and harassing phone calls. Suddenly, none of the kids on my street were allowed to speak to me. I was hurt and confused.

At my new school, all the faces were White, including the teachers. I decided this school was better--modern, with lots of windows, a big gymnasium, and new books. I loved the smell of new books and being able to be the first person to write my name in a text book. Yet, at the new school I was no longer at the head of my class, but a half-year behind. I felt stupid and ashamed. Further, I was angry at my former teacher for letting me fall behind. Little did I understand the funding discrepancy between two schools, in the same district, less than a few miles across town.

The other confusing incident I remember from that school year was when JFK was assassinated. Everyone at school cried, but when I got home, my mother was indifferent to his death, calling him “that Irish-Catholic Nigger lover.” When Dr. Martin Luther King died five years later (my mother called him “Martin Luther Coon”) the adults around me were satisfied, claiming he “was just a trouble maker.” A true McCarthy follower, any one my mother disliked was also labeled a “communist.”

1964-1969

By the beginning of my fourth grade year, 1964, we had moved again. (Only later did I learn that in their haste to leave the old neighborhood, my parents could not find a house in a “good” neighborhood, so we had rented a townhouse.) For the first time, I experienced the sting of class discrimination. At first, the other children teased me because I was a “farmer who wore jeans.” As a result of teasing, I became increasingly sensitive about my worn, second-hand clothes, and my self-esteem plummeted. Most of my clothes came out of large cardboard boxes of unclaimed property from my
grandfather’s warehouse. (Now I realize that these were boxes of personal belongings from people who had moved or stored property, but were unable to pay the bill). I dreaded that one day another child would see me, get angry, and say, “Hey. Those are my clothes!” Whenever I complained about the used clothes, I was hit, and told I was ungrateful. I learned to shut my mouth and tried not to wear my warehouse clothes to school.

Sometimes we would go to my Grandfather’s warehouse on the lakefront and see the dilapidated shanty houses along the railroad tracks. No White families lived there. My mother would say, “See how lucky you are?” and I would nod in agreement. I remember that my grandfather would make fun of the “Niggers” who worked for him because they could not read or write. One day he showed me the misspelled word “bade board” (bed board) and laughed. I remember feeling embarrassed because two Negro men were within earshot, looking at us. Grandfather yelled at them to get back to work, and called them “lazy Niggers.” I kept thinking that I spelled phonetically, too, and wondered if my grandfather thought I was dumb.

About puberty, I developed a sense of shame about my body. I did not want to go to gym class, where I had to change my clothes and take a shower. My embarrassment was not over my developing body, like the other girls who tried to carefully hide their breast buds. No, my shame was over the cuts and bruises across my back and legs from being beaten. I learned to stand in a corner and dress with my back to the wall. I worked hard to avoid beatings and the telltale bruises. About this time, I also began to worry terribly that my youngest sister was being neglected. She was just a toddler, and several times I came home from school to find her hurt--an eye injury; a broken toe; and another
time, a Black eye, stitches in her tiny head, and a brain concussion. Once I went to pick her up from her Sunday school and panicked because I could not find her. The Sunday school teacher pointed to the piano, where I saw my sister hiding, wadded up in a tight ball, and sucking her thumb under the piano bench. The teacher said she did that every Sunday, through the entire class. Almost 20 years later as adults, we would discuss how the abuse and neglect had taken its emotional toll on each of us. I learned that she hid in our bedroom closet when my other sisters and I were beaten.

1970-1973

The good memories from my teen years included showing horses and 4-H activities, including public speaking contests and leadership conferences. I was also active in high school--German club, intramural athletics, choir, student council, dean’s assistant, and pom-pon girls. From the outside, strangers thought my life was great. “Such an achiever,” they would say. The “all American family.” But I did not think my life was great, and my self-esteem stayed low. I was merely doing what was expected of me, and I was expected to be the best at everything.

