

MEXICAN-AMERICAN FEMALES AND THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE:  
CHALLENGES AND SUCCESS STORIES

A DISSERTATION IN  
Education

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of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment  
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by  
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2016

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the challenges encountered by Mexican-American females and how they address those challenges in order to successfully complete a bachelor's degree. Mexican-American females were selected because of the minimal amount of attention paid to this specific population. Data collected included ten face-to-face interviews and document review. Using the qualitative process of listening to Latina voices, this researcher was able to use the personal experiences at their various universities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Results of the study found that graduates had many challenges during their academic career. Mentoring, family support, and personal determination and persistence were key to their success.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled “Mexican-American Females and the Bachelor's Degree Challenges and Success Stories,” presented by Donette Alonzo, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	20
3. METHODOLOGY .....	46
4. FINDINGS .....	60
5. DISCUSSION .....	95
Appendix	
A. EMAIL REQUEST .....	104
B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM .....	105
C. INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	107
REFERENCES .....	110
VITA .....	127

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. U.S. Born Hispanic & Non-Mexican Hispanic Population .....	21
2. College Enrollment Rates among 18- to 24-Year-Old High School Completers .....	35

## TABLES

Table	Page
1. Descriptive Codes .....	54
2. Codes and Themes .....	55
3. Participants' Responses to Themes .....	56
4. Demographics .....	62
5. Parents' Educational and Employment History .....	63
6. College Experience .....	78
7. Family Attitudes and Beliefs about Higher Education .....	87

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Let my year of “YES” begin!

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Recent statistics show an increase in college participation rates for students of color. In fact, current statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) show an increased participation rate for students of color from 15.7% in 1976 to 39.7% in 2012, undergraduate totals show similar statistics. NCES (2012) shows an increase from 16.6% to 41.7% during the same time period. When examining Hispanic participation rates, statistics show an increase from 3.6% to 15.8% between 1976 and 2012, and a subgroup of Hispanic women, there is a gain from 3.6% to 17.2%. While this increase can be celebrated, more work has yet to be done (Atwell, 2004). In particular, more needs to be done to examine the participation and success of Mexican-American females. Academic and societal issues such as low SAT scores, poverty, racism, inferior P-K12 schools and limited life experience continue to plague students of color, particularly Mexican-American females.

#### **Barriers to Higher Education**

Latinas who go to college deal with myriad obstacles. Some obvious barriers include under preparedness, having little or no mentoring, receiving inadequate advising, and experiencing social isolation. Those Latina/o students who do graduate from high school in many cases have completed a less rigorous curriculum (Fry, 2004). Scholars have written that the lack of finances, lower family support, few mentors, cultural stereotypes, inhospitable campus climates, and a sense of cultural misfit influences the Latina's college experiences (Capello, 1994; Cardoza, 1991; Cuadraz, 1996; Gloria, 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Quintana, Vogel, & Ybara, 1991; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000).

Latinas believe that going to college is a good option for them; however, having all the adequate information they need to succeed is a challenge. Limited knowledge about the college criteria and culture can lead to missed opportunities (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; Immerwahr, 2003; Nevarez, 2001). It can be a struggle to find people who can provide the right information and gain the students' trust. Even today, college campuses are predominantly white, male, and middle-class settings that value a culture of individualism and competition. The majority of students of color struggle with fitting in and being accepted when they have different views, styles of learning, or approaches (Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Watson et al., 2002).

### **Economic Impact of College**

Lack of a college degree affects the economic impact Latinas contribute to their families and the larger society. Latinas who do not complete a college degree are more likely to have poor paying jobs; and may never return to school due to family commitments. In the traditional Hispanic culture, a Latina is expected to stay at home and be the caretaker; she cannot leave until she has found a husband to take care of her (Jimenez-Silva, Hernandez, Luevanos, Jimenez & Jimenez, 2009). Yet in today's culture Hispanic families value their children getting a college education and this includes their daughters.

The Latinas who do not return or go to college and graduate with a bachelor's degree find it difficult to obtain a job outside of the home. The unemployment rate in 2013 for women was 7.1% compared to males 7.6 %. The number of White women who were unemployed was 6.2 %, African-American women 12.1%, Asian women 4.8%, and Hispanic women were 9.5% (U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 2015). Women who are 25

years of age and older with less than a high school diploma were 12.6% unemployed, those with high school diplomas and no college were 8.1%, and those with a bachelor's degree or higher were 3.8% (U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 2015). There is a connection with unemployment rates and higher educational levels for all racial female ethnic groups.

Another factor to look at when Latinas go to college and finish with a bachelor's degree is their income comparison it to other female groups. In 2013, Whites with a bachelor's degree earned \$50,000.00, Hispanics earned \$45,800.00, and African-Americans earned \$44,600.00 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2014). White females with a high school had a weekly salary of \$678, Hispanic \$604, and African-American \$600. These same women with a bachelor's degree weekly income was White females \$975, Hispanic's \$852, and African-American females \$870 (Hill, 2015). The outcome is clear that women who completed college with a bachelor's degree have a higher income is than those who did not.

### **College Experience**

Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) explain how the experiences Latinos have in college are different from their White classmates and these experiences create a wide gap in who graduates from college and who does not. Some of this gap is because Latino high school students attended more two-year institutions than White high school graduates. The Pew Hispanic Center Report/Kaiser Family Foundation (2004) provided the higher education community with a comparison of Hispanic and White high school graduates who go on to college. One key finding showed that among the best prepared Hispanic high school graduates, 60% of them attend non-selective colleges and while 45% of White high school graduates chose this option. Institutions that have open admission policies are mostly

community colleges. While students who attend community college are “among two-year college entrants that are ‘minimally qualified’ for college, 16% of Whites finished a bachelor’s degree versus 7% of Hispanics” (Fry, 2004). Another issue is the minimal preparation some Latinos have for college academics and culture. Even if Latino students choose to go to four-year institutions, as do more of their White peers, the majority of the time, they do not get the same treatment in and outside of the classroom from students, faculty, and staff in higher education. Castillo, Conoley, and Brossart (2004) state that Latinas who attend college have experiences that are best described at cultural differences between their Latina values and the university culture that is driven by White American values. This conflict is reflected in how they study and who they socialize with both in and outside of the classroom. The Latinas find that adapting to White American cultural values such as individualism may cause controversy with their Mexican-American values (Castillo & Hill, 2004).

As an example of the college experience, students on campuses across the country have spoken out about their college experiences. A recent situation in fall 2015 the University of Missouri (MU) in Columbia, Missouri is illustrative. Students of color at MU had been reporting racial discrimination for years, and these concerns reached a crucial moment in fall 2015. A number of African-American students formed a group called the Concerned Student 1950 and they wanted to sit down with campus administrators and voice their concerns about the racial slurs and discrimination they had experienced. They did not believe their voices were heard, which led to protests, a graduate student hunger strike,

possible game strike by the MU football team, and a call for the resignation of the system's president and chancellor (Supiano, 2015).

MU is not unique finding the need to deal with discrimination on their campus. After the media expose to concerns at MU, students at other universities throughout the United States began to express their discontent about racism and other discriminations they had experienced. Yale students wanted a new residence hall named for a person of color. The Purdue University president apologized to the university community for his knowledge of racism that existed on his campus and reinstated the position of chief diversity officer. Guilford College is attempting to have a more diverse faculty and staff members (Thomason, 2015).

Another impetus for this study is personal. I am a Mexican-American female who went to college in 1977 seeking a college degree. My college experiences in regard to challenges and success assisted me to find questions to research in more depth the participants for this study. From the beginning of the one-on-one interviews the participants and I had a trust and they shared far more than I thought they would. At times they cried because of some of the challenges they faced while attending college. Not one of them apologized or seemed embarrassed because they shared deep pain when the challenges seemed too much to deal with. I believe this was because we looked alike and I could be empathic with each of them. We also seemed to talk in a common language by this I mean they did not have to explain a lot of what they were saying when talking about culture and family expectations because I knew what they meant because of my own cultural experiences.

## **Latina/o Culture and Higher Education**

The future for some Latinas may seem bleak and unclear. This study focused only on Mexican-American females and when the findings and stories relate to only those of Mexican heritage it will be stated this way. When using the term Latinas it refers to women whose family heritage is from Spanish speaking countries. Orozco (2003) explains how she resigned herself to the idea of conforming to the standards of her Latino community, which included limited education, marriage and a family. Some Latinas are told not to think of college or it is not even discussed in the family because the parents do not know it is an option. One Latina shared her story and experience of college while at home. For her college was not discussed at home and she never thought that she would go until her older brother took the leap and went away to college. It was a difficult decision for her to make and it meant going against her cultural norm of the females stay home and raise a family. The traditional Latino culture is about the community, not an individual (Quevedo-Garcia, 1987). Latinas are to be the support that holds the family together when the parents cannot be there; they are doing this for the community not for themselves. Sy (2006) states that familism is about putting the needs of the family first without regard to the individual needs and wants.

Women of color graduate at a higher rate than their male counterparts (Lee & Rawls, 2010). These women have been found to be passionate learners who, value education, and are involved in their own educational success (Hooks, 1994). Gladwell (2008) also found that the successful Latina college student has faced the cultural dynamic, learned to problem solve, and when given the chance, took the opportunity to better herself. The women of color who learned how to embrace their culture discovered what success means to them, took on

leadership roles, and reached out to a wider view of what is community (Bordas, 2012). Even though a large percentage of Latinas face challenges before, while, and after receiving a degree, there are areas in which they find success. This study focused on those challenges and tools used for success.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although it is suggested that male Latino students are facing more barriers to higher education than their female counterparts (Gonzales, 2007), focusing this study on Mexican-American students is important for several reasons. First, Latina students are often neglected in higher education research and literature (Reyes & Rios, 2005). Reyes and Rios (2005) suggest that universities are struggling to effectively serve Latina students because of cultural stereotyping and the perpetuation of a “cultural deficit” model that implies a Latina identification is a disadvantage. It is also important to examine Latina students separately from their male counterparts because Latinas are more likely to experience gender-role stereotyping and family obligations when they enter college, which could ultimately affect their success (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Latina students also experience ambivalence as a result of coexisting in a culture that values family and interdependence and the world of academia that values individuality and independence (Gonzalez, 2007). Letting Latinas share how they have accomplished success and challenge at institutions of higher education provides learning from the past and preparation for the future. This is done through an exploration of the student perspective on the challenges of college life and the tools they used to succeed. Finding academic resources for this qualitative study was a struggle because of lack of data and research materials to compare information.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this narrative study was to hear from the Mexican-American females themselves of their challenges and resources they utilized to enable them for success in college. This study provides each participant to be interviewed alone so that their voices could be heard. “Narrative research employs restoring the participants’ stories using structural devices such as plot, setting, activities, climax, and denouement (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 180).

This study explored the challenges and success that Mexican-American females in higher education face in order to complete their studies with a bachelor’s degree. As Latina students continue to access higher education institutions, there will be an increased demand for studies focusing on the specific tools used to complete their degree in higher education. Hispanics ages 18 to 24 from 1996 to 2012 tripled (240% increase) the college enrollment (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). With these rapid growths in just one ethnic group it is important to study how those who have completed their bachelor’s degree to enable institutions to have the resources available to students before they arrive on campus.

This narrative study describes the lived experience of Mexican-American females who have been successful in higher education. The success in this study was achieving a bachelor’s degree from an institution of higher education. According to Patton (2001), “Narrative studies are also influenced by phenomenology’s emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of experience” (p. 115). As Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) suggest, “narrative can be both a method and the phenomenon of study” (p. 120). Creswell (2007) explains that the narrative is a method, which begins with a lived experience and the stories

are told by those who lived them. The different methods of analysis are up to the writer. This research examined the experiences Latinas have had on college campuses before graduating. The participant's experiences are expressed using their voices.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

#### **Research Question 1**

What challenges do Mexican-American females face while working toward a bachelor's degree in institutions of higher education?

#### **Research Question 2**

What factors and opportunities do Mexican-American females use to face the challenges as they work toward degree completion?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Qualitative research methodology was used for this study. Readings from Mason and Creswell (2007) on qualitative research states there is need for justification of qualitative research in the middle of the academic world that focuses a lot on quantitative methods. Maxwell (2005) emphasizes that the framework is to "study-the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research-is a key part of your design" (p. 33). This study is to share the experiences of ten Mexican-American females and their higher educational experiences while obtaining a bachelor's degree. They clearly discussed the challenges and openly expressed what they needed earlier on in their academic career to be more successful.

The two theories used for this study are: persistence and caring. Persistence was examined in this study. Retention and persistence are at times confusing and viewed as having the same meaning. Reason (2009) emphasizes that persistence is about an individual (student) who persists to a goal that they have established for themselves, while retention is “an organizational phenomenon-colleges and universities retain students” (p. 660). The persistent theory for this study is defined as a completion from a four-year university with their bachelor’s degree. Mexican-American females were contacted and asked to be participants for the study. They were interviewed on their university campuses.

Stowe (2006) defines caring as a worldwide concept that can be viewed from various perspectives. Views from the disciplines of nursing, art, literature, and psychology are explored in a quest to assist each student in developing a personal concept of caring. Nursing departments in higher education have been exploring and analyzing the concept of caring from faculty to student and student to patients they work with for years. Kozier, Erb, Berman, and Snyder (2004) explained how caring is also an action that involves “the will to care, the intent to care and caring actions,” Noddings (2003) capitalizes on the nature of women and how they have been brought up to care for others and not to think about themselves first and how women see their lives like a circle and it is important to bring all the people they know into it and even open it up to include those they do not know but need to be comforted and cared for (p. 46).

### **Persistent Theory**

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) have done extensive research on what influences students to learn and be persistent. Terenzini and Reason (2005) found that some

studies conducted by Astin (1985, 1993), Tinto (1975, 1993), and Pascarella (1985) were too narrow and that many more outcomes should be included. The framework of Terenzini and Reason was to encourage the isolation of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) and promote those who do research in higher education to broaden the many concepts affecting college student outcomes. The four areas that Terenzini and Reason (2005) bring to attention are: “precollege characteristics and experiences, the organizational context, the student peer environment, and finally the individual student experience” (p. 61). This study took the broader view of Terenzini and Reason to find out which concepts played a role in the Latinas who were interviewed as they talked about their challenges and successes.

Few studies have examined the precollege educational experiences of Hispanic students before they arrive at their selected schools. Traditional precollege academic ability like ACT and SAT scores, and grade point averages, do not give a full indicator regarding who will be successful in college. Non-cognitive variables need to be explored further for the full understanding of Hispanic student’s academic success. Nora and Cabrera (1996) looked at psychosocial factors experienced in high school to examine why Hispanic students leave college before degree completion. The two researchers identified thirteen precollege domains to explore and examine regarding student persistence:

1. Academic anticipation of going to college,
2. Anticipation of being enrolled in a more diverse student population,
3. Resiliency in the face of adversity in high school,
4. Perceived academic self-efficacy as established through high school academic experiences,

5. Perceived social self-efficacy as established through high school social experiences,
6. A sense of pride in academic endeavors while in high school,
7. Degree of shyness as reported by the student,
8. Nature and degree of involvement in leadership activities in high school,
9. Perception of the existence of a friendship support group while in high school,
10. Degree of encouragement and support received by that support group while in high school,
11. Degree of encouragement and support provided by parents,
12. Parental expectations of students before enrolling in college,
13. Patterns of internal or self-directed explanations when the student experienced a setback or unstable causes while in high school, causes that were likely to change quickly and not have long-term consequences. (pp. 61-62)

Nora and Lang (2000) also confirmed looking at further factors besides academic performance will assist researchers to provide insight on why Hispanic students make the decision to withdraw from college.

