

MASTER NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES: AN ANALYSIS OF
MEXICAN AMERICAN LIFE STORIES OF OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE
ALONG THE JOURNEYS TO THE DOCTORATE

by

Michelle Marie Espino

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Michelle Marie Espino entitled *Master Narratives and Counter-Narratives: An Analysis of Mexican American Life Stories of Oppression and Resistance Along the Journeys to the Doctorate* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Date: 4/4/08
Jenny J. Lee

Date: 4/4/08
Gary Rhoades

Date: 4/4/08
Jeffrey Milem

Date: 4/4/08
Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College. I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Date: 4/4/08
Dissertation Director: Jenny J. Lee

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SIGNED: Michelle Marie Espino

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DEDICATION

For Matthew and Genaveve

Our Future

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the *testimonios* [life narratives] of 33 Mexican American Ph.D.s who successfully navigated educational systems and obtained their doctorates in a variety of disciplines at 15 universities across the United States. The theoretical and methodological frameworks employed were critical race theory (CRT), Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit), and narrative analysis in order to examine power relations, multiple forms of oppression, and the intersections of race, social class, and gender within educational contexts. CRT and LatCrit frameworks were expanded by attending to the experiences of middle class participants and participants who identified as second- or third-generation college students, which challenge traditional paradigms that essentialize Mexican American communities. This study uncovered and contextualized the ways that Mexican American Ph.D.s resisted and reproduced power relations, racism, sexism, and classism through master narratives constructed by the dominant culture to justify low rates of Mexican American educational attainment. The findings suggested that as the dominant culture develops master narratives, Mexican American communities reproduce these stories as well. Mexican American communities also crafted counter-narratives that resisted the master narratives. The dominant culture master narratives were: Mexican American families do not value education; Mexican American women are not allowed to get an education; The dominant culture and Mexican American communities reproduce masculinist ideology; If Mexican Americans would work hard enough and persevere, they can succeed in education; The U.S. is a colorblind, gender-blind, and class-blind society; and Mexican Americans are only in college/graduate school because they are

minorities. In addition, Mexican American communities constructed two master narratives in an effort to advocate for educational equity and increase research in Mexican American communities: Mexican Americans must struggle through educational systems and Mexican American Ph.D.s should research Mexican American issues. This study provided a venue for narratives on Mexican American educational attainment that reflected struggle and survival, privilege and merit, as well as overcoming obstacles and not finding any barriers along the way. These narratives have the power to reshape, reframe, and transform discourses of deficiency to those of empowerment and resistance in K-12 education, postsecondary education, and graduate school.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Latina/o population, which is composed of Cuban, Dominican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Spanish, and Spanish-speaking communities from Central American and South America, is the largest growing demographic in the United States, yet remains near the bottom in terms of educational attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006a). Between 1990 and 2000, the Latina/o population increased by 25 percent. During that same time period, however, the percentage of Latinas/os over the age of 25 with at least a college degree increased by only 6.1 percent. For “non-Hispanic Whites,¹” the population grew by 1.9 percent, but the percentage of those with at least a college degree substantially increased by 6.1 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Although the “Hispanic” population enjoyed a large percentage of growth during the 1990s, the paltry increase of “Hispanics” over the age of 25 with at least a college degree indicates that despite “Hispanics” entering colleges and universities at rates comparable to Whites, the rates of completion are significantly lower (Fry, 2002; 2004). In addition, Latinas/os are more likely to attend less selective or open-door institutions, utilize pathways such as community colleges and part-time status, and enroll in graduate school at the lowest rates of any racial/ethnic group (Carter, 1997; Fry, 2002; 2004; Nora & Rendón, 1996; Solórzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005). As Latina/o communities come of age in the 21st century, educational attainment is stagnant.

By disaggregating the Latina/o population, the disparities in educational attainment are more apparent. Mexican Americans, the largest subgroup within the

¹ Quotation marks are placed on a racial/ethnic identifier to indicate that the terminology was extracted from the study cited.

Latina/o population, are considered the future of the U.S. workforce (Rendón, 2003; Vasquez, 2006). Increasing Mexican American undergraduate and graduate school access points as well as retention and completion in college and graduate school is imperative. As of 2006, only 53.1 percent of Mexican Americans over the age of 25 have graduated from high school (90.5 percent for “non-Hispanic Whites”) and 8.5 percent over the age of 25 have obtained college degrees (31 percent for “non-Hispanic Whites”) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006b). These statistical data, however, only impart one aspect of the larger puzzle in Mexican American educational attainment. Qualitative methodology provides an additional perspective on the potential factors affecting Mexican American journeys along educational pathways.