In the summer, while other kids were swimming at the gravel pit, my sisters and I operated a custom hay baling business for my parents. We worked like men in the scorching heat, operating dangerous machinery without supervision, and struggling to stack 80 pound hay bales high above our heads. By each fall, I was an outsider at school, without the shared summer experiences of my classmates. My reality was that other kids acted like I was White trash. They seldom invited me to their homes. I eventually grew too embarrassed to invite anyone over to our tiny unkempt house, smelly with raw sewage in the front yard, chickens in the basement, and livestock manure in the back.
When I turned 16, my parents allowed me to start dating. My father’s admonishment was, “If you ever bring a ‘Nigger’ home, I’ll paddle your ass ‘til your nose bleeds then kick you out of the house.” I’ll never forget that day. Those were his exact words, and I knew that he meant them. So I dated only the “nice, White boys” my parents approved. If they did not like someone I dated, I was shunned. It was senseless. Dating also exacerbated the shame of my lower economic status. For example, the best friend of a young man who broke up with me said, “You’re not good enough for him, so leave him alone.” Another young man, a doctor’s son, was continually badgered by his mother because I lived on a farm. He eventually broke up with me, too.

Somehow--and to this day I still do not fully understand it--I rejected my parents’ racist notions and ignored their disparaging remarks. I resented the hypocrisy of their nasty racist comments and stereotypes. I realized they were insincere when they told me “Color is only skin deep.” It ate at my conscience. How can this be my family? Perhaps as an escape, or maybe in rebellion, I became a voracious reader--hungry to learn about poverty, gangs, slavery in the Deep South, the Holocaust, and cultures of foreign countries. One particular book, Black Like Me, (Griffith, 1961) made me ashamed of being White. The simplicity of “color is only skin deep” now seemed ludicrous; it was clear to me that “color” meant much more--for Blacks and Whites.

1974-1976

Attending a community college was, in a sense, fortuitous. The year I was to leave for college, my parents took my savings. I had no recourse but to stay at home, work full time, attend a community “junior” college, and attempt to save more money. I resented having to give up my goals and watch others go away to prestigious schools.
Yet, in reflection, the rich experience of that community college setting in the 70s was perfect for me. Foremost, the student body was diverse with “displaced homemakers,” Viet Nam veterans, high school dropouts, and retired people. Once again I had friends from a variety of racial, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds. Faculty members were also unique. One of my favorite professors was a Episcopalian priest and another, a scrappy, long-haired, bearded, an anti-government activist. I felt like a sponge, absorbing other students’ life experiences and their perspectives about “truths.”

At home, I felt my situation was intolerable. My parents ostracized me for several weeks simply I had two friends who lived in a Polish neighborhood in North Chicago. Another time, my father threatened me with a beating for having a Black male friend. Truthfully, at 20 years old, I lied to escape the beating. I told my father that he was “just a friend from student council,” when I had dated the young man and liked him a great deal. Another dear friend was Jewish, of Hungarian descent. He confided in me that his last name was not real. His father, unlike his grandparents and uncle, had survived a concentration camp. In fear of the Nazis, his father changed his last name when he arrived in the U.S. One day my mother asked me why I didn’t date this young man. Without thinking, I told her that he wanted only to date an Orthodox Jewish girl. Her haughty response was, “He doesn’t look Jewish.” Her words and tone literally made me sick. Arguments resulted in beatings, and I became reticent.

This young man, Michael, and I grew quite close through our 4-H involvement. In fact, both of us were awarded a national 4-H scholarship the same year, due to our collaborative leadership activities. One event—a leadership internship in Washington, D.C.—was particularly insightful for both of us. When we arrived, our four-member team
was assigned a Black adviser/chaperone. I remember thinking how nice it was for Norman, the only Black person on our team, to have someone else Black to relate to. (Thinking back, Norman was the *only* Black 4-H member I knew.) He lived on a small farm near the southernmost tip of Illinois along the Ohio river, where most families lived well below the poverty line. The other member of our team was a White girl named Teri, who, like Michael and me, was from one of the “collar counties” of Chicago. Whereas Teri’s family lived in a middle class neighborhood, Michael’s family lived in an exclusive area. I remember the inside of his home looked like a picture in a magazine; I felt I was masquerading by simply standing in his kitchen. As a team, the four of us were a study of contrasts. I was emotionally closest to Michael, had a female kinship with Teri, but likened myself most to Norman, who was poor and lived on a farm like me. In fact, it was upon my insistence that Norman ended up on our team.