Other studies give further support for the use of additional factors to measure Hispanic persistence. Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) attempted to gain understanding of Latina/o's adjustment and attachment to college. The students were selected for their achievement of being semifinalists for a national scholarship award plus being freshmen at a university. Participants took part in taking the National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS) and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. The findings indicated the type of

college, and size of student enrollment where the students attended had considerable effects on how the Latina/o students' made social adjustment and attachment to their selected campuses. Private four-year colleges showed significant positive responses to social adjustment and attachment to the institutions of higher education. Two factors for positive outcome in academic adjustment of Latina/o students were the size of the Latina/o population and their relationships with faculty. The participants reported that a large number of Hispanic students on campus with a positive contact between students and students and faculty and students assisted in retaining them at their various universities.

During the participants' second year they reported that after their personal adjustment had been achieved, they could focus more on their academic ambitions. They were persistent toward managing their time, money, and schedules in a positive way. The students noted they knew adequate support was coming from their family as well as from the friends they had made at college. This encouraged them to ask for assistance with advisors, academic resources, and mentors that had a positive impact on them. It was even obvious to the participants they still needed support and guidance from faculty who they had built a relationship with during their freshmen year.

Longerbeam, Sedlacek, and Alatorre (2004) reported results from an online questionnaire that was established by University New Student Census (UNSC) to explore why Latina/o students drop out of college. The key factors were financial issues, the student's perception that they lacked academic preparedness to be successful, and the desire to go into the military. Another factor that came to light in this study was that Latina/o

students were more likely to stay and work through their challenges if they had a perception that the campus was diverse.

### **Caring Theory**

The second theory that was researched was caring. Stowe (2006) defines caring as a worldwide concept that can be viewed from various perspectives. Views from the disciplines of nursing, art, literature, and psychology are explored in a quest to assist each student in developing a personal concept of caring. Nursing departments in higher education have been exploring and analyzing the concept of caring from faculty to student and student to patients they work with for years. In 2004, Kozier, Erb, Berman, and Snyder, explained how caring is also an action and it involves “the will to care, the intent to care and caring actions.” The two authors capitalize on the nature of women and how they have been brought up to care for others and not to think about themselves first (Noddings, 2003). Women see their lives like a circle and it is important to bring all the people they know into it and even open it up to include those they do not know but need to be comforted and cared for (p. 46).

In 1999, Valenzuela brought to light the need for pedagogy to care and follow from and flow through relationships cultivated between faculty and staff with Latino students. The composite imagery of caring that unfolds accords moral authority to teachers and institutional structures that value and actively promote respect and a search for connection, between faculty, staff and Latino students and even among the students themselves.

Palmer (1998, 2000) explains how mutual respect and caring between teacher and student can be problematic because of the hierarchical traditions of education. He says, “What we teach will never ‘take’ unless it connects with the inward, living core of our

students' lives, with our students' and an inner teacher" (p. 31). "Inner teachers" do not use the traditional teaching methods but learn to have caring-healing relationships with students to foster teachable moments, promote self-discovery, and add the ability of personal learning (Bevis & Watson, 1989).

Latino students have different views of their family and home life from their white classmates and this is evident in how they view higher education (Evans, 2004). Evans goes on to describe how when Latino students go to college they experience the culture of higher education to be about individuals not a community environment, and because of this the students experiences a sense of loss as and go through a grieving process. The presence of faculty who care for Latino students and value relationships with them is important in their academic success (Arenson, 1997; Campbell & Davis, 1996; Griffiths & Tagliareni, 1999). This faculty presence aids students in finding their voices while not losing their cultural identity in higher education.

Having faculty and staff caring for Latino students while in college is not enough; the family plays a very important role also. Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) state, "university-based effort to retain Latina students must include family" (p. 149). Although typically not well-recognized by the university, family greatly influences and is of critical importance to Latina students. Parents may need reassurance that their daughters will be safe and taken care of at the university (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Orozco (2003) shares a personal experience from her own college years of how she felt cared for when her family came to visit her in college. "When my parents visited me in the dorms and brought carnitas (fried pork meat) with jalapeno chili peppers and warm

tortillas, it was then that I knew they cared-and that was reinforcing me to stay in school (p. 130). Orozco's study (2003) found a similar experience of finding someone who cared.

Orozco tells of her experience, "When I was assigned an African American male academic counselor, I was unwavering on making the most of the academic relationship. We met periodically; he reviewed my grades, and suggested tutoring sessions, which I sought because they were paid for by their services. Finally, I felt that someone at the university cared about my academic success or in my case, failure. At that point, I had some guidance and felt a sense of hope" (p. 145). The caring theory can have many variations as long it is a relationship between two people, who have mutual respect and the willingness to share with one another the positive and negative experiences inside and outside of academic areas.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Schmidt (1981) described qualitative research as the study of the empirical world from the viewpoint of the person under study. The biases of a qualitative study can change the outcome of the results more than a quantitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Mason (2007) then stated that qualitative researchers typically "position themselves in a study." As a Latina who is second generation Mexican-American and a college graduate, I wanted to research how current Latina's deal with the challenges and find success in college.

One limitation to this study is the participant's validity to remember and talk about her own higher educational experiences. Each participant volunteered for the study and was encouraged to talk only of their experiences while attending a four-year university during the before the one-on-one interview. To eliminate any concern the participants had in regard to

confidentiality they were told a coding system would be used to identify them and their institutions of higher education would not be named in this study.

Another limitation was the use of four-year institutions of higher education in the state of Kansas only. There was no outreach to universities in other states. Every university in Kansas was asked to provide participants but only two research public institutions and one private participated in this study. There is no comparison between the institutions other than the experiences of these Mexican-American female graduates.

The first delimitation I placed on this study was to only use Mexican-American females who were United States citizens or permanent residences. These participants were to have obtained their bachelor's degree the semester before or were in their last semester before graduation.

A second delimitation of the study was all the participants had graduated from a four year institution of higher education in Kansas. With the rapid changing of demographics in the United States Kansas is an area of the country where many Latinos came to migrate because of the work in the agricultural and railroad working opportunities. The Kansas Historical Society (2015) reported Hispanic growth in Kansas because of the meatpacking industry during the 1970 to 1980 when the state's Hispanic population increased by 35%. Many families came to work from Mexico and never returned to their homeland because they found a more profitable way of life and a way to give their children better opportunities than they had been given. The Dream Act of 2004 is active in the state and this allows undocumented students who graduated from a high school in the United States to gain education in institutions of higher education for in-state tuition.

The last delimitation of the study is to focus on the stories of success from the female's prospective. The students were asked to tell what opportunities and resources they used to enhance their success toward a bachelor's degree. I chose to use a qualitative research method because I wanted to hear from the student lens how they found success. All the participants were given the opportunity to share resources and recommendations to institutions of higher education to further assistance other Latinas toward successes.

Latinas are going to college at a higher rate than their male counter partners yet we tend to study only Latino males and why so many go to college but do not finish with a bachelor's degree. Researchers have also focused on many of the challenges these students have and tend to overlook the resources students use to be successful as they attended college.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section will include terms used in this study to enable the reader to fully understand the cultural expectations.

*Chicana*: "Mexican-American females born in the United States; often a term of pride" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

*First Generation degree seeking students*: Definition from York University: "Students who are the first in their families to attend an institution of higher education – more strictly refers to students whose parents have attained education at or below the high school level" (Douglas, 2007, para. 4).

*Institutions of Higher Education*: Academic institutions that award certificates, associates, and bachelor's degrees.

*Latinas*: Females who declare their family has origins in Latin America and Spain.

*Latinos*: Males who declare their family has origins in Latin America and Spain.

*Hispanic*: American citizen or resident of Spanish or Latin-American descent.

*Machismo*: A strong sense of manliness; an assumptive attitude that courage, strength, and entitlements to dominate are attributes of masculinity (“Machismo,” 2015).

*Marianismo*: A women’s role in the culture, and is exemplified by a woman being like the Virgin Mary (Gil & Vazquez, 1996).

Women of color: Females who declare they are African-American, Hispanic and/or Latina, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islanders (“Women of Color,” 2015).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the rationale and framework for this study. The lack of literature on Mexican-American female college success leaves a gap needs to be addressed. Institutions will benefit from studying the barriers faced by this population and the strategies they use to succeed, as they will have information that can allow them to structure supportive programs for a population that is often overlooked. Using interviews and document analysis, the voice of the student will be presented. Chapter 2 reviews literature and research studies associated with Mexican-American females as they complete college with a bachelor’s degree.

## CHAPTER 2

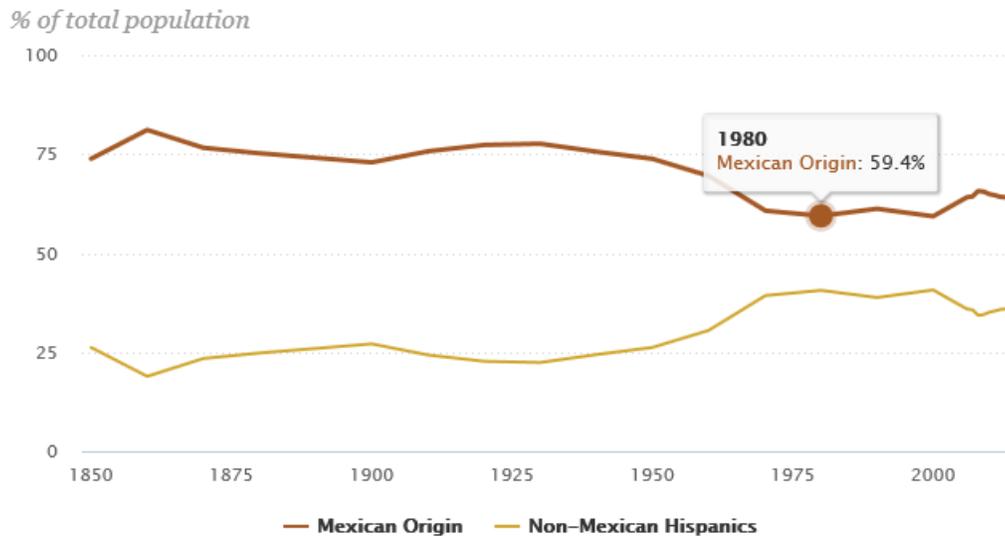
### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review will examine literature dealing with Latinas in the United States in their challenges and drive regarding completion of their higher educational experiences. It will also look at literature about Mexican and Mexican-American historical migration demographics in and outside of the United States, a Hispanic culture overview, how culture impacts college attendance, barriers to success in college from the point of view of all students, and students of color. In addition, it will address cultural traditions role about how Latinas fit in the family structure, gender roles, and stress dealing with social economics.

#### **Historical Demographics**

In 1980, the United States had a population of 22.65 million, and Hispanics represented 6.5% of the total United States population at that time. In 2013 there were 54 million Hispanics in the United States, making them 17.1% of the total United States population. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2014). The Hispanic population continues to grow in the United States. It is important to understand where and why certain immigrations have migrated to the United States. When other countries have population growth history shows the United States has immigration growth (Martin & Midgley, 2006). The number of foreign-born Latinos has increased more than 20 times over the past half century, going from less than 1 million in 1960 to 19 million today (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2014). This population in the last four decades did increase; yet after 2000 a noticeable decrease began to happen. The number of adult Hispanics born outside of the United States declined from 2007 at 55% in 2007 to 49.3% in 2013 (U.S.

Department of Commerce Census Bureau, 2014). This decline did affect those who immigrated to the United States.



*Figure 1.* U.S. Born Hispanic & Non-Mexican Hispanic Population

Historically, Latinos with Mexican origins have always been the largest Hispanic group in the United States. In 1860, when there were 155,000 Hispanics living in the United States, 81% of them were of Mexican origin. From that time on the origins of Hispanics who are in the United States have become diverse. A growing number of immigrants have arrived from other Latin American countries and Puerto Rico and settled in the U.S. In the 1980s and 1990s the growth of Mexican immigrants rose to 65.7% in 2008. Recently there has been a slight decline to 64.1% as Mexican migration has slowed down to the United States (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013).

## **Hispanic Culture**

Culture is best defined as, “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time” (Culture, 2015). The history of Mexico plays an important role in the cultural development and preservation of machismo and marianismo. Machismo dates back to the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The Mexican men learned how to treat their women from the Spaniards who saw women as second class citizens (Castillo, 1994).

Paz (1986) tells of the deep psychological damage that the Spaniards left on the Mexican people that came from being raped and taken advantage of and seen as a weak people who could not defend themselves. The Latin American spirit was deeply wounded and their sense of self was compromised (Abalos, 1993). Mexican women became objects, seen as things, and not as people who deserved respect (Paz, 1986).

In the Latino culture there are two words that describe concepts what Gil and Vazquez (1996) call two sides of the same coin: machismo and marianismo. These are two social constructs to be part of the patriarchal force that puts limits on Latina progress in life and provides constraints that are prescribed by gender roles. The gender roles are hard to move away from when the Latinas know no other reality.

Machismo has a negative connotation to those who do not understand the true meaning (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Machismo, is a deeply rooted cultural idea that a man has to defend his honor and this means appearing strong and the person who has power. In the machismo world the women are seen as property of the men they marry. Within this role, the woman is to stay at home and care for the needs of her family and community. It is hard for a

Latina to be caught in the desire to get an education yet want to be there for her family (Sy & Brittian, 2008).

Marianismo is a woman's ideal role in the culture, and is exemplified by a woman being like the Virgin Mary. Mary is submissive, obedient, self-sacrificing, and pure. She heard the call from God to be the mother of Jesus and followed this call without questioning; therefore, women are loyal, compassionate, and generous without expecting anything in return (Gil & Vazquez, 1996). These male and female roles in Latino families provide background on why Latinas finding it hard to convince their parents that leaving from home to attend college is a good thing. Often when Latinas bring up the subject of higher education, they are met with resistance because they are not to question the decisions their parents make for them (Sy & Brittian, 2008, p. 731). However, in the United States today, these gender roles are not being played out directly but can be exhibited in a covert way.

Daughters and sons in a Mexican-American family are viewed and treated differently. One example is that females are expected to work in the home, whereas males are not (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Since this is seen in the Latino families in the United States, the gender socialization outcome to follow the traditional expectations and messages. Miranda and colleagues (2006) points out that machismo and marianismo are significant factors in which the Latino females and males find their identity. This identity can cause conflicts in the United States because the Latino view is seen as too strict and leaning toward a machismo view of protecting females (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman & Meek, 2006).

Another cultural view is that comes to play is the familismo, which means that the Mexican-American people value their family. The family obligation is to follow what is

being modeled and taught in and out of the family on how gender roles need to be played out (Sy & Brittian, 2008). To be familismo is to put the family needs first and make personal sacrifices. Marianismo views female Mexican-Americans mean that they sacrifice their own wants and desires to be there for their family even if it means not going to college (Sy, 2006). There is also the family assumption that the females move from their family to another (Sy & Brittian, 2008). In other words, they get married and leave their parents' home and go to their husband's home to form a new family to care for (Ortega, 2006). The Mexican-American gender roles affect how and if Latinas go to college.

Parents of Latinas find it hard to let go of the cultural ways, including gender and how they treat their daughters. Latinas do not assimilate into the majority reality (Barajas & Pierce, 2001) as much as Latinos do. These women struggle with who they are and how will they fit in with others who are different than them, but yet they do not lose sight of their cultural values. They find other Latinas on and off campus to assist them in their academic struggles. There may not be many on campus, but the few that are there find one another and form their own group to assist one another toward success (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). The desire to seek out other Latinas on campus is important for their success because they understand what is going on at home and in college.

The tension of being away from home is heightened when one tension is the constant pressure for Latinas is to prove to their parents that they can take care of themselves without being with a man. It takes time to convince the parents that going to school is a benefit. It is not true that Latino parents do not want their children to go to college, but the reality is many do not have any higher educational experience themselves so they do not know how to give

quality advise when their children need it (Vasquez & Lopez, 2002). Latino parents need to make a connection with the institutions of higher education. They need to know there are others to take care of their daughters such as faculty, and staff members (Gonzalez, Jovel & Stoner, 2004). With others on campus who know the Latino culture, they know their daughters will be able to find support from those who have her same values. Working through the gender aspect of the transition to college can be difficult yet another issue can be culture and being true to oneself.