Unfortunately, much of the educational research on Mexican Americans focuses on high dropout rates in high school and low rates of completion in college and graduate school, with little consideration for successful strategies Mexican/Mexican American communities employ while overcoming obstacles or the experiences of Mexican Americans who do not face any obstacles along their journeys. Rather, educational research draws attention to Mexican/Mexican American deficiencies. Lack of cultural capital (McDonough, 1997), lack of knowledge about college and graduate school admissions processes (Post, 1990; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002), lack of parental involvement (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b; Valencia & Black, 2002), and “deficient” cultural traditions (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995) are cited as key factors that hinder Mexican American students’ “assimilation/integration” into the education pipeline (Attinasi & Nora, 1992; Ramirez Lango, 1995; Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). These deficit

models are based on genetic determinist and cultural determinist theoretical perspectives drawn from quantitative research that contrasted Mexican/Mexican American communities with Anglo American communities, which were and are still considered the norm in educational research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b; Stanley, 2007; Trueba, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Genetic determinist theory purports that Communities of Color, which I define as communities composed of individuals of African American, Latina/o, Asian American, and Native American ancestries, have low educational attainment because they are intellectually inferior to Whites due to genetic differences. In this case, Mexican Americans will never succeed in school because they are genetically incapable of learning. Cultural determinist theory places blame on Communities of Color that maintain their cultural traditions, which are inferior to White culture. Therefore, Mexicans/Mexican American communities that retain their culture transmit dysfunctional, non-White cultural values that stress the family, “immediate versus deferred gratification,” and less importance on “education and upward mobility” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b, p. 6). The deficit models then work in cyclical fashion, formed from educational research and then informing researchers who base their work on deficit models. This negative discourse is then translated and expressed in media, politics, and education, among other social institutions, in the form of master narratives.

Critical race theorists use the phrase *majoritarian stories* instead of master narratives and define these stories as the “bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462). I extend the definition to include gender

and social class because educational research and critical race theory should include analysis of marginalized communities' experiences by accounting for intersecting forms of oppression that simultaneously occur (Cuádriz & Uttal, 1999). *Intersectionality* is defined as the study of "relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). This perspective is most often incorporated in feminist methodological approaches to understanding social life through the lived experiences of complex individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression, particularly in relation to race, social class, and gender (Cuádriz & Uttal, 1999, p. 158). To privilege one identity without considering how other identities affect one's negotiations and navigations through social structures limits the opportunity to interrogate linking systems of oppression. I choose to use the phrase *master narratives* to acknowledge the power of dominant racial, gendered, and classed groups to craft stories that subjugate marginalized communities and maintain this power within U.S. society.

Master narratives are stories woven by the dominant culture into the fabric of social structures as a means of garnering and maintaining power, while justifying the subjugation of marginalized communities (Communities of Color) (Giroux, 1991; Stanley, 2007). Boundaries stemming from master narratives are built in order to protect and legitimate the dominant culture's circle of power (Trow, 1984) when "contradictions and social fractures in times of crisis" (Moraru, 1999, p. 251) occur, as evidenced, for example, in the 244 anti-immigration laws passed this year in 46 states (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2007). One of the most widely known and powerful master narratives is the "American Dream," which crafts a societal message of personal

responsibility and individual success; breaking through social class barriers to achieve prosperity (Cuádriz, 1997; Hochschild, 1995). Often told through books, seen in movies, and discussed on television, the American Dream is more than a story; it is an ideology that (mis)leads all who are part of this country, undocumented and documented, to envision successful lives, equal opportunity, unimaginable wealth, and prosperity for future generations, achieved through hard work and determination.

Inherent in the ideology of the American Dream are the sacrifices of culture, language, and belief systems that are not consistent with the definitions of American citizenship. Becoming American means assimilating into so-called “American culture” and disregarding the customs and traditions inherent within personal cultural contexts (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Martinez, 2006). Mexicans/Mexican Americans, similar to other racial/ethnic groups that were absorbed into U.S. society, are led to believe that in order to achieve the American Dream, Mexicans/Mexican Americans must first assimilate and then *individually* take advantage of the vast opportunities offered in society; not considering how some opportunities are hidden from Mexican/Mexican American communities or that some opportunities are only obtained with the right credentials. In this way, achieving the American Dream is stratified by race, social class, and gender, which means that if one’s intersecting social identities are incongruous with the dominant culture, the American Dream is unattainable, although still an inspirational device that keeps individuals and communities aspiring to climb social hierarchies with no possible chance of actually achieving this dream.

Individuals from marginalized communities, and Mexican/Mexican American communities in this instance, who break through barriers created by the dominant culture are utilized as examples or tokens to convince Mexican/Mexican American communities that the American Dream is possible and attainable and, as some attest, a credit to their individualism and assimilation, maintaining social class hierarchies and adopting White, middle class values (e.g., Chávez, 1991; Rodriguez, 1982). Assimilation, therefore, becomes a proxy for Whiteness (Martinez, 2006). This master narrative, however, is often abbreviated, neglecting to explain how families, communities, institutions, networks, physical and psychological mechanisms, and social structures help or hinder Mexican Americans attempting to achieve the American Dream (Padilla, 1997).

Mexican Americans who fail along the way are blamed for not working hard enough, or for emphasizing attachments to cultural practices, speaking a language or languages other than English, and relying on family. As a result, Mexican Americans develop an internalized oppression that reinforces the mechanisms that keep White, middle and upper class communities in power. This internalized oppression is difficult to overcome because the socialization is so deeply rooted and reproduced after each generation.

Bombarded with racist, assimilationist messages, Mexican/Mexican American communities internalize and reproduce boundaries and borders that create “ceilings on aspirations,” aspiring only for what is reasonable to achieve within their social positions.