While we were in D.C., we interviewed several people about their leadership styles. Our charge was to bring back ideas and leadership materials to share with other Illinois 4-H members. One day, as we were walking along Embassy Row, we saw an armed, military-type guard patrolling the grounds of an embassy on the other side of a tall, black iron fence. We stopped and the guard acknowledged us. Being curious, we asked if he was armed because there had been some sort of trouble. No, he said, indicating that things were fairly calm. Then he laughed and added, “But I would not want to throw a nice little ‘Jew-boy’ into the yard to see what would happen.” A chill ran through me. I felt Michael stiffen. The four of us hurried away. Until that moment, I never realized that such hatred of Jews existed, and I finally understood why his father had changed their family name so many years before.
The other D.C. lesson that clings to my memory happened during a social event. Our advisor had invited us to her home for dinner. As we rode in her car, it was clear we were entering a “different” part of D.C. In sharp contrast with the huge, manicured yards near the 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, we were now in an area of tall, dark brick apartment buildings, void of tall trees and lush green lawns. I remember feeling tense and deriding myself for feeling unsafe. My anxiety diminished the longer we were in my advisor’s apartment. Then, the doorbell rang. My anxiety rose again. She indicated that she had invited her boyfriend to join us for dinner and walked to the door. To my astonishment, in strutted the personification of the 1970s icon, Superfly. Hat. Long coat. Jewelry. Jargon. My reaction: Our advisor was dating a pimp! Teri’s eyes and mouth were wide open and I signaled her to be cool. Superfly immediately related to Norman, calling him “Brother.” But Norman could not follow his Soul Brother handshake any better than the rest of us. After dinner, Superfly brought out an Ebonics matching quiz—terms in one column and definitions in the other. I felt intimidated by his “test” of us, but complied. In the end, I scored the highest on the quiz, followed by Michael, Teri, and Norman. Superfly was astonished that a White country girl knew more about Ebonics than did a Brother. He embarrassed Norman horribly. And, for the first time ever, I realized that stereotyping and small thinking was not a disease exclusive to Whites.

In 1975, when I was financially able to leave my parent’s house and move to Urbana, I worried that I would not be there to protect my younger sisters from abuse. Fortunately I bumped into a teacher I had loved and trusted since grade school. I did not tell him much about my home life, as that subject was taboo. Maybe this teacher instinctively knew something was wrong. After listening to my mixed emotions, he said,
“Robin, you need to move on with your life.” Clinging to the faith that he was right, I left the fighting, racism, criticisms, and my sisters’ well-being behind me. I just had to earn my bachelor’s degree. Only my maternal grandparents supported my college goal—even though neither of them was able to attend high school.

I embraced life at the University of Illinois, not my studies. It was wonderful to be free of criticism and fighting. I studied little, and placed most of my energies into beer drinking with friends and dating. I did not value my educational opportunity—just my freedom. I only attended classes when I liked the subject matter, which resulted in academic probation. During my senior year, while interning at the national FFA convention, I met a man from Indiana whom I truly liked, a former FFA national officer with a tremendous public speaking talent. We dated for several months before he broke up with me. Like a reoccurring nightmare from high school, his best friend had convinced him I was not “good enough” for him; he had ambitious goals and I was not the right “type” to be by his side when he became a millionaire. The sting of his words was devastating; my socioeconomic status was albatross I would never be able to shed.

1977-1994

With marriage and adulthood, I believed I would escape my past shame. However, during my wedding my husband loudly emphasized the word “poorer” in his vows. He chastised me for having cheap clothes, no money, and that my sisters now worked for a carnival. The badgering never ceased. At times, he was physically abusive. With no money, I could not leave. I had no place to go, because my parents would call me a failure. My self-esteem plummeted further.
I also thought I would escape racism, but that was not the case, as discrimination was around me once again. My husband and his family were quick to judge others and held many stereotypes. After I took a job working at the Association for Retarded Citizens, his family warned me that a mentally retarded man could molest me. My mother-in-law even bought me a bobby’s whistle so I could summon help. When the mentally retarded men from the group home would call out my name and wave, my husband would laugh at me. Racial and ethnic jokes prevailed at the dinner table, and gay-bashing was also routine. I did nothing to stop them because I needed to be accepted.