Family is a high priority to Latinos and with this commitment comes with both positive and negative aspects. These traditional cultural barriers heighten when Latinas attend institutions of higher education because of the desire by the parents for them to stay living at home or go to school close by (Nelson, Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007). The family obligations do not go away once a Latina goes to college, as tensions continue between being a good and active student and a good Latina by participating in all that goes on at home. Latinas experience requests from parents asking them to be home for important life experiences while the students have school obligations such as homework. This causes the family to think the Latina is losing her commitment to her culture and desiring to be away from the family who gives her support and care (Nelson et al., 2007). Conversely, another study found that attachment to the family can be beneficial for the success of Latinas in higher education (Aldaco, 2010).

Parental support for the Latinas gives them a solid foundation for success. A study was done at Yale University with ten first-generation Latinas, who talked about their parents' support while working on their undergraduate degrees (Ceballo, 2004). The parents in the

study had given their daughters facilitation of autonomy. This kind of freedom allowed the Latinas to make important decisions on their own because the parents did not know how to be involved and college life was not in their reality. In such a case, the parents trusted their daughters to make good decisions. As one Latina said, “they didn’t even know what Yale was” (Ceballo, 2004, p. 178). Ceballo makes a point that this kind of behavior by the Latino parents is not at all common, as Latino parents seek control of what their children do.

The positive support given by parents and peers to Latinas as they pursue their educational goals of being successful enhances their success. When a Latina is confident in her relationship with her family and helps them see the value of an education that she is receiving, she finds her best support those family peers (Garriott et al., 2010). This kind of support can help the Latina when she encounters discrimination and marginalization. The Latina believes in herself to know that the whole world is not like these who do not see her as a value, because she knows her family is there to support her in all her endeavors.

With all the challenges Latinas deal with in working toward a degree in higher education, the most complex is being underprepared for the academic culture (Rodriguez et al., 2000). A recent study of Latinas sharing their college experience told how in high school their counselors had low expectations they would attend college. Some of the Latinas said their Anglo teachers were mean to them and always spoke down to them (Cavazos & Cavazos, 2010). There were no Latino teachers whom the students could relate to, and when they tried to find support, their teachers poked fun at them or yelled at them. The negative comments and treatment leads the Latina student to live out a self-fulfilling prophecy (Martinez, 2003). Without support from their high school teachers and counselors, the

Latinas were not planning on college, suffered low expectations, or not be prepared in order to be successful. Not only did the Latinas deal with low expectations, but they also had been given minimal information about higher education and academic preparedness.

Kimura-Walsh, Yamaura, Griffin, and Allen (2009) found out that many of the students did not receive college information because they did not rank in the top 10% of their class. This kind of treatment has been common when asking Latina students how they found out about college. Some of these same students experienced being put into classes lower than their academic ability because English was not their first language. Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) mention an important role for the success of Latinas was to have faculty and staff who care about students from all ethnic backgrounds and not try to put them in a box but instead to have high expectations of them. As schools form partnerships with parents of Latinas to make sure the family knows all the options their child has in regarding to higher education, the student know she can go to school counselors and parents for academic support. The barriers and concerns that Latino parents have are minimized because they know where their daughters are going to be spending a large percent of their time away from home; the unfamiliar then becomes the familiar.

### **Barriers to Success in College**

#### **General Student Adjustment to College**

With life changes comes adjustments, and beginning college is no different as it requires a process of change. Tinto (1987) has been widely quoted and critiqued regarding his views about how young people adjust to higher education. His research has a longitudinal, predictive model of slow destruction that incorporates into the academic and

social systems of the institutions of higher education at the core of the attrition process. With interactions in both the social and academic arenas, students do one of two things they either reaffirm or reevaluate their goals and commitments. Other students who have little contact with their classmates on campus or have a bad experience may chose to leave the university after they have reevaluated their experiences.

In 1980 and 1983, Bean researched another way to explain college persistence based on models of organizational turnover and relationship between attitudes and behaviors. This model implies that students either go to college with certain attitudes and expectations that are given affirmation or the students adopt new impressions during their college years. The model is that the students enter college with their own attitudes and behaviors that are approved of or not approved through their campus interactions; the students receive confirmation about their attitudes and behaviors or form new traits. This affirmation or new attitudes and behaviors lead the student to stay or complete college. It is highly predictive of students' choice to their selected colleges. Eaton and Bean (1995) extended Bean's early model to a deeper level to consider students background characteristics that are related to assimilation. This model has social and academic integration including their university's characteristics that influence the students' attitudes. These attitudes establish the students' commitment to the college and feelings of belonging. A key element to mention is that both Tinto and Bean discuss academic integration, but each places it in a different role in their models. Tinto gives academic performance credit toward academic integration and Bean gives greater credit to grades for this same academic integration.

Astin (1984, 1993) did in-depth research on college students and discovered those students who were more involved in various campus activities are more likely to have better results in both short and long terms. This is called the “input-process-output” model that realizes students’ involvement is in direct relationship with their academic’s and social events while in college. Astin (1993) further says that the college environment is a key factor to this process because it is vital that gives students opportunities for interaction with their peers and faculty; this is definite connection to degree completion as well as possible successful outcomes. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) affirmed the outcomes Astin reported concluding “that the level of student involvement and integration in any of the components of an institution’s academic and social systems can be a critical factor in students’ persistence decisions” (p. 426).

### **Mediating Factors in School Adjustment**

Many similarities exist in both Tinto (1987) and Astin (1993) perspectives. The key component is making connections to individuals and groups on college campus that lead to a students’ persistence. The process Tinto confirms is divided into integration of the social and academic fields of the college; however, Astin took a more multifaceted approach to better understand the influence of the various types of campus involvement on student outcomes. For Bean (1980, 1983), the substance of these interactions (validated or non-validation) is a cause for concern. Research indicates that certain groups of students such as multicultural students (Attinasi, 1989; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992) first generation students (Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2003; London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994) have a higher risk of leaving college than other groups of students. Research also affirms that financing college

can add stress to students' desire to complete college and affect their performance and satisfaction (King, 2002). With only a vague mention of background characteristics none of these perceptions detail an accurate view for the distinctive difficulties these groups will face. A large majority of African American and Latino students are first generation who rely heavily on financial aid to attend college these students also face other issues that can affect their adjustment to college, including their minority status on predominantly white campuses.

Research shows that African American and Latino students on average have lower grades and are at more risk of leaving college (Bowen & Bok, 1998). This is only moderately explained by differences in family background, resources, and academic preparation, leading to the belief that these outcomes come from events and circumstances that occur in the college environment (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2002). Stelle (1997) suggests that negative stereotypes about the academic ability of African American and Latinos may result in their lack of achieving their full academic expectations because of fear of confirming these negative stereotypes. He says that in time this fear can interfere and have negative results in students' not identifying from the domain in which the risk as a defense mechanism (Stelle, 1997; Stelle & Aronson, 1995, 1998). Data also show high level of alienation and perceptions of discrimination among students of color on predominantly white campuses (Allen, 1992; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Loo & Rolison, 1986). With this research it is assumed that race and ethnicity have a deep impact on how college is experienced by students of color, leading to a conclusion that their adjustment process is not the same as their white classmates.

Going to college is an adjustment for all students but for first generation students this process can be complex. Terenzini and colleagues (1994) found after interviewing first-time freshmen from four universities that there are major differences between students who were from families in which college was an expectation as part of their process into adulthood as opposed to students who were first generation to attend college. Going to college is no easy transition for any student yet for first generation students this process can have additional difficulties (Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2003; London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994). Terenzini et al. (1994) point out that many first-generation students who go to college see this time as a disconnection in their life course because of separation from their friends and family. Ishitani (2003) also points out that first-generation students are at a higher risk to leave college than their classmates whose parents graduated from college.

Another issue regarding adjustment to college life is how students stay connected to off-campus friends and family once on campus. Tinto (1975) was clear in his model that this is a challenge. This model affirms what Van Gennep (1960) calls the rite to passage that encourages separation from past communities as an essential part of assimilation into their new college community. Van Gennep (1960) believed it was essential for students to leave behind their past communities to make a successful transition to college. Ongoing debate continues if these off campus relationships continue at the cost of assimilation into campus life and if this might be a critically helpful issue for students of color to making the adjustment to college life (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pollard, 1990). Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) established that support from family and friends, measures of social mixing and signs of goals are positively connected to

persistence and the plan to persist. Nora and Cabrera (1996) found while comparing students of color and white students at a large university that the change to college is easier for students who have supportive family and friends from their community. Pollard (1990) also found while studying African American professionals that off-campus support from family and friends is imperative to their persistence in college. These findings are not in essence in opposition to Tinto's (1993) theories as he does acknowledge that some students who have family support in college are persistent, but he also says that this kind of support is not the major component for minority students. Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, and Pascarella (1996) have supported Tinto's model that maintaining active relationships with off-campus does pull students away from becoming more involved in the social life on campus. These off-campus relationships were specifically dealing with family and/or work commitments rather than merely support. The mixed findings indicate that it is important to better understand the off-campus relationships as their presence does not automatically mean that they lead to negative outcomes.

The research outlined indicates that how students adjust to college is important to their persistence toward success. Students who are more involved in various campus activities on their college campuses are more likely to persist through college and also perform better academically. The models of student attrition and involvement were primarily based on experiences from typical college students who were most likely white and middle to upper class. However, indicates that this process of college adjustment may not go as smoothly for students of color. In particular, research has shown that African American,

Latino, first-generation students, and students who need more financial aid support are more likely to leave college before completion.

### **Latinos Educational Attainment**

Latinos value education. They see education as a way to make a better life for themselves and their family members. Parents are primary factors in the academic achievement of Latinos/as. Encouragement, and emotional support, plays a strong role in how successful Latinas are in education. Butner et al. (2001) found that if higher education is discussed in the home, the likelihood of students continuing their education is enhanced. If parents are involved in their success, for example assisting with homework, going to school events, and mentoring their child, the outcome of a Latina graduating from college is improved (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). Another factor that provides a good indicator regarding if Latinas will be successful in college, is strong female role models. These strong females can be grandmothers, aunts, cousins, mothers, and other women close to the family. They model how to be a strong Latina and persistent either alone or with others.

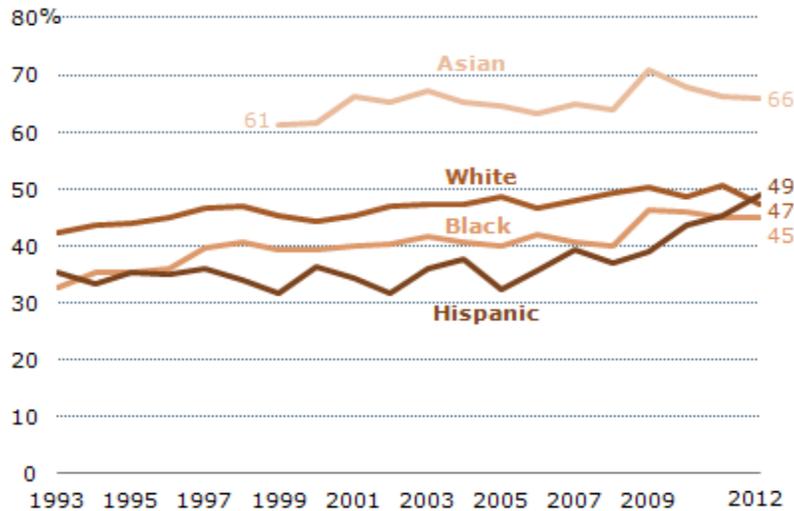
Latinas are no different than other students who face challenges before and once in college, but their struggles to be successful as they work toward a college degree are not being shared with the wider community inside and outside of the academic world. One problem is the lack of Latinas in college. Latinas face the reality that their gender, culture, and lack of preparation for higher education will affect them negatively. The family plays a role in the success of a Latina's choice and persistence in college. Mentors who are in the family and those not in the family are also important. Once a Latina decides college is for her, she faces many factors. The one key element which stands out in the literature regarding

why there are not more Latinas being successful in college is persistence. A solid foundation of success in college for Latinas is rooted in their persistence.

The U.S. Census Bureau has reported that over several years there have been some gains in college enrollments in the United States; however, between 2011 and 2012 enrollment has fallen. One group that continues to show growth in higher education is Latinos because of the growing number of Latino youth who are of college age. In 2014 the U.S. Census Bureau also reported that Hispanic students reached upward goals in trends of educational attainment and attendance to college.

College enrollment rates among Hispanics who are between the ages of 18 to 24 years old who have completed high school are progressing upward. The U.S. Census Bureau in 2014 reported that in 2012, 49% Latino high school graduates were enrolled in institutions of higher education in comparison to white non-Hispanic high school graduates, with 47% enrolled in college. Between 2011 and 2012 the growth in Hispanic students enrolled in college marked the third straight year of increases. When comparing Hispanic college students to non-Hispanics enrolled in institutions of higher education between 2011 and 2012, there was a decrease in non-Hispanic students. Figure 2 demonstrates the trends of high school graduates going to college.

Figure 1  
**College Enrollment Rates among 18- to 24-Year-Old High School Completers, by Race and Ethnicity**



Notes: "White" includes only non-Hispanic whites. Starting in 2003, respondents could identify more than one race. The figures for 2003 onward refer to the white-, black- and Asian-alone populations. The data shown prior to 2003 consists of those identifying themselves as "Asian or Pacific Islanders."

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the CPS Historical School Enrollment Time Series Table A-5a (<http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/historical/index.html>)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2. College Enrollment Rates among 18- to 24-Year-Old High School Completers

A study done by the Pew Hispanic Center Report (2013) clearly states that Latino students were lagging behind in graduating from college. Latinos in 2012, received 14.5% bachelor's degrees of those going to college who were 25 years old and older. Comparing these Latino students to their classmates who are Asians 51%, 34.5% of whites, and 21.2% of blacks completed their degrees within higher education.

A large percent of Latinos go to two year schools and are part-time students. With these numbers being the starting percentage who are working toward a bachelor's degree, it is obvious that those pursuing graduate degrees will be low also. Challenges are common for both Latinos and Latinas, but this research will focus only on females. Issues dealing with

gender in the Latino community are known and it is not unusual to have parents struggle with the issue of letting their daughters go to college. Latinas are looked upon as those who stay at home and take care of the family so the parents can work, and if they go to college and/or away to school, this responsibility falls on someone else in the family (Sy, 2006).

Being aware of one's culture can be difficult and many Latinas find this a challenge while in college (Sy & Brittan, 2008). Cultural differences are pointed out of by those who see the Latinas as different in how they deal with everyday life. The Latinas who choose to leave home and attend college deal with having to adjust to living in two separate cultures while attending school (Sy & Romero, 2008). Once at college, Latinas are faced with being under prepared for the academic rigorous demands. Some of the academic expectations are hard to keep up since some of the Latinas did not have the same experiences while in high school. This lack of academic preparedness adds to the stress on the Latinas some choose to leave college never to return (Ortega, 2006).

### **Latina College Experience**

In 1987, Tinto gave a model of student integration that explains how young people in higher education integrate into academics and social systems. Tinto says that when students do not integrate while in college, it affects their outcome. Astin (1985, 1993) echoed Tinto by saying that those students who become active on their college campuses have a better success rate than those who are isolated, or choose to be. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) give more support to Tinto and Astin and report "that the level of student involvement and integration in any of the components of an institution's academic and social system can be a critical factor in students' persistence decisions" (p. 426). With these findings, it appears crucial for

Latinas to be involved in academic and social systems in higher education in order for them to be successful.

Research shows when Latinas have had to deal with alienation or discrimination while in institutions of higher education, it affects their confidence to succeed and persist. When Latinas believe in themselves and know they can be college graduates, it allows them to overcome a lot of the challenges they must go through on a daily basis while they focus on their academics. If Latinas feel isolation they begin to distrust the institution and those who are there to provide resources. When this happens, the Latina then refuses to ask for assistance and finds her trying to be successful without a support from the place which has the knowledge to be successful. This is very common with first-generation Latinas because they do not trust the institution of higher education and have no one at home to go to either to assist and explore their feelings (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005).