Applying the ideology of the American Dream to educational attainment, a belief is established that college is an attainable goal for any documented child. If Mexican American children work hard, take individual responsibility for their educational

successes, and are virtuous in action and thought, they can reasonably obtain a college degree. Barriers are surmountable; it is only a question of dedication and motivation on the part of children and their families. Educational attainment is achievable because all children enter an educational system that is perceived as equitable and fair (Yosso, 2006). These are misinformed messages that do not consider the “hidden knowledge” (i.e., cultural capital) that is transmitted within affluent families from one generation to the next in an effort to successfully navigate through educational systems (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997). I contend that the American Dream, a construction of the dominant culture, is connected to having cultural capital, a tool crafted by and for the dominant culture. Therefore, although the American Dream symbolizes what is possible in this country, it is only a reflection of what is possible for the dominant culture that has tools available to make the dream a reality. This master narrative perpetrates a message of porous boundaries, while other master narratives solidify borders.

Purpose and Audience

Using the master narrative of the American Dream to frame this qualitative study, I present the *testimonios* [life narratives] of 33 scholars, researchers, and administrators of Mexican descent who navigated through various educational systems and earned Ph.D.s in a broad range of academic disciplines at U.S. institutions of higher education. Although I use the phrase *life narratives* to explain the data I gathered for this study, I recognize that acquiring life narratives would have taken significantly more time than the average three hours I spent with each participant. Therefore, the life narratives in this study are topical in nature, specifically discussing the intersections of race, gender, and

social class in participants' educational journeys. Using critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit), I center my analysis on the ways in which Mexican Americans framed their educational experiences as a means of countering or reproducing master narratives created by the dominant culture and/or master narratives found within Mexican/Mexican American communities. Few studies articulate participants' experiences as journeys from early schooling to graduate education and no studies have presented the relationships between Mexican American educational attainment and reproduction of and resistance to master narratives.

This study challenges the deficit discourse in educational research by demonstrating how Mexican/Mexican American communities activate community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006), rather than cultural capital, in order to navigate through institutions and structures that are inherently racist, sexist, and classist. As the findings suggest, the emphasis on cultural capital, a dominant cultural artifact (Sandoval, 2000), or the lack thereof, in accessing higher education cloaks the power and agency within Mexican/Mexican American communities to survive challenges and barriers, as well as retain their cultural identities at various levels of education. Mexican/Mexican American communities develop counter-narratives that articulate that survival, affirm cultural values and traditions, and deconstruct master narratives and deficit paradigms (Stanley, 2007). Critical race theorists use the term *counterstories* "whose purpose is to reveal the contingency, partiality, and self-serving quality of the stories [i.e., master narratives] in which we have been relying to order our world" (Delgado, 1993, p. 666). The act of developing counter-narratives is an act of resistance that has "a revealing

function, one that contains critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection...self-emancipation and social emancipation” (Giroux, 1983, p. 109). In that effort, counter-narratives offer empowering messages within Mexican/Mexican American communities while offering alternatives to traditional educational discourse focused on deficit models.

In addition, this study extends CRT and LatCrit by uncovering the intersections of race, social class, and gender, as well as attending to the experiences of Mexican Americans who do not fit into traditional paradigms focused on low-income and low educational attainment within Mexican/Mexican American communities, particularly addressing the experiences of middle class Mexican Americans and those who identify as second/third generation college students. Unfortunately, communities are often defined by researchers based on particular characteristics and behavior, or essence (Fuss, 1989). Essentializing communities, however, is a reductive process, excluding aspects of communities that are difficult for educational researchers to explain (Spivak, 1988). Essentialism is implicated with education policies and teaching methods that blanket entire populations, without providing specific remedies for marginalized communities. Traditional paradigms essentialize Mexican/Mexican American communities, rather than acknowledge the complexity within Mexican/Mexican American communities including, but not limited to, immigrant status, social class, linguistic attributes, parents’ educational attainment, phenotype, and racial/ethnic identities.

By asserting the need to deconstruct the monolithic description of Mexican/Mexican American communities, I recognize the limitation in this study to

articulate dominant groups in U.S. society as part of a monolithic dominant culture. However, these dominant groups, primarily composed of White middle and upper class groups, continue to solidify their power in U.S. society, “redrawing the boundaries established by nationalism, ethnocentrism, and Eurocentric culture” (Giroux, 1991, p. 218). White working class communities, rather than aligning with the struggles of Communities of Color to fight against inequality, may view Communities of Color as threats to their own goals of achieving the American Dream (Harris, 1993). Therefore, White working class communities may participate in maintaining the “master narratives of Eurocentric domination” (Giroux, 1991, p. 218) and are connected to the dominant culture by virtue of their complacency to dismantle current social structures. This is due, in large part, to the benefits and privileges received through their identities within White communities; even if the benefits are small compared to the benefits received by White middle and upper class communities. There is a stake in keeping Whiteness as an advantage over Communities of Color (Harris, 1993). The paradox I find is that as dominant groups maintain their power, they articulate Communities of Color as the Other (Said, 1994) in order to receive recognition as the groups at the center of U.S. society. Their identity as the dominant culture is predicated on the notion that Communities of Color are placed in the margins; a perspective drawn from Georg Hegel’s (1977) dialectic of master and slave which is cited often in research pertaining to slavery and slave narratives (Burns, 2006; Cassuto, 1996; Kohn, 2005). In essence, the master’s identity as master is based on the slave’s recognition of the master. The slave’s identity, however, is not solely based on the master and can find identity within his/her community(ies).