The town, Jacksonville, was the site of a historic state institution for the mentally ill, two state schools for the deaf and visually impaired, and two large nonprofits serving people with disabilities. When I moved there, I assumed people would be open and accepting. It was not the case; people feared those with mental and physical disabilities and they lived segregated lives. Two gay coworkers left town to find accepting communities. Further, just as in my childhood, all of the Black families lived on the northeast side of town. I often wondered how so many people can remain marginalized in one community? The words from a Beatles’ song often came to mind:

\[ All \text{ the lonely people, where do they all come from?} \]
\[ All \text{ the lonely people, where do they all belong?} \] (Paul McCartney, 1966)

Between 1984-1990, I traveled to families’ homes in seven different counties as a parent-infant educator, teaching parents and other guardians about developmental delays and how to teach new skills to their infants and toddlers. Some vignettes:
I once worked with a 14-year-old girl, pregnant with her third child, who told me her boyfriend tied a rope around her son’s neck, dragged him around the yard, and pretended to hang him. He also shot a BB gun at the boy inside their trailer.

One summer, I tried to teach a mentally retarded woman how to talk and play with her baby. Several professionals argued that the baby should be awarded to the state—even though the baby was not abused or neglected.

One rural family had six children in a tiny trailer with added on ply board rooms. The father hunted for deer, rabbit, and squirrel meat to supplement the garden vegetables and eggs they collected from a few hens they owned. To conserve their well water, they did not flush the toilet all day and shared the same bath water.

In an especially crime-ridden area of another city, a young mother showed me the bullet hole in her living room wall from a drive-by gang shooting. During another visit, she was hysterical that a rat had found its way into her baby’s crib and was chewing on her little girl’s paralyzed feet.

Without meaning this to sound like a cliché, I learned several lessons about my assumptions.

1. Some destitute and uneducated parents can fully embrace a “less than perfect” child.
2. Some affluent parents, consumed with the fear of stigma and rejection, may abandon a “less than perfect” child.
3. Filth, lack of education, abject poverty, and domestic violence span racial, ethnic, and class boundaries.
4. Not everyone living “in the projects” (public housing) is on drugs, welcomes government assistance, is unemployed, and/or lives like a pig.
5. Families often have needs and concerns that should supersede the priorities of professionals; professionals often fail to see how they abuse their privilege and power.

6. Mutual trust and rapport can be achieved across racial, ethnic and class “boundaries.”

7. The most acute lesson: Despite my background, I never realized what it meant to be truly poor.

   Truthfully, I realized the contradictions in my life. As a professional, I was working with urban and rural families of different races, ethnicities, and economic levels. At home, even though it violated my core principles, I tolerated racism because passiveness was easier than arguing with my husband and family members or risking their rejection. It was important for me to “fit in” rather than be controversial or combative. I justified my silence as being enough: after all, if I did not participate in the conversation, I was not endorsing it.

   Further, I was proud of myself for not wavering on the values I imparted to my daughter, Becky. In fact, I devised non-confrontational ways to educate my child, despite the conflicting racist messages from my husband. For example, during the summer, I made certain Becky had opportunities to play with children from various races and economic backgrounds, and children with disabilities. Another strategy: I purchased dolls that represented different races and ethnicities. That took some effort, because even though it was the early 1980s, the local stores only carried White dolls. I ended up finding a Black doll for her in Chicago, which was five hours north of where I lived. Within a week of purchasing the Black doll, my daughter asked me why her sitter said, “What is Robin trying to prove, buying her that Nigger baby?” Because this woman was
my mother-in-law’s friend, I never confronted her about her language in front of my child. In sum, I feigned blindness to stereotypes and discriminatory remarks. I was reticent and even cowardly; I had tolerated racism and did not like myself because of it.

1995-1997

I waited more than 10 years to return to school, because my husband would not “allow” it earlier. By 1994, we had agreed that divorce was imminent and I knew that he would eventually leave. Therefore, I also knew that I would have to support our daughter, a juvenile diabetic, on my own. Gathering all the courage I could, I told him, “It’s my turn to go to school and your turn to be a parent.” My timing was perfect. By 1995, he had been dating a coworker for more than three years and no longer wanted to control my life.