In a narrative study by Jimenez-Silva, Hernandez, Luevanos, Jimenez and Jimenez (2009), the researchers tell about two sisters' experience of isolation when they arrived to attend college and how they dealt with this challenge in two different ways. Norma was two years younger than her sister and decided to attend the same four year institution as her older sister. Their parents found comfort that the sisters were going to be going to the same university. Both sisters expressed how they struggled with academic knowledge and how to work within the college system to find all they needed to be successful; however, it was noted from both that the college was open to all their questions. Norma explained how her high school had limited resources and it was obvious to her once she arrived at college. She felt like her high school academic curriculum did not prepare her well. She also felt the social

isolation right away; since the college culture was different from her home culture, she experienced culture shock. Even little things, like the food, were different. Her parents thought Norma would have an easier time adjusting to college if she lived with her older sister. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Norma did not have the connection with other students from different ethnic backgrounds because she was not living on campus. In addition, her sister had little time for her because Norma often went home on weekends, so she would not feel lonely. Norma shared how, in order for her to be successful, she needed to make changes. One of those changes was to be active on campus and find student groups that were like her.

Assimilation in American white culture has been a concern of sociologists for years (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963; Gordon, 1964; Park, 1950; Rumbaut & Portes, 1990). Park (1950) wrote that the process of assimilation into the dominant culture was for a person to find acceptance. At first it was obvious to new immigrants this needed to happen so they could be successful. Latinas do not assimilate in the ways of Latinos (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). This kind of change makes the Latina doubt herself and what she has learned from her family. To be different from the place that has given you your identity can cause a Latina to have internal conflict between having a Latin culture and being educated.

During her third year of college Norma began to forget she was Mexican some days. The “adaptation meant becoming part of the institution, being immersed in social activities on campus, and doing well academically” (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009, p. 735). Norma learned to not question the status quo and navigate the socio-cultural borders of school and home. Norma knew of many students of color who struggled at her college and did not graduate.

This led her to learn how to adapt to what was expected of her while at college. At times, when she went home to visit, her family accused her of being “white.” At first this caused to her to wonder what they were talking about, but with time she began to understand how she acted differently at school and home. Norma was learning to understand her process of ethnic identity development. This process is not new for students of color who go away to college (Jimenez-Silva et al.).

Years later Norma was to fully understand the ethnic identity development she went through in college. While taking the time to grasp her experience, she wished her friends, siblings, parents, classmates, faculty, and staff would be able to understand what she had to go through to be successful in higher education. After graduating and processing what she had gone through, Norma realized why she went home on most weekends. The journey home was for her to always keep in mind not to lose her Mexican American culture and to remember to be true to herself even while at school because her success was for not just her but her family. She also promised to assist her younger peers and family members when they began their higher educational journey as they processed through their ethnic identity development. Norma did not lose sight how important a quality education is and wanted to be a mentor for others to learn because she realizes. Latinas need mentors for their success in higher education. This study only gave two examples of how Latinas deal with going away to college and finding success. In this study there will be more Latinas and stories to tell.

Gandara (1995) wrote *Over the Ivy Walls* which included a chapter on how the women in her study talked about needing mentors and wanting them in their lives as they struggled through college. Even now, in 2016, Latinas who are going to college wanting to

be successful are looking for and desiring mentors. These are people who may and may not look like them, but most importantly, they are people who care about their success and who can be there for them with the challenges get to be too much to handle.

Family can be a support to a Latina in higher education, but if they themselves are struggling to understand what is happening, it is important to obtain that support from outside the family and campus. Some institutions of higher education realize that family support is the best mentor for Latinas and they have found ways to invite the family to be involved in the Latinas academic culture (Castillo & Caver, 2009). This also helps the family know and feel comfortable with the school their daughter is attending. The family plays a significant mentoring role for the Latina. Family is consistently identified as a critical source of educational support and encouragement that affects academic persistence decisions for Latina/os, (Hernandez, 2000). Maintaining family relationships and support are keys for a successful outcome as the family members are the ones to shape the Latinas' personality, cultural, and community values (Gloria et al., 2001). These values also are shared with siblings and peers who they find can be a support while persuading a degree in higher education.

"I needed to remember where I came from," Orozco (2003, p. 130) wrote when discussing college experience and looking at people who were not like her. Veronica knew her parents wanted her to finish high school and get married so she would have someone take care of her. However, this was not what Veronica wanted. She came from a hard working family that worked on the farm and education was not talked about. Veronica had an older brother who went to college and she knew that is what she wanted for herself. When it was

time for her to make the decision to go off to college, she asked her parents' permission to go but if they did not allow her, she knew she would not go. Her brother talked to her parents about the academic culture and how Veronica would be fine if she went. The real shock came when Veronica wanted to go far away from home to school. At first her mother was not going to allow her to go and felt she did not like her family and wanted to be away from them. In the end, Veronica decided to attend a university closer to home because her brother was there and they had the degree she was most interested in. While away at school, she kept in contact with her parents and used her brother as a support person for all her decisions.

Mendoza (2005) wrote about Latina college students who achieved success against all odds. Three students were given insights about how siblings and peers were their mentors. Ceja (2004), assistant professor of public policy and administration at California State University-Sacramento, says Latinas who have siblings who went to college serve as good mentors and can provide a better path of success because they themselves have been through the educational system. The Latinas who are younger benefit from the information shared with them by their older siblings. However, there have been conflicting outcomes regarding peer mentoring.

Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) show that peers who are supportive are critical for Latinas' success in higher education. Peers provide a group of people who are caring and trustworthy, plus they have the advantage of seeing each other every day during their daily routine. Yet empirical support shows that peer mentoring has had mixed results. Nora and Cabrera (1996) found no relationship between Latinas' success and having supportive peers. More studies can be done to find other outcomes of how supportive peers

can be for the success of Latinas in college; another route could be faculty and staff who can also be valuable mentors to Latinas while in college (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005).

At institutions of higher education the faculty and staff from all ethnicities, can be considered mentors, yet the best ones are those who have an understanding of what Latinas will experience during their time in college. Two-thirds of Latinas enroll in mentor programs because they have a strong desire to help others like themselves (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). Family and peers are good mentors and all students need this kind of support, but for Latinas it is necessary to have a more formalized mentorship. Faculty and staff know how the university system works and can give helpful insight to the Latina as she is learning to find her way around the new academic culture. To implement a formal peer-mentoring program is essential to any Latinas' success in college, so those involved can know what information is vital to their success and have to not wonder where and how to find it (Santiago-Rivera, Arrendondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). With formal mentoring, the Latina knows who she can go to for help with her struggles or just have someone to listen and understand where she is coming from without having to worry about how she will be judged.

Barajas and Pierce (2001) tell stories of Latinas who had experiences before and after entering college and how these Latinas now wanted to make sure those who have come after them have someone to find support with. The study tells of how the Latinas knew they were not prepared for higher education because after arriving they did not know about resources available to them and were lost in whom to ask for assistance. Latinas find comfort in having mentors because it is relational and they like this. Marta, a 20-year old Chicana, explains how

she values her mentor who is not a faculty or staff person where she goes to college. Marta valued having someone to talk to who listened to her and understood where she was coming from. She did not have to spend time explaining what she because it was just understood. Marta liked that her mentor made time for her to talk about things like her family and how they were handling her being away from home and missing important family events. This indicates that mentors can help Latinas know they are valued and have someone who cares about them.

Latinas are about relationships, and mentorship is about relationships. Young Latinas need to know there are older Latinas who have had the same experiences as them and want to be those women who can be a solid support for them in their lives and educational journey toward success. Latinas have had to face racial discrimination, prejudice, and pejorative stereotypes. As women, to face this alone can lead to self-doubt, but with others it can make them stronger. The negative impact will affect them less when they know they have others who understand them and will challenge them to not let others control their futures (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). When Latinas find safe places to be themselves, they will invite others to join them as they celebrate their success. And all this is done with persistence and determination to reach out to others in order to have them experience success also.

Latina students' perceptions of the college environment can have an effect on their social and academic lives (Gloria, 2005). This also means it can have a negative effect on their desire to stay in school and finish with a degree. Belonging to something is important to everyone, but being a young person who is out of his or her comfort zone and being away at

college for the first time, can have lasting, lifetime effect. Yet with Latinas the desire to be successful can take them a long way.

Latinas face challenges every day during their college experience. Most of them have told researchers how they felt that being a female caused their parents to hesitate to let them go to college, or that their families believe that women need to stay at home and take care of others. Also when they did go to college, they lacked information on how to be successful, and felt some sense of social isolation from the majority already at school. All these challenges did not stop the Latinas from being persistent and working toward their degree in higher education. Persistence has helped many Latinas achieve their academic goals, but it did not come easily and without having doubts in themselves and those who were supposed to be a resource for their success.

Being Latina can be a gift in the world today (Monk, 2004). This means that the limitations of being successful in higher education can be overcome. The challenges are going to be great and have an overwhelming impact if they are allowed. It will continue to be obvious that there are not many Latinas in higher education and if we do not face this reality it will not get better or change. History cannot continue to repeat itself. Mexican Americans will have to face their past and understand that having a college degree can only enhance their quality of life (Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). Just looking the other way is not going to help the situation. Latinas will continue to be seen as second class citizens by others and not encouraged to go to college because they have to stay at home get married and raise their family. It will be important to tell parents of Latinas how their daughters can go to college and be married with a family. Latino parents will struggle to let go and know their

daughters will make good choices about their futures in education. Let it be known whether you are male or female, all people desire the right to quality education.

Latinas live in two cultures and many of them have figured out how to be successful in both cultures (Cano & Castillo, 2010). They know that in order to live in the United States they have to be true to being Latina, and this means understanding this on a deeper level. While attending school there are rules, written and unwritten, but they must find out what they are and follow them to be successful. Of course, this means there must be others around to give them support. When they encounter social isolation, it will require the Latina to know who to go to for guidance in how to address the issue to find a solution so it does not happen to others (Gloria, 2001).

As Latinas do go to college, they may be aware that some of them are underprepared or lack all the information they need to make good choices for their academic journey (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Parents can play a part in this when they have learned they have the power to ask for more for their children in school. Not sitting back and waiting for others to take care of them but giving themselves the power to know their rights. As Latinas see their parents being advocates for their educational needs, they too can emulate this behavior. Latinas are strong women who know with persistence much can be accomplished in one day (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was used for this study because it allows the voices expression of the Mexican-American females who participated in this study. A narrative study is used as a frame work to hear the voices of the participants. According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) narrative has the potential of being both a method and the phenomenon of study. In narrative it is not how the stories are told, but what is told. The concept is like a window into seeing what is being shared. Polkinghorne (1995) states that a narrative research design is a means to knowing and gives insight to how our experiences will affect our lives even the smallest detail. The person telling his or her story has a history and narrative design of how to tell the historical events in a particular way with a strong focus on the rhetorical structure.

Creswell (2007) explains how, in narrative studies, there are two ways to share the voices of those who were interviewed. The first one is analysis of narratives in which the researcher collects data on events or happenings and then arranges the story using a plot line. The next approach is a biographical study that records the individual's story of his or her life leading to higher education and significant experiences. For this study a biographical approach will be used. Data will be collected through interviews with Latinas and coded to find common themes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that the narrative research not follow a lock-step approach but instead find the common topics and group them like a family.

## **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it allows the voices of the participants to be heard and shared with others. The stories are from the Latinas themselves, which gives more in-depth value to their lived college experiences. I was able to listen to the participants talk about how being successful in college allowed them to follow their dreams and be proud of themselves while sharing some key concepts of what a university needs to know for future students to be successful. Miles and Huberman (1994) caution the researcher that there is a lot of complexity in qualitative data and to be careful in analyzing it. Qualitative data has depth because it shares stories that have been a lived experience, and shared honestly with all who will listen. Qualitative data is also collected over time as the participants have lived the experiences making it more than a snapshot approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For these reasons a qualitative approach was chosen as it allows the higher educational experience the Mexican-American females had while working toward their bachelor's degree to give insight to what they accomplished and how they were successful.

## **Role of the Researcher**

Another key factor is the role the researcher plays in the process of the qualitative research method. One significant role of the researcher is to be part of the data collecting process as if they are a tool (Merriam, 1988). The data was best heard and collected in person, as this allows the researcher to build abstracts, concepts, and theories from the details. Patton (2001) provides another way to narrative analysis as a researcher:

The idea of “story” of personal narrative, intersects with our earlier look at autoethnography in which the researcher’s story becomes part of the inquiry into a cultural phenomenon of interest. The language of story carries a connotation different from that of case study. For example, in program evaluations, people may be invited to share their stories instead of being asked to participate in case studies. The central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings. (p. 116)

During the interview sessions, the participants were recorded so that I could become an active listener and without comparing my own higher educational experiences with the Latinas interviewed; I worked at building a relationship with each of them. The researcher’s role plays a large part in how successful this study turned out. A narrative inquiry “is about stories lived and told,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

## **Design of the Study**

### **Setting and Participants**

Kansas has seen growth in its Mexican-American population since the 1900, and I sought to gather information from Mexican-American females who had graduated with a bachelor’s degree while studying in Kansas. Another factor that played a large role is that I myself am a Mexican-American female who went to college in Kansas and received a bachelor’s degree. Every university in Kansas was asked to participate in the study. Only three universities respond to the invitation they were two public and one private.

To begin the process of finding participants, an email was sent to the Vice President of Student Development, Vice President of Student Affairs, and Dean of Students at all three

of the institutions of higher education to assist in finding Mexican-American female students who had just completed their bachelor's degree or were in their last semester before completion. One week later phone calls were placed to people in those positions at the university and to confirm their commitment to find participants.

One private and two public universities have played an active role in recruiting their Mexican-American female students for this study. The universities were located in Kansas. The first university was private (not for profit); four-year or above; undergraduate student population 1101; size and setting is small and primarily residential. Student ethnic population is: white 52.7% and students of color: 20%. The next university is urban, public, four-year or above, undergraduate student population 11,670; size and setting are large and primarily nonresidential. The student ethnic population is: 60.7% are white and students of color are 21.1%. The last university is public, four-year or above, undergraduate student population 20,327; size and setting are large, and primarily nonresidential. The student ethnic population is: 81.6% are white and students of color are 10.8% (Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015).

I was given permission to acquire assistance from the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the two public universities and the Vice President of Academic Affairs at the private institution. An email was sent to introduce myself to the student affairs professionals who would be assisting in recruiting the participants. After the introduction email an email exchange began between the professionals and myself. I then provided the university professionals with the following criteria for each participant:

1. A Mexican-American, United States citizen or permanent resident.

2. Graduated in December or May or in the last semester of completion.
3. Willing to share their educational experience for this research project.

Creswell (2007) states “Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 128).

I then traveled to each university and meet with my campus contact. A list of students and their email addresses were provided for me. The campus contact then sent out an email explaining what my study was about and how that person fit the criteria. Once I received my list of interested participants, I then contacted them via email to set up interview times and dates. I used the campus contact once again to assist me in reserving a quiet, private meeting room to conduct one-on-one interviews with the participants. After establishing a date and time, personal cell phone numbers were shared in case a time or date needed to be changed or if the participant was running late. All participants received a text from me to confirm the interview time and location the day of the interview.

### **Interviews**

Fifteen Mexican-American females agreed to be participants in my qualitative study; after receiving a text or email about when and where an interview would be conducted, only ten participants met with me in a private quiet room on their campus. Five of the fifteen participants who were contacted did not show up for their interviews. I emailed and texted them to give them an option to reschedule but they did not reply. I introduced myself to each participant and thanked them for giving me of their time to conduct the one-on-one interview. I then proceeded to explain the purpose of my study, how I would appreciate their honest responses, and asked them to speak of only their higher educational experiences not

those of their friends or classmates. Each participant was asked if she had any questions regarding the confidentiality or the study content. After a few questions were asked and answered, I then gave each participant a consent form approved by the SSIRB to read and sign explaining the study and the permission to use their answers for this study. This form is found in Appendix B. The participants were then told they would be recorded for accuracy. The use of the recording device was to make sure there was an accurate portrayal of what was shared and that no valuable comments were eliminated. While interviewing, I did take notes for future clarification if needed. It was important to hear the voices of each participant as they explained their experiences of higher education and how they found ways to be successful while in college. The interview protocol used for this study can be found in Appendix C (Aldaco, 2010). Each interview lasted for about an hour and a half.