Therefore, I use the term *dominant culture* to recognize the power of dominant groups in U.S. society in an effort to juxtapose the dominant culture with Communities of Color that realize their humanity in spite of oppression and objectification as the Other, yet do not remain as such by telling their stories and empowering their communities. Additional research is need to deconstruct the dominant culture, however, for the purposes of this study, I will employ this term.

From the first years of schooling to college and graduate school, realizing the potential to obtain a doctorate is a journey in which Mexican Americans are active participants, moving through rigorous academic terrain, breaking through potential roadblocks, if any; and creating new pathways for others to follow. At various points in the journey, Mexican American scholars utilize tools of resistance within the margins or “decolonial imaginaries” (Pérez, 1999), activating community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) gathered from their families and social networks to navigate the worlds of home, community, and academe. Contrary to the pipeline metaphor, there is not one way in which to travel through educational processes, which provides future Mexican American undergraduates and graduate students with various models from which to draw (Jones, Yonezawa, Ballesteros, & Mehan, 2002; Solórzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005). This study seeks to engage researchers, institutional agents, students, families, and communities in a more complex discourse that frames Mexican American educational attainment as a meaningful and achievable goal by focusing on successful strategies external to artifacts (i.e., cultural capital) manufactured by the dominant culture.

Methodology

In accordance with critical race theory (CRT), experiential knowledge is a central aspect of research that uncovers and contextualizes issues of oppression. In this way, Mexican American experiences navigating through educational systems rely upon a qualitative approach to the research. The nature of qualitative research involves exploration and a sense of openness to whatever may be found through the data collected. Ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, and narrative inquiry research are examples of research strategies that direct a researcher's mode of inquiry (Creswell, 2003). For the purposes of this study, I frame the research within narrative inquiry, blending CRT methodological approaches (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b) with narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) of participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] (The Latina Feminist Group,² 2001). *Testimonio* is a form of narrative that exposes racial-, gender-, and class-based encounters, as well as empowers and validates Mexican American lived experiences as truths (Acevedo et al., 2001). From a Latina feminist perspective, *testimonios* are not simply narratives, but opportunities to bear witness to issues of oppression, confronting "traditional notions of ethnicity and nationalism, [and] questioning Eurocentric feminist frameworks" (Acevedo et al., 2001, p. 2). *Testimonios* provide venues for stories of triumph and struggle from the perspectives of marginalized, silenced people who share their personal experiences in an effort to form a collective consciousness. Building interdependence within

² The Latina Feminist Group is comprised of eighteen Latina poets, historians, researchers, and scholars, namely, Luz del Alba Acevedo, Norma Alarcón, Celia Alvarez, Ruth Behar, Rina Benmayor, Norma E. Cantú, Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Gloria Holguín Cuádriz, Liza Fiol-Matta, Yvette Flores-Ortiz, Inés Hernández-Avila, Aurora Levins Morales, Clara Lomas, Iris Ofelia López, Mirtha N. Quintanales, Eliana Rivero, Caridad Souza, and Patricia Zavella. I will cite their work as Acevedo et al. (2001) throughout the study.

marginalized communities heightens a sense of collective efficacy to persevere against various obstacles and forms of oppression (Bandura, 2000). Few studies capture the journeys of Mexican American scholars through the use of *testimonios* (Acevedo et al., 2001; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Cuádriz, 1992; Padilla & Chávez, 1995; Rendón, 1992). *Testimonios* of Mexican Americans who navigated through educational processes and left with degrees in hand are essential pieces to understanding the entire picture of Mexican American educational attainment (Acevedo et al., 2001; González & Padilla, 1997; Horn & Chen, 1999; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Snyder, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Intertwining strands of identity such as gender, social class, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and language further strengthen *testimonios*.

As a researcher-interpretor, I acknowledge that my personal history, social class, gender, immigrant status, racial/ethnic identity may (dis)connect with the participants' backgrounds and with my interpretations and (re)presentations of participants' narratives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I re(present) participants' narratives within the context of education, with particular emphasis on how the participants interpreted their experiences with racism, sexism, and classism. About 101 hours of *testimonios* were sifted and coded for responses to racism, classism, and sexism; the presence of obstacles along educational pathways, if any; as well as structures or mechanisms employed in navigating through educational systems, such as social networks, financial aid, equal opportunity programs, families, and individual self-efficacy, which is defined as "judgments of how well one can execute courses of action [i.e., behavior, thought processes, and emotional reactions] required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p.122). Utilizing this

method, I center Mexican Americans scholars, researchers, and administrators in educational discourse and provide a forum for the construction of new forms of knowledge through the life narratives shared.

Significance of the Study

This study is situated between the power of the dominant culture to perpetuate master narratives justifying low Mexican American educational attainment and Mexican/Mexican American communities that resist and reproduce these master narratives, which is not currently discussed in the literature. This research is significant because it addresses the ways in which Mexican/Mexican American individuals, families, and communities navigate through structures, barriers, and master narratives constructed by the dominant culture to deny equitable educational opportunities for all communities. I de-center the dominant culture and Whiteness as the standard used to compare educational attainment across racial/ethnic groups and shift the focus to the lived experiences of Mexican American Ph.D.s.