But I found that returning to school in middle age was a challenge. In spite of my professional background, accomplishments, and professional development activities, one faculty member did not want to accept me into the program because my undergraduate transcript was poor. I was incensed that he would judge me on mistakes I had made as a 20-year-old, rather than my skills and potential as an adult learner. His remarks fueled my lack of self-confidence; I feared I would not be able to compete with younger students. Plus, my writing skills were rusty and I had problems with dyslexia. The department chair permitted me to enroll in three classes with the edict to achieve a perfect 4.0 GPA. My very first class, educational statistics, had about 40 students and I was the oldest person in the class. I recall very little of what Dr. Gary Pike said those first 20 minutes, because I had chest pains from so much anxiety. As the semester progressed, my self-efficacy improved and I achieved a 4.0 that semester. (I secretly told myself I was
“kicking a little undergraduate butt!”) Even so, the faculty member still denied me official entry into the degree program. After another nine credit hours sustaining a 4.0 GPA, the faculty member *still* did not want me in the program. I began to suspect--and still question--that my age and/or gender were factors. Finally the other faculty members stood behind me and admitted me to the program despite the one person’s objections.

Outside the classroom, I grew acutely aware of the lack of diversity on my side of campus--the “white brick” campus. A majority of the faculty were middle-aged, White males. I saw very few students from underrepresented groups, with the exception of international students. Actually, the rest of the campus did not fair much better--very White, non-Hispanic. It was also clear this campus catered to younger undergraduates. Advertisements for the recreation center contained young faces. Campus surveys on student life and give-away items were aimed at an 18-year-old lifestyle. From my point of view, adults on campus were invisible. (In fact, while in an exercise class at the recreation center, the photographer snapping “promo pictures” took pictures of everyone but me!) I did not know it at the time, but my feelings about being marginalized helped serve as the impetus for my decision to pursue doctoral studies.

Back at home, life was horrible. Columbia was a two-hour commute, so I rented a basement sleeping room in a woman’s house and stayed there three nights a week. During the four days I was home, I performed all of the cooking, cleaning, homework help, doctor appointments, shopping, bill paying, and yard work. Although my husband agreed to supervise our teenage daughter on the days I was in school, I learned that while I was out of town, he left our daughter to run amuck with her friends. She seldom could find him when she needed him (like when she wrecked her truck), and grew depressed
and resentful. Her grades plummeted. On the days I was home, it was a constant struggle to reinforce curfew and other rules. We fought, and she would break windows when she got angry. Then one night she called me in Columbia in tears because her father had been abusive. The next day I told my advisor that I had to finish school as soon as possible because I needed to be home. Fortunately, he was very supportive and I finished my Master’s degree that summer. Within a few months of returning home full time, my husband moved to Green Bay, WI with his coworker.

1998-2005

Then came the divorce. We agreed to mediate the process with one neutral attorney. However, when I was served the divorce papers, I learned that my husband had demanded sole custody of our daughter, claiming I had “abandoned the family” when I had commuted to Columbia for my Master’s degree. (Don’t miss the irony that he was now in Green Bay with his girlfriend!) Looking back, I supposed he thought my self-esteem was so low I would not fight him. What he did not understand was that I was now a different person; I had gained self-confidence from going back to school. I hired my own lawyer and told him I would fight for custody of our daughter. At that point, he backed down, not even interested in shared custody, as we originally agreed. I don’t intend to get into the rest of the details, for what is important is this: As emotionally and financially devastating as the divorce was, it was also liberating. At 38, I was free from physical and emotional abuse for the first time in my life and started to feel better about myself. The pressure to be what others expected began to diminish. I set new rules and was forceful with my daughter. We went to counseling. I also set limits for her friends
about acceptable talk in our home--forbidding racist jokes and slurs. I was beginning to like myself once again.

When my daughter graduated from high school that spring, I moved to Columbia to pursue a terminal degree. Looking back, I probably should have waited. My daughter was still making poor life choices, intentionally not taking care of her diabetes, and landed twice in intensive care. Rather than go to Penn State as I had planned, I decided to go back to MU to stay close to her. The man I was dating was wonderful to me, but his daughters had emotional troubles because their mother had abused them. Now I had three girls who needed me to be a loving mom. Some days were quite a challenge, and I often had trouble staying focused on my studies.

My monthly budget was so limited that I invited another graduate student, Jose Alberto Cerdas Chavarria, to move in with me and split living expenses. It was a tiny place, yet Jose called it a “palace” because his family home, in Costa Rica, was next to a banana plantation and had a dirt floor. In a peculiar way, we achieved a bicultural living situation: Our place smelled of potpourri, lemon Pledge, garlic, and cilantro. We had fabulous conversations over Costa Rican coffee and Latino music, comparing lifeworlds, ideologies, and language--laughing about our cultural assumptions. Jose taught me to slow down and enjoy life more. Upon reflection, I also know that he helped prepare me for this study.