During the interview process I was an active listener. Creswell (2007) states a researcher should be a “good listener rather than a frequent speaker during the interview” (p. 134). After the interview was completed I then transcribed each interview for accuracy, coding, and theme development. The transcription allowed me to find key themes that emerged during the interviews. I used my notes to assist my memory of the surroundings and to note the nonverbal expressions of each participant.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis begins by finding emerging themes from the data collected by the research study participants. Being holistic is part of the process as the researcher uses an instrument to determine patterns, find the emerging themes, and document them for others to read at a later time. Out of this information the researcher will become personally involved

and have an empathic understanding. Data from documents, interviews, and observations will be collected and analysis of themes that make an impact on the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) also state:

Data interpretation refers to developing ideas about the findings and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts. Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns. Interpretation involves explaining and framing your ideas in relation to theory, other scholarship, and action, as well as showing why your findings are important and making them understandable. (p. 159)

There are three approaches to narrative analysis, and the one chosen for this study is the biographical narrative writing. This approach as suggested by Denzin (1989) states that the researcher will begin the study by identifying an objective set of experiences in the participants' lives. The following process was done as it is described by Denzin:

1. Have the participant journal or tell of her life from the beginning of how she began to think and believe she could go to college. This will allow me to have a chronological timeline of the participant's educational journey.
2. Stories and epiphanies will begin to emerge.
3. As the researcher, I will then look for documents that are concrete, contextual biographical materials to see how the participant's educational journey fits with others.
4. Then I will ask the participant to theorize her story and ask questions to find more depth of meaning.

5. This will bring about themes that will become clear once the material has been coded.
6. Finally, this will lead to writing an analytic abstraction of the participant's experience which has shaped her educational journey. The highlights will include the educational process of success, different theories related to education, and unique and general features of the participant's success in graduating with a degree. (p. 125)

Data from the participants exposed similar higher educational experiences. Common themes began to emerge. Analyzing the data coding to find descriptive codes, categorizing descriptive codes were then formed that produced clear family clusters of key themes. The descriptive codes were used to form groups of familiarity. Codes were then identified during the review of literature. Once codes were found I identified patterns in the data that led to articulating the meaning of the data.

Table 1 lists the descriptive codes used in this study; each code has no relationship between rows and columns. Thirty-two descriptive codes were analyzed during the open coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then each code was made clear and interpretive codes were developed. After the interpretive codes were found, themes were developed to form a meaning from the data.

Table 1

*Descriptive Codes*

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Academic	Advisor	Financial Aid	Brothers
Challenging	Classes	College	Cultural
Dad	Differently	Education	Self Esteem
Encouragement	Experience	Faculty	Family
Money	Friends	Personal	Assistance
Home	Importance	Mexican	Mom
Motivated	School	Spanish Speaking	Understanding
Work	Mentors	Academic Preparedness	Trust

---

Table 2 provides the codes and themes that were developed through the coding process.

Table 2

*Codes and Themes*

THEME	INTERPRETIVE CODES	CODES	DEFINITION OF CODES
Theme #1 Challenges	Those experiences found to be an obstacle for educational success	Money	Having the financial knowledge and enough to not cause stress
		Academic Preparedness	Lack of high school academic classes and knowledge of higher educational system
		Work	How to balance job while attending college because money is needed to live
		Financial Aid	Lack of knowledge and when seeking assistance found resistance
		Trust	Who can assist with the many questions and who can be believed to give the right ones
		Self Esteem	Feeling inadequate to be successful and afraid to seek assistance for fear
		Personal	Finding their own persistence and will to be successful
Theme #2 Success	Those tools and resources used to complete college with a bachelor's degree	Mentors	People who were and off campus provided support even when they might not have knowledge of higher education
		Peers	Hometown friends, college classmates
		Family	Parents who valued education even when cultural values got in the way
		Self	Finding the resources and determination to accomplish the personal goal of graduation

(table continues)

Theme #3 Family Attitudes	Family attitudes about support and educational achievement	Family	Immediate family's cultural values, support before and during college years
		Education	How does the family view higher education in their daughter's life
		Balance	How to find the right balance between being a Latina and academic success

Table 3

*Participants' Responses to Themes*

Name	Challenges	Success	Family Attitudes
Participant 1	4	4	2
Participant 2	5	4	2
Participant 3	3	4	3
Participant 4	4	1	3
Participant 5	5	4	1
Participant 6	4	2	3
Participant 7	5	4	2
Participant 8	6	2	1
Participant 9	7	3	2
Participant 10	7	4	1

\*More than one response were given by some participants

Creswell (2007) noted how narrative research coding is related to the story. The story will be in a chronological order. After the documents, and interviews, have been analyzed, themes did appear and I interpreted them to find the depth of what the Latinas shared as their higher educational experience. In the next chapter I will use the participants own words to provide in-depth explanation of the three themes.

### **Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

Maxwell (2005) states that in order to not be biased as a researcher, one must understand how the researcher can influence the data collected (p. 62). He notes that validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted (p. 38). Not taking validity for granted will mean working to find the truth and making sure it is shared without taking it out of context. The value of truth is whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects or informants and the context in which the study was undertaken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 250). Validity and reliability are essential to the foundation of a qualitative study. The truth value is the most important concept for qualitative research, and if the study is solid in this concept, the outcomes will be valid. Stenbacka (2001) describes the notion of reliability as one of the quality concepts research needs “to be solved in order to claim a study as part of proper research” (p. 551). As the researcher I was willing to listen and deal with my own bias when questioning and asking the Latinas questions about how it is possible to have certain experiences in higher education and still be successful. After about an hour of interviewing in a comfortable setting, the participants began to go back to the questions they felt needed more explanation: at this point nine of the ten participants cried as they felt comfortable

sharing some painful experiences. Under the SSIRB approved research protocol each participant was encouraged to seek counseling on their campuses. As I listened to their experiences I asked them if they wanted to stop and all of them responded “no.”

Reliability is the concept of testing commonly used in quantitative research. Some scholars think it is not valid for qualitative research. However, Patton’s (2001) perceptions are that a researcher should be concerned about reliability while designing a study in order to analyze the results. To be more specific, when referring to the concept of reliability in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term “dependability,” which closely corresponds to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research (p. 300). No matter whether it is quantitative or qualitative research, it must be trustworthy, and in order to achieve that end point, the research will have to use appropriate strategies to address this issue.

Communicating with the Latinas before and after the interviews assisted with building trust between the participants and the researcher. It gave the Latinas the freedom to ask questions before being interviewed and the opportunity to remove themselves from the study if they wanted. The one-on-one interviews began with me telling the participants some information about myself and my background so they could understand my commitment to this study and why I thought it was important to do.

To make sure the research was performed with ethical integrity, steps were taken to protect the Latinas during the study. The first step was to seek mandated approval from the Social Science Institutional Review Board (SSIRB) as required by the University of Missouri-Kansas City. This approval was granted and the researcher followed the guidelines established by SSIRB to protect the confidentiality of the Latinas. The second step was to

share study goals with the Latinas. Before the interviews the participants were given a consent form, which gave permission to use a recording device in the interviews.

Telling the stories of Latinas who are college graduates or almost graduates will provide institutions of higher education the opportunity to hear from those who they serve on a daily basis. This study will provide insight regarding how certain Latinas are successful in college. The lack of Latinas not completing college in higher education is an important issue to be dealt with for the future of our Latinas and their success. Chapter four will give insight to the findings of this study and the experiences each participant had while in college and moving toward their success with a bachelor's degree.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

Higher education institutions have been encouraged to recruit more students of color. Diversity initiatives have seen some success in the recruitment of students of color; the increase has been noticeable since 2011. Numerous national strategies were provided to institutions on how to recruit, but it became obvious that recruiting more students of color was not enough. A study done by the Lake Research Partners for the American Federation of Teachers: Higher Education (AFT) (2011) brought to light the concept of not only recruiting students of color but retaining them. The report also provided insight on how and when they graduate with a bachelor's degree. What was evident is that the policy debate has increased to what is happening to students after they enter college. To hold the institutions of higher education to meet the needs that are evident for retention and learning outcomes. Paying for a college degree was first and most important however the need for a more clear and sensible path to graduation. Provide for more personal attention from advisors and faculty who care and give the students needed time to explore options and concerns.

This study sought to find the answers to two research questions: (a) What challenges do Mexican-American females face while working toward a bachelor's degree in institutions of higher education? and (b) What factors and opportunities do Mexican-American females use to face the challenges as they work toward degree completion? The ten Mexican-American female participants for this qualitative study were interviewed about their college experiences. All the participants were in their last semester or had just graduated with a

bachelor's degree. Each of them provided insights into the resources they used when faced with challenges and how they overcame those challenges.

### **Chapter Organization**

The first section will provide demographic data about the participants and family background. The next section will use the participants' own words to tell of their challenges and successes. Finally, what participants said they would recommend to institutions of higher education to assist all students of color toward success will be shared. The in-depth one-on-one interviews that were done for this study provides insight to the reader to understand what a Mexican-American female goes through before and while in college.

### **Demographics**

Demographic information was collected on the ten Mexican-American females for this study who were preparing to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in the spring 2014 or who had just graduated in the previous fall semester. The participants' demographic information gathered during interviews (see Table 4) details their age, marital status, and number of children if any. All ten of the participants were between the ages of 20 and 29. Nine of the participants were single with one who was married at the time of the interviews. One of the participants had a child. The table shows who was interviewed and their personal information. Following that will be more information about the Latina's parent's educational levels and employment history.

Table 4

*Demographics*

Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Ages</b>		
20-29	10	100%
30-39		
40-49		
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	9	90%
Married	1	10%
Divorced		
Widowed		
<b>Number of Children</b>		
0		
1-2	1	10%
3-4		

**Family Background**

This section of the interviews inquired about the participant’s family educational and employment backgrounds. Table 5 shows the levels of both parents’ educational achievement and their employment history. Three of the fathers had no schooling, while four of both parents completed elementary school. Out of the ten mothers, two finished post secondary school. Two of the mothers completed high school along with three of fathers. As the participants talked, it was obvious how proud they were that two of the mothers had gone to college although neither had completed a degree. One participant tells how her father “didn’t attend past elementary school. He dropped out because he had a very large family and he had to work, so that he could make a little bit of extra income” (#1). Another explained how both her parents were from Mexico “so I believe they only went up to 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade and in the

United States they took English classes, but it was important that they work to support their family” (#2).

Table 5

*Parents’ Educational and Employment History*

Characteristic	Parents		%	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<b>Parents’ Level of Education</b>				
No Schooling	0	3	0	30
Elementary	4	4	40	40
Secondary	2	0	20	0
High School or GED	2	3	20	30
College	2	0	20	0
<b>Parents’ Employment History</b>				
Agriculture	0	1	0	10
Business Owner	1	1	10	10
Stay at home	3	0	30	0
White Collar	1	0	10	0
Blue Collar	5	8	50	80

The participants were interviewed about their parents’ work history. All of the participants reported that their parents mostly worked outside of the home. One father worked on a farm and another said her family owned a store where both parents worked. Three mothers stayed at home caring for the needs of the family. One mother had a job at an insurance company and used her Spanish to communicate better with clients. Five of the mothers and eight of the fathers of the participants had blue collar jobs. One participant talked about how being from, “Western Kansas is a lot of agriculture so when my dad got here he drove a feed truck and when it went out of business he moved to a bigger company”

“it was important for mom to stay home so dad would not worry about his children as they were growing up” (#3). Another participant stated that, “both of my parents worked in the meatpacking plant and mom has been there for 19 years” (#6).

The family background helps explain how each of the participants viewed education and encouragement from their family members. None of the parents had a bachelor’s degree yet they knew their daughters needed to go to college even when it was an unfamiliar culture to them. All the parents worked and provided for their daughters so they needed to seek financial assistance from their institutions of higher education. This will be discussed in the themes that came to light under challenges.

### **College Experiences: Challenges and Stressors**

The Mexican-American female participants who were interviewed talked about their challenges and stressors they encountered while at a four-year university in the United States. This theme came up with all the Latinas who all expressed they had challenges and stressors while working toward obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Table 6 details what those challenges and stressors were.

#### **Financial and Personal Stressors**

Finances played a large role in the women’s academic goals to finish college. The participants dealt with the reality that finances would be an obstacle and they had to figure out how to find the money to attend and complete their degree. All the participants had to work on and off campus to fill in the deficit from their scholarships, grants, and loans. Six of the participants shared their experiences in how they were dealing with needing financial assistance which meant for them they had to work plus go to school full-time. This was done

because they could not get enough support to find more financial assistance from the office of financial aid, “There’s a lot of times when I remember one semester I had three jobs, and I was taking 19 credit hours, two of them which had labs” (#1). Another participant concurred stating that, “Uh, it has been challenging. I feel like... it’s because of work and stuff, I have like three and a half jobs, one full time and then the one at the rec site for summer training, group fitness, which is my fun job. Something I would love to do full time, but it’s kinda hard to find that, that’s gonna pay the bills, full time. And I still work at the hospital every other weekend, ‘cause that’s me—in the kitchen, ‘cause it kinda relates to, you know, dietetics and food service” (#2).

Learning to trust the people on campus was difficult and even more of a challenge when it had to do with finances. I had a cousin who was at the same university with me and I asked her lots of questions when I was not clear who or where to go for the answers. Yet she also had questions and had a hard time always being a good resource for me while in college. After a semester I learned I had to go and ask those in the financial aid office and my first year I was intimidated because I did not understand they were there to help me.

Another participant framed her financial issues within the context of work versus involvement; “But my freshman year I wasn’t involved at all. I worked a lot. I worked like 30 hours a week, so I didn’t have time to really get involved. So it was pretty much school, work, home and it wasn’t until my sophomore year that I actually started getting involved on campus” (#7). Also highlighted was the concern for family contributions to the student’s education. “So, I had the pressure of finding a job or 2 jobs or 3 jobs, so I could pay for myself, so I didn’t have to ask my parents for money. I overworked myself, you know,

because at one point I was like having three part time jobs, and full time college student, so it was, it was real hard, but I think that was a good learning experience” (#9). Said another, “I’ve never worked before until I came here. So I mean I do work study which helps a lot. I mean being on my own like” (#10). Learning to work and study at the same time became a challenge but the participants who were interviewed in this study were able to find a balance that worked for them.

The participants stated they went to seek advice from the financial aid office at their universities. It was expressed many times how their university financial aid offices and those who they went to seek advice from were not very helpful and lead them to not seek additional assistance after their first visit to the office or person. Their expectations were that the people in those offices could assist them and give them expert advice so they could have many options and would not be just limited to loans when their scholarships were not enough. One participant states,

Financial, oh, it was a bad experience. They have financial advisors for certain students by your last name. Luckily for me, I had one that was not very helpful. Her way of helping was these are your options, but then when I tried all those options, it’s like not even words of sympathy or empathy, whatever it may be. It was just like, well, those are your options, and so pretty much told me that’s it. I almost felt like she was telling’ me, well if you can’t find any of those to options to work for you, then, you know, you, yeah, there’s nothing I can do, you can’t go to college kind a thing, or, it’s out a pocket pretty much. So it was hard. I’ve never felt that of the experience, I felt for a moment that I can’t study, I can’t get educated. It’s like I

made it this far, I'm already here, like I can't stop. So that was really rough. And ever since that moment, like I walked out there and I was almost in tears. It was just hard. And, I have to go talk to advisors, like in the multicultural area, and they told me, you know, you need to talk to this guy, and he was like the main financial aid advisor kind of person. And he helped me, and he got me a grant. And I mean it didn't help with everything, but it took some pressure off. And he was able to find me a loan, I know it's a loan, but at this moment, that helped so much. And it's like... even though that other things didn't work, she could of, well why don't we try something else. It's like let me go ahead and look into some more things, I'll get back to you; something. It was just pretty much and, the way she told me too, was just like, oh, that's all, you need to know" (#2).