Recognition of diversity within Mexican/Mexican American communities helps to expand and diminish boundaries, borders, and the confines of stereotypes that subjugate Communities of Color in education. Rather than attempting to frame this study as “truth” that can transcend bias, I present multiple truths about Mexican American educational attainment that are interpreted through my personal and theoretical lenses. This research provides a venue for narratives on Mexican American educational attainment that reflect struggle and survival, privilege and merit, as well as overcoming obstacles and not finding any barriers along the way. To share *testimonios* [life

narratives] is to participate in confronting issues of oppression, form a collective consciousness for Mexican/Mexican American communities, and find ways to take action as researchers, practitioners, and community members to resolve issues of oppression that directly affect Mexican American educational attainment.

Presentation of Findings

This study uncovers and contextualizes Mexican American narratives that reflect personal truths, which may conflict with the ways in which Mexican American experiences are documented in educational research, and the ways in which Mexican Americans identify or dis-identify with the experiences discussed in this study. I utilize the terms *Mexican* and *Mexican American* throughout the study in reference to individuals of Mexican descent because these are common racial/ethnic identifiers assigned to individuals by the dominant culture and because racist discourse often portrays all Latina/o communities as *Mexican*, regardless of nationality, immigrant status, or personal racial/ethnic identity(ies). Although Latina/o critical race theory, a part of my theoretical framework, uses the terms *Chicana* and *Chicano* in reference to people of Mexican descent in educational research, I recognize that the terms are political and nationalist in nature and are racial/ethnic identifiers that individuals assign themselves; not necessarily terms embraced by all Mexican American communities (Kaplan, Alarcón, & Moallem, 1999). The exceptions are in reference to terminology used in previous studies, government statistics, and in participants' narratives.

Centering personal truths and experiential knowledge in this study meant that I made space for participants' use of English, Spanish, and code-switching between the

two languages; the lived experiences of individuals from working class and middle class backgrounds; as well as individuals who identified as first-, second-, and third-generation college students. I present seemingly controversial findings as a means of engaging in discourse that recognizes multiple Mexican/Mexican American *communities*, rather than the monolithic Mexican American *community* that is discussed in educational discourse and hides the diversity of social classes, linguistic attributes, immigration status, and levels of educational attainment. In addition, I utilize the phrase *Mexican/Mexican American communities* as a means of critiquing deficit models that present a static, uniform, and uncomplicated Community of Color.

Mexican Americans' successful navigation through systems and structures are affected by their ability to negotiate the tenets of the American Dream and other societal master narratives and form the findings presented in this study. I present five sections that discuss the ways in which participants resisted and reproduced master narratives constructed by the dominant culture that rationalize low levels of Mexican American educational attainment (Mexican/Mexican American Familial Involvement in Education, Social Constructions of Gender and Education, The Horatio Alger Myth, Choosing Not to See Oppression, and Affirmative Action). I also present two sections that discuss the ways in which participants resisted and reproduced master narratives crafted by Mexican/Mexican American communities that justify the need for higher levels of Mexican American educational attainment and increased research in Mexican/Mexican American communities (The Struggle and Obligations to the Communities). Each finding incorporates an analysis of the intersections of race, social class, and gender, as

well as the resulting activation of mechanisms that dispel or reproduce master narratives, such as self-efficacy, family, community cultural wealth, and social networks. In each findings section, I provide an introductory overview, present stories that reproduce the master narrative and counter-narratives that dispel the master narrative, and conclude with a discussion of the findings in that section. The Horatio Alger Myth was the only section that solely discussed stories that reproduced the master narrative. The final chapter of this study discusses the implications of the findings within research and practice, as well as for Mexican/Mexican American communities and Communities of Color. I conclude with participants' *consejos* [advice], as well as my own *consejos* for navigating through educational systems and obtaining the doctorate.

Along the journey to the doctorate, Mexican Americans gather knowledge, skills and abilities from families and communities and activate their community cultural wealth, even when the dominant culture finds little value in Mexican/Mexican American culture, language, and traditions. Mexican Americans find strength in the margins. Their successes, in spite of educational systems, deficit models, and mechanisms of social control, serve as *testimonios* [life narratives] for the next generation. These narratives have the power to reshape, reframe, and transform discourses of deficiency to those of empowerment and resiliency in K-12 education, postsecondary education, and graduate school.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to understand how Mexican/Mexican American communities navigate through educational systems and negotiate potential barriers they may experience. I present an overview of Mexican American educational attainment, propositions that guide the study, as well as a theoretical framework that guides my approach. Because this study focuses on the pathways to obtaining a doctorate, the amount of literature covering these educational life-spans is very extensive. Therefore, I focus the literature review on Mexican Americans' educational attainment in secondary and postsecondary education, educational forms of capital, deficit modeling, and master narrative and counter-narrative construction.