About the same time, I grew discontented with my departmental studies. I was frustrated with the biases, traditional pedagogical methods, and status quo thinking. Intuitively I knew more change was imminent for me--and I was scared. I finally chose to move on, knowing that if I did not challenge myself, I would never be happy because I
had settled for an easier path of mediocrity. I applied to the Higher and Adult Continuing Education program with a goal asking Dr. Joe F. Donaldson to serve as my mentor. I had taken a course from him in 1996, and wanted to expand my knowledge of adult learners--other people like me. In my new department, I was drawn to faculty members who engaged students in critical discourse from multiple viewpoints, in order to enhance student (and faculty) learning. And, for the first time ever in a classroom, I began questioning assumptions and values, re-examining concepts, and exploring new theories. My perspectives were changing. With the completion of each course, I found I was making more connections between various theories and schools of philosophical thought. I also became increasingly interested in the implications of institutional polices and practices, factors contributing to the marginalization of students in classrooms, and authentic campus diversity. I became less tolerant of racism. Was I the brave anti-racist I wanted to be? No. Did I still have racist thoughts? Yes. But knowing, admitting, and working to improve my limitations, was gradually helping me to become a better person.

From Dr. Donaldson, I learned that the literature on adult students is sparse--and has been for decades. Then, when I discovered that only a few researchers were studying underrepresented adult students, I told myself, “Here is where I can make a contribution.” About the same time, I was becoming disturbed over racial and political tensions in two of my courses. Group discussions were polemic and students with the dominant ideologies silenced students with divergent perspectives. Hallway discussions during breaks were tense. One professor, perplexed over what was happening, privately talked with me about what to do. While a negative experience, it reinforced my conviction that I
needed to conduct a qualitative study with adult minority students on their classroom experiences.

By then I was convinced that my life experiences had prepared me to be an understanding and caring researcher. In my arrogance, I had come to believe I could easily engage in meaningful research across racial and ethnic boundaries. After all, I now acknowledged my biases and believed I was sensitive to other’s life-worlds. Plus, I had a strong track record of being able to develop trust and rapport with families from various racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. However, in the fall of 2003, I read an article that caused me to have self-doubt. This article claimed that White researchers could not possibly understand the experiences of the Other. It said that minority participants would not reveal deeply held beliefs to a White researcher the same as they could with a researcher from a similar background. From this, I concluded that my dissertation research would not be valid and abandoned the notion of a cross-cultural study.

Shortly thereafter, I ran across two articles by Scheurich and Young (1997, 1998) about White racist assumptions and epistemologies in educational research. Rather than shrink from the challenge of cross-cultural differences, these researchers wrote that although Whites and people of color have “significant different ‘realities,’” it does not mean “no communication and total separation” (p. 30). Scheurich and Young view their research in the larger context of anti-racist work:

. . . Our point here, then, is that in the U.S., to be White (no matter your political or moral commitments are), to go through daily life with White skin privilege (a kind of long term White affirmative action), is to some degree, to be a White racist. . . .The two of us, for example, see ourselves as both anti-racist and White
racists. This we argue, is the contradictory, ambiguous reality of Whites doing anti-racist work. The two of us are both inside White racism, deeply and unconsciously affected by it, and working against it--both within and against it (1998, p. 31).

Their candor spoke volumes to me, and gave me a bit of hope. Fortunately, I knew several graduate students and faculty on the MU campus from different racial and ethnic backgrounds who were willing to engage in a respectful racialized dialogue (Brookfield, 2002; Tierney, 1993) with me--they did not evade racial, ethnic, and cultural topics. I met with each person individually and explained to them my interests and the conflict I felt: “Was I, a White researcher, doing the right thing by wanting to conduct a study with underrepresented adult students?” Amazingly, the people I talked to gave me the same answer: Move forward with your study. In sum, while they acknowledged my concerns about cross-cultural research were valid, they also saw the merit in my effort. One said because there are not enough researchers doing this kind of work, “any contribution will be helpful.” I was back on the path to my study.