Other participants stated how they were frustrated with what they did not know,

I didn't know about different grants and stuff. I knew about FAFSA, but I didn't know that you could get grants. The office of financial aid wasn't very welcoming. I've never been back. I felt very judged, for being Hispanic. I felt like the lady that was talking to me just kind of was talking down to me and kind of talking to me like I was dumb. And she told me, oh, you know, well this is what you need to do, or, to supply FAFSA here and this and that. And I'm like well, I already knew, I was like I don't qualify for FAFSA, so what else can I do? Oh, you can apply for scholarships. And that's it. It was very brief, and very quick. It was like a 5 minute meeting. It was very quick. It was like she had things to do, I told you what you need to do now get out. So, I didn't feel like it was very... effective" (#7).

Similarly, a participant stated, “Unless you have an issue, or unless you go and talk to like the head of the financial aid, you don’t really get to know what’s really, available to you. You know, like I could have applied for a scholarship my freshman year but I didn’t know about that, until later when I needed them, and it was like okay but to late at times” (#9).

Finally, another student expressed her frustration:

Financial aid where do I even begin? I didn’t realize, like I said, I didn’t really know much of what to do for money. You know, when they first gave me the scholarship, I was like oh wow, that’s a lot of money. But then you don’t realize how much more money you need other than whatever they offer. I lost one scholarship after my first year because of GPA, so that added to it. I’ve had to take out a lot of student loans, to pay my way through, because my parents took care of what they could, and then of course I had to cover the rest. So it’s, it’s been a lot of investing in this. I’ve never worked before until I came here. So I mean I do work study which helps a lot now (#10).

### **Academic Preparedness and Culture**

The participants had to learn about the academic culture with little to no assistance from their families. Nine of the participants were first generation college students so the option of getting guidance from family was not an option. When the participants entered college they had the expectation of finding others in the institutions of higher education from whom they could seek assistance. Many of the participants in this study had to learn how to balance work, academics and a social life. The academic issues were demonstrated by the following comments:

I had a different advisor when I first started in college. The advisor I had was in psychology because I wanted to major in it. When I came in and enrolled, she really wasn't a lot of help, 'because she had so many students enrolling in her same room. And so, it was hard to go from one to the other. She was by herself. And I thought oh my goodness; I have no idea what I'm doing. Should I take this class, should I not, you know. And actually I ended up enrolling in a psychology class that was probably a little too high for me coming in as a freshmen (#3).

“At first it was overwhelming just being in class, I was one of the few Latinas in there. And it was just overwhelming, 'cause at back home, the majority is Hispanic/Latino. And then transitioning here where I'm the minority now, it just blew my mind, and it was difficult to adjust (#6).

Another participant explains,

I felt like there was a lot of times that if I could go back now I would of do some things differently that I didn't know, like resources and stuff. And I feel like I missed out on those, being a first generation student, you know, because I didn't have anybody to tell me to go do this or go that (#7).

I guess growing up in western Kansas going to high school with a lot of Hispanic students. A lot of our parents didn't know what it is to go to college or how to prepare their children to go to college, and, obviously my growing up at the store, my parents never had time for me. So, learning English was hard. I basically had to teach myself. And, going through high school I didn't know how to apply to colleges, and my parents didn't know either, so, I just grew up doing everything on

my own and helping my brother out. And I think that has a lot to do with it, is that no one really prepares anyone to go to go to college, or motivate us to go to in our own community (#8).

Going to college was not an option in my home and my parents were always supportive in what needed to be done to be prepared. However, there were certain things they had no or little knowledge of how to go about this academic world. When it came time for me to take the ACT I knew it was a test required for college admissions but had no idea what to expect. With this lack of knowledge I took the test and got a 12. Of course, I was still not sure what that meant either. My own lack of preparedness for college left me feeling at times like I did not belong there yet was encouraged by my parents and other family members much like the participants for my study. I struggled with writing, and reading at a slower pace to fully comprehend the material needed for my classes.

One participant states how being a first generation college student affected her:

I was a first year generation student, you know, I have no idea what I was doing. Just everything was fairly new to me. Classes were a challenge. I was on my own pretty much the whole time and how do I explain this? I would go to my advisor, they would tell me what classes I needed to take, and so I would just did it without knowing exactly how but getting accepted into the program work and stuff like that. So they weren't very helpful if that makes sense. So academically I had a lot of trouble. Because the classes I took I was not prepared for them very well. It was all new, and it was just on a whole other level than what I was used to. And so my GPA suffered a lot. I was in school for two or three years. My advisor never really

explained much to me, until maybe my 3rd year that she started hinting that I should probably consider a different career path. So by then I mean I was at the point where I wanted to just drop out of college, 'cause I didn't know exactly what to do (#10).

Being academically prepared was a challenge for the participants. Many of them stated they did not know this until after at least two semesters. Eight of the participants stated how they learned they were not as academically prepared as they thought. Said a participant, "I think, science courses by themselves are challenging. So it's pretty tough. And not having a role model to follow, it's been tough. I had to learn on my own the difficulties of college, I had to figure them out by myself" (#6).

You know, I feel like I'm always one step behind everyone. So I feel like, I don't know if it was just in the beginning whenever I came to school, I feel like my high school didn't prepare me as well as other students who went to other high schools. And so, a lot of the material, I felt like it was too fast, too much, and a lot of other students had already heard about these concepts, and I had no idea. So, it has been like a domino effect. So ever since then I feel like I always have to study twice as hard, and do things twice as much. I mean I always try and go and speak to the teachers, but, I've also had some, a lot a teachers that haven't been very responsive to students, like willing to help (#7).

Another participant explains how she thinks lack of preparedness is a bigger issue,

"I think that has a lot to do with our community, is that no one really prepares anyone to go to college, or motivate us to go in our own community. Because obviously parents don't know, who don't come from the United States and getting that college

education, because they've never been through it or they don't know how to prepare their own children for it. So because of this I didn't get advice or help from my parents and it was really bad" (#8).

The same participant states how she was treated in class by a professor,

When I stressed out I get sick. And during my freshmen year I was sick a lot. And on top of that I had an art class I had to take. On the very first day I entered, my professor asked me what was my name, and I told her my name and she was like where do you come from? And I told her oh, I'm from Liberal, Kansas. And she's like oh, okay, where are your parents from? And then I told her Mexico. She's like oh, that's what I thought, according to your last name. And I'm like what does that mean. So I sat down, and then, every day she just had a little racial comment. And it got to the end where she said, oh, what's your real name one time, and I told her. She said no what's on your green card? And it being my first year, I was really scared, and I felt like oh, why am I doing this? Why am I putting myself through this? It was really hard. And I wondered are all the professors were going to be like this. And, being from the Art Department, only myself and another girl were Hispanic, and the majority are either white or Asian. It was just really hard, because I figured all the professors were just going to be racist. And I didn't know how I would deal with it (#8).

Well I did have some academic challenges as far as writing. That's really hard for me, and especially since you my English, and mostly grammar isn't something I know well. So writing was a challenge. It affected me because I like to do things, and have

them be perfect. So I would go through my papers, if there's something that I don't know, I would get my papers back be like, oh, I didn't know that. So I would have to go and get them proofread from somebody else. And that was so like, I can't do something on my own, I have to rely on other people for help (#9).

One participant expressed her frustration, "And I had taken classes that I did not need for my major. So I finally talked to the professors in my program, and they helped me figure out what I needed to do to get my degree. But just everything was new. I didn't know really how to properly study or anything and I was lost most of the time" (#10).

### **Student Interaction**

Seven of the participants acknowledge that when they asked for support and received no or little assistance, it began to affect their self esteem. Several of the participants experienced barriers and struggled on how to facilitate working through them. Most expressed how they knew getting a degree in higher education was going to be a benefit for their future yet struggled with how they were being treated. The following participants told about their experiences:

The only thing that really, I experienced was I have a little bit of Japanese in me, whenever I smile, I look more Asian. And I did have some people that would make fun of my smile, and they'd start pretending like they were they'd speaking Chinese, or they'd pretend like they were speaking Spanish, or they'd say, mucho grande burrito. Some dumb thing like that. I don't know, I guess they just kind of assumed it was okay to joke about those things. And it made feel like I was a joke to them (#1).

But sometimes I feel like I'm not as welcome. I don't know how to explain it. And, you know, I see all these other girls too that, I mean the majority of Dietetic students are white girls. And that's fine, and, you know, we'll be in class, and I've had classes with them for a while now, until this day, like, some will talk to me or, they will for that moment, but outside of class they won't. And it's like, you know who I am. I'm stand out. But it's just been kind of just like hard that way. You know, I don't really let it get to me, but at the same time, I knew some of them a little better, it'd be easy to be like hey, you know, let's get together to study sometime. And you know, I really never had that. The only few that I was actually close to were from South America. So, we were able to converse in Spanish, and we had that connection. But even then it was hard, because, you know, I had things to do, they have things to do. But a few times we were able to me as a study group together for class, and it really helped. So it's like if I had that in all my classes it would have helped. Even just to study, it would have gone a lot better. I don't really let it get to me, but at the same time, it would have made my college experience easier (#2).

Another participant stated how some of the white students did not talk to her.

Sometimes it is really hard for me to understand people why students wouldn't talk to me. Here, like you will sit down, and nobody will talk to you. And, sometimes you'll take it personal, like they don't wanna talk to me, I'm different. But some, you know, it's just how people are I guess right here. So it was hard. And then I got used to it, and I became kinda okay with it. Because I came here, I didn't have any friends; it

was really hard and this year I became involved in HALO. And after that it changed everything. I feel a lot more welcome, I feel like there's people just like me (#6).

One participant states her feelings about moving away from home, "So moving away, that was really hard. Making new friends, not knowing anyone on campus and especially since there are not many Latino students or staff, to really talk to, it, that was the hardest part for me" (#5).

Another stated the following:

I definitely feel my level of intelligence, and my self esteem is low, because I always feel like I try really hard and I'm not a 4.0 student, so I kind of feel like, oh that persons smarter than me. Oh, you know, they're doing really good. But, I always have to remind myself, because me and my best friend, we're in the same major. We would have all the same classes, and I'm like well but she got a 97 and I just got a 92. But she has a tutor and she has this and she has that. And I'm like oh, okay I always have to self motivate myself and, believe that, you know, everybody's different, and everybody learns at a different pace, and, I feel like the most important thing for me is just persistence because I'm very persistent, even if I have to do things, two, three times. I've had to retake a lot of classes, not because I failed, but just because I wanted to do better. And so I've just been very persistent, and hoping that my future employers, and, future professionals will notice this (#7).

Feelings of not being good enough in college began to make me feel like I was at the wrong place and wondered how I was going to tell my parents. I began to have lots of self doubt but I did not want to stop going to school and learning. Many of my participants

expressed the same desire to finish what they started but at times could not see how it was going to work out.

Another tells of her feelings of failure,

I felt like I had pretty much failed everyone, like my family and everything they had done for me, and myself. I called my mom and I told her that, I couldn't do this anymore. I just, felt like I was alone and I was at a greater disadvantage than a lot of people, because a lot of people, you know, the majority of them have at least one family member who, who knows the ropes of college. Like I couldn't turn to my parents for advice, because they had no idea of what, was going on or what it took to graduate from college. I was stressed and overwhelmed a lot. I didn't think I could do it. I didn't think I was smart enough. But with the whole nursing thing I felt so dumb (#10).

The participants knew they had to find ways to deal with their issues of self esteem and overcome the doubt they felt and thought at times. Many of them did eventually did find support from family, peers, and mentors on and off campus.

### **Family Pressures**

All of the participants had to deal with relationships of others both positive and negative and they also had some larger issues to deal with before and while in college. One participant told how she got pregnant while in high school,

I got pregnant, my senior year in high school, I wanted to stay at the community college and be with my daughter. And also wanted to study architecture, and they didn't have an architecture program. So, my mother asked me, will the classes that

you take count towards your degree at the university, and I said no. And she told me I had to go. At the time it really hurt but she did not mean it to hurt me but I see why she did it, and I appreciate it now (#1).

One participant explains how her mom's health issues were a concern for her.

Oh I have to be with my mom, I have to take her to the hospital, I have to do this. But then she told me I was not her only daughter. I was feeling as the whole responsibility was on me. In my first year of college, I go home and take her to the hospital and do things for her. But then I was like, they have to help me too because it's all on me. I didn't tell my sisters, I was like well you have to help me here. But then I tried to not to go as often, so they would have to do it. When I'm there, I go with them too. But when I'm in school, I can't do anything about it. So I try, to be helpful when I can. But, if I have to be in school, I have to be in school (#5).

The challenges of finances, lack of academic preparation, trying to found the people to trust on campus, and self-esteem made the Latinas at time doubt their place in higher education. All of them did at one time find it hard to always feel and think getting a college degree was in their future. As they continued to face challenges they began to find that their determination was going to be a key factor in their success; the following section will give more insight to this theme.

### **College Experience: Contributions to Success**

The participants were asked what contributed to their success as they worked to complete their college degree. For this question the participants could give more than one answer. All ten mentioned that family support was a key factor. The participants who had

supportive families explained how this was a key factor even if their family knew nothing about higher education. “When an older cousin, applied to Texas Tech, she helped me fill out my FAFSA. So that was my guide. She was also gave advice to my mom. So that really helped a lot. But at the same time, it wasn’t the same you like it was coming from your own mom or dad” (#2).

Table 6

*College Experience*

Response	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Challenges and Stressors*</b>		
Financial	6	60
Academic	8	80
Self-Esteem/burn out	7	70
Relationships with others	10	100
<b>Contributions to Success*</b>		
Family Support	10	100
Peer Support	3	30
Encouragement of mentors/professors	10	100

\*Participants were allowed to answer more than once.

Three participants stated how their parents reacted to them being in college away from home, “My mom and stepdad took me to campus. They helped me move there. It was really hard on my mom. I was the only one living with them, my sisters are already married” (#5).

My parents, I mean especially more my dad, he always wanted all of us to go to college since he didn’t get to. And, I mean education is super important to my family because nobody can take that away from you. My mom also wanted me to go to school, but her maternal instincts came out. She’s like don’t go. But, they were all very encouraging. My whole family is very, encouraging and even though they

couldn't really help me, throughout the process of applying to school and knowing what to do especially when several issues occurred. They would just say well I don't know what I need to do, but well, do whatever you think is best (#7).

Another participant tells what her mom told her, "As far as going to college, my mom would tell me that I should get an education to get a better job, and to not depend on a man, whenever I get married. That was one of the things with her. She taught me to be very independent, she's herself is very independent and a strong woman" (#9).

I believe when my parents and I talked about going to college my mom never thought I would leave her because I was her only daughter. Even though I was encouraged to learn, and be independent it was hard on my mom when I left. Years later I found out it was because she was scared for me. The research for this study indicated how I need to be taken care of because of being a female in a Latino family. Even though she was worried about me she always put on a brave face and told me to go but not to forget where I came from and to come home when I needed to.

Three other participants emphasized how their peers' were key factors in their success. "It's like a freshman mentoring program, for new students. It's just for minority students. I didn't really know about it until sophomore year. I was more involved on campus then. And they gave me opportunity to become a peer ambassador to help those students know the things I first struggled with knowing" (#7).

I always had, very good friends that will help me as far as, being supportive, telling me, positive things, you can do it, and helping me out if I had questions. Some of these friends even proofread my papers before I handed them in. My friends made me

be accountable to them by always check in on me and not letting me get down on myself. We would have group study time; sometimes I will go and study in their room; sometimes they'll come and study in my room. I've never had, a, you know like peer pressure to do anything wrong (#9).