Mexican American Educational Attainment

After the Latina/o population became the largest minority population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), projections of garnering greater power in society and within institutions, such as education, were widespread in the media (El Nasser, 2003; Schmidt, 2003a; 2003b). These projections are not yet realized, particularly in the area of Latina/o educational attainment; only 57 percent of Latinas/os over the age of 25 have graduated from high school compared to “non-Hispanic Whites³” at 88.7 percent (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Mexican Americans, the largest ethnic group representing 66.9 percent of the Latina/o population, have the lowest levels of educational attainment (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Out of every 100 Mexican American elementary school children, 44 will graduate from high school, 7 will graduate

³ Quotation marks are placed on a racial/ethnic identifier to indicate that the terminology was extracted from the study cited.

with a Bachelor's degree, and less than 1 will earn a doctorate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Referred to as the "education pipeline" (Jones, et al., 2002), the progression from elementary and secondary education to postsecondary and graduate education is riddled with ruptures. The metaphor of an educational pipeline is problematic because it assumes that all students receive similar access to strong academic curricula, educational resources, and experienced teachers, as well as attend schools that are free from institutionalized racism, sexism, and classism (Jones, et al., 2002; Solórzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005). In addition, the pipeline metaphor does not account for individual agency to move through rigorous terrain, overcome obstacles, break through roadblocks, and creating new pathways for others to follow. The metaphor of a pathway or multiple pathways to navigating through educational systems allows for discussions of institutional accountability and individual agency in student success and, in some cases, failure. Unless solutions are created that assess and repair educational pathways at individual, institutional, and societal levels, countless Latinas/os, particularly Mexican Americans, will continue to drop out of high school, leave college before completion, and depart from graduate and doctoral programs. This section provides an overview of the literature pertaining to Latina/o and Mexican American educational attainment in secondary and postsecondary education.

Mexican American Experiences in Secondary Education

In order to understand the low rates of Mexican American educational attainment, I first set the historical context of Mexican Americans in education, as the vestiges of segregation continue to affect Mexican American children's opportunities to complete

high school and matriculate into college. As early as 1916, discriminatory educational policies across the country placed Spanish-speaking children and children with Spanish surnames in segregated schools (Fernández & Guskin, 1981). “Americanization” programs dispossessed Mexican Americans of their culture and language by enforcing American values; for example, good hygiene was a mark of a good American. A hygiene program in California required school administrators to inspect Mexican children and determine if they were “filthy or unhealthy” (Delgado Bernal, 2000, p. 71); children categorized as such were forced to shower in special bathrooms at the schools (Fernández & Guskin, 1981). Federal and state policies perpetuated a racist discourse about Mexican/Mexican American communities and used linguistic differences and phenotype⁴ to segregate Mexican American children.

In the early 1950s and 1960s, studies on education targeted Communities of Color and low-income families, citing that these communities were at fault for their students’ low levels of educational attainment (Valencia & Black, 2002). Mexican American families, in particular, were accused of having low educational standards for their children, socializing their children to stay with their families instead of becoming independent, and lacking an ethic of hard work (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b). Adding fuel to the discourse, Octavio Paz’s (1950) “The Labyrinth of Solitude,” perpetuated the image of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as passive, lone figures, outsiders to the machinations of society. These figures were absorbed into the imagination of U.S.

⁴ Within the concept of race, phenotype is described as “biologically based human characteristic(s).” The selection of “these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55).

society, where the caricature of the lazy, sleepy, and resigned Mexican was ingrained in the social consciousness and explicated in educational research. While other researchers critiqued Paz's work (Romano-V, 1973; Sanchez, 1995) by portraying the agency within Mexican/Mexican American communities, the distorted images of Mexican Americans continue to linger and affect the ways in which educators and researchers perceive and work with Mexican American students and their families.

Although the 1947 landmark desegregation case, *Méndez v. Westminster School District of Orange County*, successfully argued against segregated schools for Mexican children and set the precedent for *Brown v. Board of Education* (Delgado Bernal, 2000), de facto segregation is a current issue in secondary education (Orfield & Yun, 1999; Valencia, 2002). Mexican American children generally attend under-resourced, predominately minority schools that “provide low per-pupil expenditures, few well-trained teachers, and limited access to quality college-bound curricula;” all of which hinder Mexican American academic achievement (Yosso, 2006, p. 4). Schools with high numbers of minority students “are more inclined to stress academic remediation and a slowing down of instruction,” rather than provide accelerated programs (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995, p. 295). Even when academically rigorous programs are provided, minority students, including Mexican American children are less likely to participate because of low expectations from teachers. In addition, teachers and administrators, in part, are less experienced with educating minority children and have higher turnover rates than teachers at predominately White schools (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995).

Educational research regarding Mexican/Mexican American communities often utilizes theoretical models to explain low rates of attainment, particularly models that focus on cultural determinism (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). In essence, the research indicates that Mexican/Mexican American communities espouse cultural values such as “present versus future time orientation, immediate instead of deferred gratification, an emphasis on cooperation rather than on competition,” and place “less value on education and upward mobility” (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995, p. 297). In addition, “large, disorganized, female-headed families; Spanish or nonstandard English spoken in the home; and patriarchal family structures” contribute to low levels of educational attainment (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995, p. 298). Mexican/Mexican American families are consistently blamed for low rates of educational attainment, despite countless efforts to dispel this myth.

Parental aspirations are key aspects to helping Mexican American children persevere and aspire for college. Latina/o parents are cited as having more influence over their children’s educational aspirations than other ethnic groups (Clayton, 1993), particularly if they are involved in school activities (Qian & Blair, 1999). The use of parental *consejos* [advice] within the home could help Mexican/Mexican American families build strength and advocacy for their children in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). In addition, Latina/o parents who expressed their own interests in advancing their education had children with higher educational aspirations and believed that such aspirations were achievable (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004). However, barriers were still cited in the research such as lack of time to dedicate to furthering parents’ education

because of work obligations, lack of understanding how children's aspirations could actually become reality, and lack of English language proficiency that limited parents' abilities to assist with homework (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004).