Then I had coffee with another middle-age student, an African American. Like me, she has held several professional positions and was in the process of obtaining a Ph.D. She shared a story about a job interview she once had with a White woman. In the middle of the interview, the woman stood up, nonchalantly walked around the desk, and stood behind my friend to smell her. Rather, checked to see if she smelled. I re-tell this story for two reasons. First, that racism remains a cruel beast in the 21st Century and that anti-racist work, in any form, is important. Second, I now accept that as a cross-cultural researcher, I will never fully capture the essence of being the Other. Yes, I understand my
friend’s interview experience and empathize. I feel anger and shame as a White person. Yet, I will never be able to fully understand her life world. We do not have the shared experience of ancestors who were slaves. My parents did not sit in the back of the bus or face threats of a lynching. And certainly, I have never suffered the humiliation of an interviewer sniffing at me to judge if I was “qualified” for hire. I acknowledge that I am privileged by color, and I will never fully understand the experiences of those from other races, religions, and cultures. But I remain willing to learn.

After further reading, I began to understand racism as a broader concept, one that includes the institutionalization of power, privilege, and position. I accepted that my lens for interviewing, interpreting, and writing would be fogged with racist, Eurocentric assumptions. For these reasons, as a responsible cross-cultural researcher, I planned that my inquiry and interpretation processes would coincide with an ongoing, critical, self-examination of my Eurocentric values, biases, White privilege, and assumptions about race and ethnicity. Through careful listening, working honestly and diligently with my participants, engaging in reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Oleson, 2000), and asking others to challenge my interpretations, my aim was to extinguish faulty questions, analysis, and conclusions in my study.

Epilogue

About a month after I wrote this, I had the opportunity to return to Waukegan for my niece’s high school graduation. Before driving to my sister’s house, I turned down the short street where I once lived. In the street, directly in front of the small White bungalow with a green roof, were three small boys on bicycles. Two Black, one White. Absent was the barking dog, but memories of the three little boys from my childhood overwhelmed
me. I stopped my car across the street from my childhood home and wept. It was at this point I realized that my research is not a misguided attempt to achieve atonement for my past. Rather, my dissertation is a reflection that my life has come full circle--back to a place in my early childhood when I was permitted to embrace diversity and learn from others whose race, ethnicity, religion, and class were different from mine.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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VITA

Robin Gene Walker, named for her grandfathers Robert and Eugene, grew up in Lake County, IL, about 40 miles north of Chicago. The eldest of four girls in a White, non-Hispanic family, Robin played freely in her neighborhood with Black children and others from diverse religious backgrounds. As a result, she has loved learning about other families’ cultures and traditions from a very young age.

From kindergarten through second grade, Robin attended school in a low-income, predominantly Black neighborhood. At midpoint in third grade, her family moved to a predominantly White, non-Hispanic area, where she was academically behind in a better-funded school. After high school, Robin delayed her goal to attend the University of Illinois due to financial reasons. Instead, she attended a newly accredited community college, which proved to be a rich and satisfying experience for her, due to the age and racial diversity of student population, including young students, retired persons, homemakers entering the job market, and returning Viet Nam veterans.

Following an internship in Washington, D.C., Robin graduated from the University of Illinois, got married, and had one daughter, Becky. When Becky started school, Robin returned to the work force, joining the nonprofit, disability-related sector. During those ten years, Robin launched Illinois’ first toll-free line for Spanish-speaking families and collaborated with rural health professionals to reach migrant Latino families with disability prevention information.
In 1995, Robin returned to college to pursue a master’s degree, but by 1998, was convinced that a doctoral degree was also possible. While completing college courses, she worked as a resident instructor, Extension Associate, judicial educator, and research assistant. Robin also developed several sets of nationally published instructional materials, including a web course for the Extension Disaster Education Network.

Using the skills she honed in the nonprofit sector, Robin has been serving as a grant writer for MU while completing her dissertation research. In deference and gratitude to the participants of her study, Robin will be volunteering as a grant writer for the nonprofit organization, Centro Latino, in Columbia, MO.

A committed lifelong learner, Robin intends to acquire conversational Spanish skills and travel to Costa Rica to visit a former roommate and his family. Her career goal is to direct a postsecondary adult education program, where she also hopes to teach. In her spare time, Robin enjoys consulting on program development and evaluation, and eventually plans to obtain a professional certificate in program evaluation, specializing in qualitative methods.