My friends are very supportive. One of them told me there was no way I could fail. She and her family come from an educational background. She comes from a much more different environment than I did, so, just giving up was not even a choice. And, she's the one that helped me plan out and just think of, all my alternatives. And... thanks to her I ended up talking to the Psychology professors. They just, were not letting me give up and anything I needed I could go to them. They believed in me more than I did in myself at times (#10).

All ten of the participants reported that mentors encouraged them to be successful and were a key factor to them not giving up on themselves. "I was in scholars program, and we get paired up with a mentor, to do research. So, I knew my mentor, he's a chemistry professor, so I made a connection with him when I came here. And he was the only person who I really connected with" (#6). Said another, "I found a financial aid person here who was very supportive. Like anything I needed, he answered my questions and I started to send others to him also" (#10).

The university staff was not the only mentors the participants had and several of them reported how faculty had played a role in their success.

I definitely had professors that have been very caring. I had a sociology professor, she was very understanding. I've always been very diligent about, being academically

honest, about getting my work done. One semester I was working so much I just didn't have time. And I was getting a C in the class. And that's something that to me at the moment was not acceptable. And I cheated on an assignment, and I got caught. It felt wrong when I was doing it. I just, wanted to scream wrong. And as I was going to turn in the paper, I was just so close to, if the trash can, would have been 3 feet closer to me, I would have just thrown it away instead of turning it in. And, so she was really caring about the paper. We talked about what I had done and she did what was fair I got an F. I had another professor that had a very strict no late assignment policy. And although they adhered to it, with me as well, they... didn't let me turn in my homework late. That was when I was very low and so I couldn't get the homework done. And I tried turning it in. Although they didn't accept it, I could tell they genuinely cared. They were very sorry that they couldn't accept it. I know if they did it for me they would have do it for other students. Now I know I need to get assignments in on time and ask for help when I need it early. I have two professors that are helping me right now with the blog. They volunteer to look over it, look over the content, and make sure that it's done well (#1).

Other participants reported how there were professors who understand their cultural difference,

I had another professor that I talked to about my whole Latina struggles and they were getting harder. I needed to apply for an internship and was worried I would not find one because of being Hispanic. My professor was very encouraging. He's like I

know a Master's would probably be better, but it's like if you're this close, you know, you're still going to have your Bachelor's. Just stay focused and finish (#2).

One participant states how a professor who was not in her discipline was a supportive mentor for her success.

There is a Spanish professor on campus. She helped me see myself in a different light. Like she always pushes me to be the best, because, she'll tell me how great of a writer I am, and tell me what my problem is. And a lot of it is because, of self doubt, and to work on my time managing skills. She opened up my eyes to a whole different world and it gave me direction in I wanted to do. There's so much more out there" (#10).

The Mexican-American females found in themselves the determination to finish college with a bachelor's degree. They did not do this alone and all of them mentioned who shaped how they were successful from the family members who had little college knowledge, to their positive peers, and to mentors both on and off campus. The success they found was because many of them learned how to overcome the obstacles that were in front of them with persistence and learning to gain knowledge of their failures. Of course, it was always an option to return home and give up but these ten participants found it within themselves not to fail. In the next few paragraphs the Latinas tell more of how they used these encouraging tools to be successful.

### **Encouragement to Seek Higher Education**

During the interview process the participants were asked about what led to their being successful. Some of the participants explained how at times when they were in college they

had doubts of success but went back to those people who encouraged them and to seek their support. Two Latinas reported that their siblings were the ones to motivate and encourage them to seek higher education. A participant told how her sister was already at college and supported her as she was preparing to do the same. “My sister was already away at college and she told me she would help me with all I needed to do so I can get all my information in on time and what offices I needed to go to. She always told me all the time it was important for me to finish college” (#6). Another participant stated how her brother encouraged her when they communicated via Facebook: “My older brother is in Mexico and we communicated via Facebook. Each time we chatted he asked how my studies were going and was concerned I did not get too stressed out. He always told me he was proud of me and so having someone say they’re very proud, just hearing the words is very encouraging” (#1).

### **Support from Teachers and Counselors**

Not all participants were encouraged to seek higher education from those inside the home. Three of the participants stated that they had high school counselors advise them about college. “Her name was Ms. X and she was my counselor. She was very encouraging to me. She believed in me going to college and doing more than a community college. She knew if I stayed in hometown because it is majority Hispanic I might not be successful because of the high dropout rate among my classmates” (#7). Four Latinas were encouraged by college or university personal as they were enquiring about higher education and their options. One participant tells how when she was at the community college her academic advisor assisted her a lot,

My academic advisor was great help because I didn't know where I was going after community college. The university process seemed so big and I did not know what to do and it was harder to me. My advisor pretty much helped me through it all. She explained to me the process. I was told about applications, scholarships, and who I needed to get assistance from at the university. She did not leave me to do this alone and when I got to the university I knew a few places to go for help (#8).

Four of the participants had what they described as mentors. One had a high school teacher. Two had a college professor who become their mentor when they were struggling on how to be successful. One Latina stated how she had no one at the university should would consider as a mentor. The one participant stated how her high school teacher was her mentor:

I was involved in Upward Bound in high school and the teacher who was the advisor became my mentor. I did not know anything about how to get to college but I could ask her many questions and she always answered them and more" (#5). One participant stated how she had nobody giving her encouragement toward a degree in higher education. She stated, "The thing is that there a college in my hometown and they have three degrees. So it's really like, okay but not much to chose from. I mean it wouldn't make much sense to think you could do something else. So nobody ever asked me what I wanted to do or be, and no one told me that I should think bigger or how to get there (#4).

Even with some or little encouragement the Latinas in this study found ways to be successful and learn to seek out the resources they needed for success. Another factor that was prevalent during the one-on-one interviews was the family attitudes and beliefs each of

the participants talked about. It was important for them to be successful yet still be true to who they were and not lose sight of their own cultural values.

### **Family's Attitudes and Beliefs**

Each of the participants described their family's attitudes and beliefs about their seeking a degree in higher education. Table 7 gives information to see how each participant's family supported them as well as how cultural values played a role in their success. Ten stated they had support from someone in their family. Two had a sibling who also attended college when they began their first year of college. Eight of the Latinas reported their family did not understand how the higher education process worked but knew they needed to go and did their best to support them. Three participants knew their family expected them to go to college and it was never an option not to go. The next three participants reported how their family viewed their educational experience.

I really didn't think about it much, because it's always just been ingrained in me from when I was little. Being the first born I guess, I always was told, you know, I have a certain responsibility. My parents always used the metaphor in Spanish about, I was going to be like carrying my tail, and by tail they meant my siblings. And they, pictured an image for me like I'm holding my siblings hands, they're all trailing together, and they're all blindfolded. I'm a little bit blindfolded, but I got a little more view to the tunnel, and so I'm pulling them along, and paving the way so to speak. And being the first of my siblings is really important to me, and I think from the beginning, I wanted to do something good. If I do it well, they're going to do better. The next group will be

better, you know. By the time my little brother's in college, he's probably going to do something amazing (#3).

Like I said my parents always encouraged me. And... they supported me, and I wanted to do something for myself. I didn't want to become like them, not do anything. And, I wanted to be someone, I wanted to move up. I knew I had the potential to move up and be someone. They were scared. They didn't know if I could be independent enough. I always depended on them, when I was back home. So they were scared, they were nervous like I was. And... they missed me. But... they knew that it was for a good cause (#6).

Well, it's actually never really come up. Just for me, my dad, you know, since he didn't have the opportunity to go to school, he always told us that, you know, the most valuable thing that he will leave us was an education. And he will be really disappointed if nobody didn't want to go to college. So, since I was little, I wanted to go to college to make him proud. Also, I come from a very small town, rural environment, so working in the field wasn't for me. I realized that I should do something with my life because I didn't want to be working in the fields (#9).

Table 7

*Family Attitudes and Beliefs about Higher Education*

Response	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Family's response about attending college*</b>		
Family supportive/felt proud	10	100
Siblings were attending college	2	20
Family didn't understand concept	8	80
Family's expectation to attend college	3	30
<b>School work vs. Family Demands*</b>		
Not spending enough time with family	11	110
Not understanding late night studying	6	60
Family worries about stress	5	50
Need to work to contribute to the home	2	20
<b>Living at Home vs. Living on Campus</b>		
Needed to commute to school		
Lived on campus/out of the home	10	100

\*More than one response was given by some participants

I related very much to the participants in this study when they shared how they had dealt with family attitudes while in college. The research in the literature review also confirms that Latinas need strong female role models in their families to be successful. These women do not have to be college graduates just provide positive examples of how to persist. My own grandmother and mom were my role models. My grandmother started college at 60 years old because before coming to the United States she was a school teacher in Mexico and wanted a degree from the United States also.

### **Family Obligations vs. Academic Demands**

School demands and family obligations were a struggle for the participants. Many of them reported how they needed to work on balancing their class assignments, readings, going to class, and exams when their families expected them to be at family gatherings. The Latinas

reported how their families believed while in school they did not spend enough time with them. One participant reported how her family worked through her higher educational schedule and their desire for her to come home to visit.

With my mom, she would tell me just let me know when you're coming home. And then, I'll let her know the times to remember. And she's like okay, well I know you need you need to study or whatever. And have a good night. So she's really quick. I'm not a big phone person either, and I think that kind of bothers her, because she is. She and my sister are close, like crazy. And she would know things that were going on in El Paso that I didn't even know about when I lived there. And so it's, I think that's hard on my mom, because me and my sister are different. I'm unfortunately raised by my dad he raised us to always work, but he's not one to go out to the family reunion and stay there from the whole day you know. If we have a get together at my house, he disappears after a while. So he is more distant. And I feel like I'm like that sometimes. Like I'm okay being away from my mom; I miss her, but... not like with my sister where she's like I want her to come and all this stuff. We're all very close. I think it is the hardest on her. She's like I wish I could be over there and because my brother's still at home. And... I grew up with him and his son, so I helped raise him when he was there. He had another boy, I left when he was not even a year old. So I feel like I missed out on that. And it, it breaks my heart, you know because I couldn't be there. And my older nephew, he would always asks why do you have to go to school? You know. And, it was hard. Like, it almost made me cry, 'cause I couldn't be around him. And he, even though we would fight all the time, you know, we

would always be around each other. So that was hard. But at the same time, it's like I really wanna do this (#2).

I was so used to always, making cakes for birthdays. And when I missed those birthdays, my parents, were kinda like, what do you mean you can't make it? I can't make it. What if you leave class earlier, what if you do this early? I was like, I really can't, I'm sorry. You know, class, I tried to make them understand like college isn't like high school, it's not like elementary school where you get to leave whenever.

And I try to make them understand that, you know, this is big kid stuff. And it's like I'm really sorry, but, I cannot go home. I can only imagine what they were thinking or what they were going through. But now it's different. I feel like this year has been a lot better, for us as a family, and as far as balancing. And if I don't balance it well, they understand. And that's been really helpful to me, 'cause I don't feel as pressured and I don't feel as sad, as I did probably my first couple years. I think my parents voicing the fact that it, it's okay, helps me focus on school. If they would have expressed their sadness more and told me so, I probably would of felt sad. Like I think now they actually support me, and I was like okay. You need to focus on school. So, that was nice. So that really helped. Our extended family is very important. I know my parents don't like that I'm so far away but they understand (#3).

Balancing culture expectations of the family when we grow up believing it is family first in the Latino culture is hard and I too struggled with this while in college also. Telling my parents I could not go home for certain celebrations when I had test to study for, write

papers, and just to find the time to prepare for classes was a hard conversation. I remember lots of tears and trying to explain what I needed without having them feel like they lost a daughter.

One participant reports the loss of her grandmother and how her family worked to understand her not being there. “My parents have a better understanding now. My grandma passed away, actually last year. I wasn’t able to go because I was in school. And I grew up with her. She was really important. And my parents, my mom, they were really understanding, and supportive, and they even told me like don’t even worry about it, you know, we understand. And my uncles and my aunts, they understood also” (#4). Another tells that even with being away from home it was important she stay connected to her family. “I have to call my mom every day. She loves her daughters. She’s really close to us. She’s like if we don’t call her in one day she’s crying the next day. She’s like why you didn’t call me? And sometimes I’m like Mom you have to let us free, but I, try to call her every day” (#5). The last two participants reported how their families just adjusted to them being away from home but the feelings were deep during their process. “I used to go back home almost every week when I was first here. I always felt so homesick. But then I started getting busy and I couldn’t go back home anymore. So I just adjusted and coped with it” (#6).

At the... at the beginning, for my dad, he wanted the family to stay together. And me being the youngest and his little girl it was hard for him to imagine me being really far away. And like all alone, with all this freedom I guess. You know, how Hispanic families are, they’re very conservative. It was especially hard for him. Now it finally grew on him, but for my mom it, it wasn’t as hard, just because she kinda left home

too, she just decided one day to leave town. It's been harder with my little sister. She'll remind me that this is my 4<sup>th</sup> year, or 5<sup>th</sup>, that I was not home for her birthday. That really hit me until she told me as well, because I never thought that she would keep track of something like that. She's the one that's been the unhappy about my being away from home. She still reminds me, but now we can Skype and she's, a little better. But she knows that I'll be home soon, that graduation is close, and she's busy with different hobbies that she does or takes part in. So she's a little better (#10).

Being persistent and determined assisted the Latinas in this study to accomplish their goal of being a college graduate. Their families had different levels of knowledge of the higher educational culture; however, it was important for them to always be present in their Latina's journey even when they did not have the answer to her questions. The literature review mentioned how the scholars in education go back and forth regarding if support outside of the academic environment will be an indicator of their success. In this study, the support the Latinas received from off-campus people played a large role however all of them did mention on-campus mentors were important to them also. Next are the recommendations the participants wanted to share so all students and mainly those of color can get the resource they need for success.

### **Participant-Suggested Recommendations**

The ten participants were asked to make recommendations to their various institutions of higher education on what they needed to be successful to obtain a college degree. One participant reported, "I feel like they have a lot of programs intact, but how much are these

programs actually helping, is what they need to stop and think about. I feel like having professors of similar ethnicities in classes was a lot more helpful than I realized because I never had any professor that look like me” (#1). Another Latina stated, “Second semester it just went downhill. I needed someone in financial aid or anyone to help me more. I was running out of money and options. It was very stressful and a mentor would have helped me talk things through but also someone who could ask me questions and give me guidance” (#2).

Seven of the participants reported it was important to have family support and provide education of the higher educational process for their families to understand better. “To have a family orientation in Spanish for my parents would have been great. I also think this would have helped them feel more comfortable when they came to visit” (#3).

Mentors in high school and college were highly recommended from nine of the participants. One states that, “it would have been cool to have a mentoring program for all students and especially minority students and with a mentor program someone is always caring about you and you cannot get lost” (#7).

Eight Latinas also reported that it was important for the universities they attended to have had more cultural knowledge. They stated that family is important and when they struggled to help their families understand they could not go home all the time for every life events they needed others who they could talk to who understood the added stress. Instead some of them told how when they tried to explain their family expectations their advisors or classmates just looked at them funny. The participants also expressed feeling insulted by the

monthly ethnic celebrations because the majority of them were not well done and no one asked them for input (#3, 7, 9, and 10).

Five participants explained how being involved on campus aided them in meeting new people and learn to utilize the resources for their success. A participant tells how she felt welcome, “I got involved in the HALO club and we are not just Hispanic students but students from all over the world. When we are together I feel like school is home and I want all students to feel this way” (#5). Another reported, “I have enjoyed my experience at my university. I’ve joined organizations and participated in all the events we sponsored and I have to say being involved in student groups was the best part of my education” (#6).