Additional risk factors that can contribute to drop out rates are academic tracking and poverty (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Teachers who have lower expectations for ethnic minority students or students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds transfer their expectations into classroom environments and their classroom behavior. Teachers who have lower expectations are less likely to praise and reward students, "wait less time for a response to a question...[are] more likely to criticize a wrong answer, interpret [student] behavior in more negative ways, and teach less material...than teachers with high expectations" (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995, p. 304). Administrators and teachers, even those with the best of intentions, can show a lack of care or personal concern for students of color, marginalizing them in the process. Through their interactions in classroom environments and school structures, students of color (sub)consciously recognize that they are Othered as individuals and members of communities whose cultures, language(s), religious beliefs, and traditions are marginalized in education and society (Said, 1994). For example, in her ethnographic study of students at a predominately Mexican/Mexican American high school in Houston, Texas, Angela Valenzuela (1999) found that little value was placed on celebrating and infusing students' racial/ethnic cultures and supporting languages other than English in the general school environment or curricula. This, in turn, resulted in "subtractive schooling," a combination of students'

lack of commitment to their education based on interpersonal and environmental school structures and eroding connections to their cultural identities.

Subtractive schooling affects parents and families as well. As William Tierney and Susan Auerbach (2004) explained, the perception of parental/familial involvement has fluctuated over time, as researchers discuss the roles that parents and families should have in their students' education. Rarely reciprocal in nature, school administrators expect particular actions taken on the part of parents/families, centering all school activities around school schedules and on school grounds, rather than extending the school into the community and arranging events and activities around family time. Research on mentoring programs for "at-risk" Latina/o children and their families indicated that these programs could enhance children's social and academic competencies, especially if the programs were partnerships between communities and schools (Barron-McKeagney, Woody, & D'Souza, 2001). However, the focus remains on targeting "at-risk" students and dispensing knowledge as "mentors" rather than empowering local communities to establish programs based on the needs of the community and undermining any sense of cultural capital they might have (Stanley, 2007). Expectations that are based on the values of the dominant culture and are assumed for parents from all backgrounds are "ethnocentrically nearsighted," as such expectations and strategies are not focused on meeting the needs of students of color and their families (Ceballo, 2004, p. 183).

When Mexican/Mexican American communities are not considered in academic curricula, pedagogies, the media, and social institutions, their cultural practices are

perceived as irrelevant. In such environments, Mexican Americans are forced to live in incongruent worlds, with the pressure of assimilating and conforming to the dominant culture, while struggling to maintain connections with family through languages, cultures, and values. Mexican American children who succeed may encounter pressures to assimilate/integrate and conform to “mainstream” society by tearing away from family, language, culture, and tradition (Trueba, 1991).

Those who choose to assimilate may receive public recognition for doing so (Bell, 1992; Yosso, 2006). For example, individuals such as Linda Chávez, the chairperson for the non-profit organization, Center for Equal Opportunity, and political analyst for FOX News Channel (LindaChavez.org, 2005) and Richard Rodriguez, a runner-up for the 1993 Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction literature (Solomon, 2006), were used as token exemplars by the dominant culture to argue for assimilation. In her book, *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*, Chávez (1991) argued that “Hispanic” groups are not disadvantaged and would enjoy more success if they assimilated into American culture. Her message was problematic because she contended that assimilation was the key to success and that any barriers to accessing education and opportunity were self-imposed, rather than the result of systemic issues that marginalized and oppressed Mexican/Mexican American communities. In a similar argument, Rodriguez (1982) asserted that bilingualism and bilingual education denied students opportunities to truly learn English. His book, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez, An Autobiography*, examined Rodriguez’s educational experiences and struggles to assimilate into White culture, while admitting his self-hatred for being a “minority” and

an “affirmative action case.” He argued that affirmative action allows for minority students who have learning deficiencies and come from families that do not value education to matriculate into universities. Rodriguez and Chávez were used as examples for eliminating bilingual education and affirmative action and fueled the racist discourse found in policies and programs that historically denied Mexican Americans from educational advancement.

As most of the literature explains, if Mexican/Mexican American families changed their cultural values (i.e., assimilated), learned English, and adopted American (i.e., Anglo American) values, their children would succeed in education. Blame is placed on families that are characterized as not valuing education and not necessarily on school structures that place students into particular academic or vocational tracks or the type of training teachers receive that is based on negative stereotypes about Mexican/Mexican American communities. As illustrated above, a majority of educational research focuses on what Mexican/Mexican American families lack and do not necessarily account for Mexican American children who, despite teachers’ low expectations, difficulties with English language acquisition, and other “at-risk” conditions, still manage to excel in school.