Giving the Latinas in this study a voice also gave them the opportunity to be honest in how they valued their educational experience and wanted to share it with others. They did not try to paint a pretty picture about how their challenges affected them at times. All of them told me they appreciated that at the end our interview time, they were given a chance to make recommendations. Nine out of the ten participants cried during the one-on-one interviews because they had some significant feelings about what had happened to them in the last four to five years of their lives. These sad feelings did not stop them from the persistence to be college graduates but did shape them to be advocates. This study explored the narratives of how Mexican-American females graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree and gave them an opportunity to share their lived higher educational experience with others so they too can find their determination and persistence to be successful a little easier. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the implications of the study topic, recommendations for universities to better service their students of color and further research as it relates to inquiring more

input from students about their challenges and successes to completing with a bachelor's degree.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Research Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges and stressors that Mexican-American female college graduates encounter and what factors contributed to their success when successfully conquering the challenges and stressors. This study focused on ten Mexican-American females in their last semester or after graduation who had attained a Bachelor's degree. The qualitative environment of the research project identifies and allows the stories of the participants to be told regarding what contributes to their success in completing a college education, even with multiple challenges that can include culture, family, and lack of support systems.

This study was intended to tell the stories of the college experiences of ten participants from three universities. Two universities in Kansas were public and one private. At the two public universities the Office of Multicultural Affairs directors were contacted and asked for assistance to find participants who met the requirements of Mexican-American females who had graduated in December or May of the previous academic year. The private university did not have a diversity office so the Vice President for the Office of Academic and Student Support Services was contacted to assist in finding participants. All ten participants agreed to participate in the study and share their university experiences.

One-on-one interviews were conducted to acquire data using an application supported by an Apple I-pad. Once the verbal interviews were transcribed, a coding table was formed, and emerging themes combined to enhance obvious themes throughout the shared college

experiences. The challenges and successes the participants shared were current. Open-ended questions were asked and an honest exchange of discourse was developed. The experiences shared by the participants through their stories provide validity to the literature that is provided for this study.

### **Implications of Findings**

The second section of the data collected dealt with the education and employment history of the participants' parents. Three participants reported that their father did not attend school either in the United States or Mexico. The majority told about how their parents went to elementary and secondary school but did not go beyond those academic years. Two mothers and three fathers did go to high school or completed their GED and received their diploma. Two mothers did attend college but did not receive a degree. This is consistent with statistics found in the 2010 U.S. Census report found in the 2014 Educational Attainment Report. Of the Hispanic population over 25 years old, 26% have some college or an associate's degree.

Three major themes of challenges, successes, and family attitudes and beliefs came from the findings provided by the participants. The in-depth interviews provide a means for each of the participants to share how she felt and thought about her experiences of being in higher education and what she believes is a value for future Mexican-American females to be successful with a bachelor's degree. They each told stories of experiences that led them to be successful.

## **Challenges**

The first research question used was: What challenges do Mexican-American females face while working toward a bachelor's degree in institutions of higher education? The participants stated that cultural understanding was a key component of this theme. It was clear that a better understanding of different cultures needs to be addressed when recruiting and retaining the participants. The participants mentioned on several occasions the need to better understand how Latino culture is centered on the family. Parents need to be included in all academic discussions. This was a problem at times because some parents had limited English skills and the universities did not provide anyone who spoke their first language, which led to some mistrust in the process. Evans (2004) states when Latino students go to college they have different experiences than their White classmates because Latinos are raised in a community environment not to be individualistic but to always be responsible for those who are coming with them and those in the future. Therefore, when the parents are left out of fully understanding the academic process the participants lack families support to move forward in their educational success. Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) stated that a university needs to include the family in the recruiting process so the Latinas and their parents know they are accepted and their culture is appreciated.

Another focus that came to light about cultural understanding was that participants expressed in their interviews the necessity to have the financial aid office staff give them all options available to them and their families. This also meant taking the time to explain the process and how taking out loans was not the only option to fill in the shortage after scholarships. Many of the participants expressed they did not have good experiences when

determining how to pay for college yet found a way to persist through the process.

Participants expressed that over-sharing financial aid information before even being asked would be very beneficial to all those involved. They talked about how many times they did not know what to ask or if there was any questions to ask. Receiving materials in different languages would also be useful when they had to navigate the process with their parents.

The theory of caring was a lens used to view comments made by participants when they expressed the need for mentors during their college years. Chapter one stated how caring is an action and it involves “the will to care, the intent to care and caring actions” (Kozier et al., 2004). Nursing, art, literature, and psychology have been using this concept for years as they educate their students in their disciplines to be agents of care. The participants noticed few women of color on their campuses and explained how it would have been helpful to have them so could express themselves more openly and not feel like they had to explain their cultural experiences both positive and negative. The majority of the participants emphasized how their parents would have liked to see more people of color at their schools in order to feel that they would be well taken care of. Gonzalez, Jovel and Stoner (2004) tell how Latina’s parents worry more about their daughter’s care more than what they are studying. The participants verified their daughters need to be cared for by those who not only understood them but those who looked like them. Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) wrote this would give them a sense of belonging, as Latinas need to have a feeling of belonging especially when they are having foreign experiences. Higher education was foreign to many of the participants and a feeling of comfort by having university personnel who cared for

them would have served an important purpose. The participants emphasized the importance to have an organizational mentorship program not mentors they had to seek out themselves.

### **Success**

The second research question that was answered was: What factors and opportunities do Mexican-American females use to face the challenges as they work toward degree completion? A major focus of this theme was the importance of cultural student organizations on campus. Belonging to a group that understands the cultural differences made the participants feel more welcome as they could speak openly about their struggles on and off campus. Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales' (2005) study expressed the importance of peer support for Latina's success in college. Their peers would be there for them when it was needed and they knew they did not have to go into great detail about how they were struggling with balancing the demands made on them when they could not be part of family commitments while away at school.

Another concern was the need for more faculty and staff of color at the participants' universities. Having more people of color on campus would have given the participants the ability to find their own mentors because no formal mentor program was established. Barajas and Pierce (2001) explained how Latinas are about relationships, and mentorship is about relationships. The participants expressed how having more faculty and staff of color on campus would allow them to build relationships with those who understand their culture and appreciate that at times just need someone to listen to them without having to explain in detail what they were feeling and thinking. Participants also stated that the faculty and staff of color would not care any better for them but know how their parents wanted them cared

for when the academic world was overwhelming. Another point discussed was the need to see women of color in the academic settings so they as college women they could learn from quality examples of how to learn and be confident in higher education. In addition, having positive role models would allow them to see their full potential in higher education beyond a bachelor's degree. Evans (2004) calls this a holistic element creating a teaching-learning environment.

A Latina's role in the family structure is to care for everyone and this includes her parents. When she chooses to go to college this can cause a strain on the learned cultural expectations. Who will take care of the family? Who will take care of the younger children? Latina role models in higher education are needed so it can be viewed as a positive and great opportunity to be successful with a college degree and have a family. Sy and Brittan (2008) explain how difficult it is for young Latina's to have the desire to seek a college education and still be faithful to their culture values. This can cause a cultural struggle if not dealt with and so that a balance is obtained between the desire for education and faithfulness to one's family and their beliefs.

The family support is important even when they do not fully understand how the culture of higher education is established. To go against the norm as a Latina and leave home without being married first is hard for Latino parents to understand. Why does she want to leave a safe environment where we can protect her and go out to something so strange and dangerous? For Latino families the family, always comes first, and leaving to get an education is not seen as a way of being there for one another. A Latina is expected to give up her own needs and wants for the family, and getting a college degree can be seen as selfish

and to individualist (Sy, 2006). In the end, Latinas do learn to balance their family cultural values and be educated. It takes time and the willingness from both the family and the Latina but when they each see the value in the outcomes is an advantage.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study was conducted to elicit responses from Mexican-American females about their challenges and successes they had while obtaining a bachelor's degree. All the participants shared those challenges and successes to the best of their knowledge and then added what they thought would be better resources on a university campus to assist better academic success for future students. Conducting one-on-one interviews with the individual participants provided this study with comprehensive themes. Those themes in turn provided valuable recommendations on what is needed for academic success for some students.

Even with the rich and in-depth data collected, there are limitations in this study. One limitation is that only females were selected to be involved, so there is no comparison with their male classmates. The second limitation is that only Mexican-American females participated so the lack of diversity to compare with the participants' classmates who are from other ethnic backgrounds. For example, would responses been different if the study examined Cuban-American female students? The life experience and culture of Cuban-American students differ from Mexican-American students and that could influence their responses. Another limitation of the study is the assumption that students were honest in their responses. The ability to have a Mexican-American researcher interviewing Mexican-American students should provide safe forum to answer questions: however, I did not personally know any of these students and had to trust that they provided honest responses to

my questions. Finally, the participants in this study were self-selected. A broader selection process of participants might have an impact on the findings.

### **Future Research Studies**

The findings of this study indicate the necessity for further research. Mexican-American females have the desire to attend college and to be successful but they encounter challenges in their post higher education career while attending or attempting to attend college. Universities and colleges can perceive this as an opportunity to learn how Latinas view the resources that are currently available to them and are they finding them useful, and if not what would they need to assist in their success. Few studies have focused on only women of color and their white classmates on what they view as resources provided for them and how useful or not they are.

A recommendation is to survey one hundred Latinas, African-American, Asian, and White females from several four-year universities. The women could be in their last semester or newly graduated with a bachelor's degree. These women will be asked to participate in the study to provide insights on how their college experiences can benefit future women and those currently attending before completion of their degree. In order for the women to trust their interviewees it would be beneficial to have women who are in higher education from the same ethnic backgrounds as the interviewers. It is important that all those involved are committed to following up with all the women at different stages of the process. This process can then be used to compare each ethnic group to get a larger population input and more women's views on what resources they used and find of great value for their academic success.

A couple of more recommendations would be to follow students five years after graduation. This would provide an opportunity for reflection by the students and may provide additional insight into the factors that lead to their success. Another is how is social media and technology going to impact how we research? Is there an ethical consideration that when we collect data it can be accessible via the cloud.

### **Conclusion**

As demographics in the United States continue to change, universities and colleges notice that more and more Latino/as are applying to attend their institutions. A study such as this will provide in depth insight into their resources provided by the institutions and whether students perceive these resources to be sufficient to support their success. The participants for this study provided quality information on their challenges and successes. They wanted others to know how they received their bachelor's degree while not losing sight of their family culture. The study found that relationships and key institutional actors are important to success of Mexican-American females. Relationships between the student and their parents and siblings, their instructors, peers and their advisors are important to ameliorate the impact of a negative environment. In addition, connecting with key institutional representatives will support success. It was obvious participants wanted to share their experiences even when it was difficult to tell some of their stories. Studies like this can provide an opportunity for higher educational institutions to listen with an open mind, learn, and take action from those who have lived the experience.

## APPENDIX A

### E-MAIL REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS

Date

Greetings:

My name is Donette Alonzo and I am currently a graduate student at University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) in Higher Education Administration program.

At this time I am looking for Mexican-American females (US citizens or permanent residences) who will graduate from your institution in the Spring of 2014 or just completed their degrees in the Fall of 2013. The purpose of my study will be to hear from the students and understand their challenges and resources for success during their time in college. The title of the study is: Mexican-American Females and the Bachelor's Degree: Challenges and Success Stories.

I need your assistance in identifying these graduates from your university. If you are willing to assist me in finding participants from your campus please reply to this email in one week. After receiving your affirmation to assist I will then call to see if you have any questions and/or concerns. If you then could reach out to your graduates and inquire if they want to participate what would be the best way to contact them for an easier response time and then share this with me.

After receiving the graduates contact information I will then take it upon myself to communicate directly with the students. The interview will consist of questions regarding their academic and social experience before going to college and once there.

I very much appreciate your willingness to assist me in my research.

Thank you,  
Donette Alonzo  
816-289-5916  
dakbd@mail.umkc.edu

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Latinas movement through Higher Education: Their Experiences while Achieving Success

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Donette Alonzo, from the Education Department at University of Missouri Kansas City. This study is being conducted as part of a dissertation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore challenges and success that Latinas in higher education face in order to complete their studies with a bachelor's degree.

- PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Meet with the researcher and answer survey questions to the best of your ability.

Allow yourself to be recorded using an apple ipad device.

- POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

In the event of physical and/or mental injury resulting from participation in this research project, University of Missouri Kansas City does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will University of Missouri Kansas City provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.

- POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Each participant will benefit with knowing their answers have assist those employed in higher education are learning from their sharing of their history.

- CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a coding procedure and use of numbers to track participant. Only those affiliated with the University of Missouri Kansas City education department and researcher will be allowed to access the findings.

The recording device will remain in the researcher's possession and files erased after final approval of dissertation is given.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Donette Alonzo, [donettealonzo@hotmail.com](mailto:donettealonzo@hotmail.com), cell: 816-289-5916.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

The Michigan Tech Institutional Review Board has reviewed my request to conduct this project. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact Joanne Polzien of the Michigan Tech-IRB at 906-487-2902 or email [jpolzien@mtu.edu](mailto:jpolzien@mtu.edu).

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

I would like to begin the interview by collecting some background information about you and your family.

I. Background

1. Describe your family's educational history.

Probe:

a. What was the highest level of education completed by your parents and siblings?

2. Describe your family's employment history.

Probe:

a. What types of work have your parents and siblings done?

3. What made you want to seek a college degree?

Probe:

a. Encouragement of parents?

b. Encouragement of a career counselor?

c. Encouragement of a mentor?

*Next, I would like to ask about your experience while completing your education.*

II. College Experience

5. What challenges did you encounter while achieving your college degree?

Probes:

a. Financial?

- b. Academic?
- c. Relationships with others?
- d. Self-esteem?

6. What factors contributed to your success while achieving your college degree?

Probes:

- a. On and Off campus?
- b. Peer support?
- b. Encouragement of mentors/professors?
- d. Family support?

*The next set of questions will ask about your family's attitudes and beliefs about higher education.*

### III. Family's Attitudes and Beliefs

7. When you first decided to go to college, what did your family say and think about your decision?

Probes:

- a. Parents?
- b. Siblings?
- c. Spouse?

8. During your college experience, what were your family members' attitudes toward your need to balance school and family demands?

Probes:

- a. Parents?

b. Siblings?

c. Spouse?

*The next question will ask about your recommendations for the types of support that Latinas need in order to be successful in college.*

#### IV. Recommendations

9. Based on your experience, what types of support do Latinas need the most in order to successfully obtain a college degree?

Probes:

a. Financial support?

b. Family support?

c. Encouragement of mentors?

*Finally, I would like to gather some demographic information from you.*

#### V. Demographics

10. What is your age?

11. Do you have any children? If so, how many?

12. What is your marital status?

*This concludes the questions that I had for you. Is there anything you would like to add or do you have any questions?*

Thank you for your participation!

## REFERENCES

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## VITA

Donette Rose Alonzo was born on January 26, 1959, in Hutchinson, Kansas. She called Hutchinson home until she left for college in August 1977 to attend Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. After two years of struggling with her academics because of her learning disability, she transferred to Newman University in Wichita, Kansas to complete her bachelor's degree in May 1982 in Theology.

Donette began her professional career in youth ministry after two years of working and living in Mexico doing long term service learning with youth. She spent ten years in youth work; during this time, she also gained training in diversity. After leaving youth work to pursue a career in higher education, she worked at Rockhurst University, in Kansas City, Missouri in 1997 as the Director of Multicultural and International Student Affairs. While at Rockhurst, she began and completed her master's degree in Integrated Humanities and Education in 1999. In 2005, she was hired at William Jewell College, in Liberty, Missouri, as the first Director of Multicultural Student Development and as an adjunct faculty. While at William Jewell, she began her academic journey to complete a doctorate degree. In 2009, she was hired at Donnelly College, Kansas City, Kansas, to be the Vice President of Student Development.

In the summer of 2014, Donette experienced personal challenges due to the deaths of both parents and the need to determine the best way to complete her dissertation. In August 2014, she was approached by the president at Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, Arkansas to provide diversity consulting. She is currently employed part-time with Arkansas Tech University.