Individuals who maintain high academic achievements despite the obstacles are described as academically invulnerable or resilient (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). In their study of 30 Latina/o college students attending highly selective, private institutions, Adele Arellano and Amado Padilla found that despite attending high schools with high minority populations and coming from low-income backgrounds, Latinas/os had high

levels of self-efficacy and felt supported and empowered by their families and teachers. It is important to note that 73 percent of the sample was tracked into a gifted and talented program early in their schooling. In a study of 133 resilient and 81 non-resilient high school students in California, a sense of belonging to the school was the most significant predictor of academic resiliency, which indicated that schools did not have to follow “subtractive schooling” behaviors and could help students feel valued (González & Padilla, 1997). The characteristics of resilient students in the study were female, had parents who were born outside of the U.S., and were living with both parents. Speaking Spanish was an attribute found in both resilient and non-resilient groups.

Mexican American Experiences in College

Mexican American experiences in college are often discussed in retention studies and focus on retaining students of color in higher education, particularly at four-year institutions. The most cited theory in retention research is Vincent Tinto’s (1975; 1987; 1993) interactionist theory, which was adapted from two models within anthropology and sociology. The first model focused on rites of passage composed of three phases (van Gennep, 1960). Individuals or initiates participate in ritualized activities that move them from separation and transition to incorporation (e.g., adolescence to adulthood). Tinto utilized this model to explain how college was a rite of passage with formal and informal processes of academic and social academic integration with examples such as students’ cumulative grade point averages and interactions with peers and faculty, respectively. The second model Tinto (1975; 1987; 1993) adapted was Émile Durkheim’s (1897/2006) study of suicide, particularly the concept of “egotistical suicide”

used to describe the process of leaving college when students rejected the values of the university community because they were pulled away by their local communities.

According to Tierney (1999), Tinto utilized Durkheim's concepts to explain that students had to sever all ties with their former communities in order to integrate into the college community. In this model, successful retention was achieved when students were able to integrate on social and academic levels within the university.

The lack of empirical validity and omissions of certain factors in Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) theory were not as controversial as his emphasis on integration. Various studies argued that integration was synonymous with assimilation (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992; 1999). In essence, retention was measured by students' levels of academic and social integration; the more integrated they were, the more likely they would persist. In this framework, successful retention meant an individual response such that Mexican Americans had to integrate/assimilate into the college community, rather than placing part of the responsibility on institutional agents who could change the cultural climate (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Tierney, 1992; 1999). Two factors that affected Mexican American student persistence was the campus environment and cultural congruity, which is the balance of maintaining students' "cultural values and identity when attempting to integrate...into the existing majority culture" (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996, p. 536). Cultural *incongruity* occurred when the students' cultures and the majority culture were "different in values, beliefs, and expectations for behaviors" (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996, p. 535). Students who did not feel connected to the

academic or social opportunities on campus had to find ways in which to make those connections. This means that students, particularly students of color, may have to conform to the “mainstream” values and beliefs of the institution, which could be dissimilar from their personal beliefs and values (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005). Often, Mexican American students are forced to choose between the values of the university (cultural suicide) and the values of the family or community (cultural integrity), which may cause distress and early departure (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tierney, 1999).

Tinto (1993) later revised his theory to include membership in a community, which signaled that students did not have to disregard their cultures in order to find connections on campus. However, Sylvia Hurtado and Deborah Carter (1997) asserted that Tinto’s revised theory did not completely capture the experiences of students of color, especially because membership in a community meant ethnic and racial affiliation. The construct of belonging was added by Hurtado and Carter as a secondary dimension to social integration, which helped to capture the perceptions of students of color regarding campus racial climate. Discussing course content outside of class and being a part of religious groups or fraternities and sororities increased Latina/o students’ sense of belonging, particularly in the first years of transition to college; the campus environment was more salient to successful transitions to college than gender or academic self-concept. Having a low sense of belonging in college, however, did not automatically lead to attrition. Students’ perceptions of the cultural climate were essential to retention, but this research often minimized Latina/o student agency whereby students made

conscious decisions not to be involved (an indicator of social integration) in campus organizations because they wanted to focus on their academics and/or stay connected to their families which could provide support during the first year in college (Hernández, 2002). Some colleges and universities were not aware that Latina/o students were creating their own support systems and retention programs with little financial or administrative support from institutional agents (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). In essence, Latina/o students were taking the initiative to provide retention mechanisms that their campuses could not provide.

Stress and distress based on these pressures were discussed in a study of “Hispanic” students who measured less distress ratings if they perceived a supportive social environment (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997). The study also found that higher levels of self-efficacy indicated less distress, which could be a predictor of college persistence. Self-efficacy was also connected to a positive perception of the university environment, increased cultural congruity, and decreased perceived educational barriers (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005). Attrition was attributed to concerns about financing education and Latina/o students’ low perceptions of their academic abilities (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004). The studies demonstrate that the focus on retention is primarily on how individual Latina/o students interact with their environments and do not generally provide frameworks for changing campus climates or institutional barriers.

Although Latina/o students are bombarded with messages to assimilate, particularly where there is not a critical mass of Latinas/os on a campus, Latina/o

students may still be able to maintain strong connections to their cultural identities (Torres, Winston, & Cooper, 2003). However, adjusting to college may be hindered if Latina/o students have high levels identification with their cultural backgrounds and perceive the institution as unsupportive (Schneider & Ward, 2003). Conversely, even if there is a critical mass of Latinas/os on a campus, colleges and universities should consider potential marginalization of Latina/o students who do not necessarily identify with their cultural backgrounds or come from backgrounds that differ from other Latinas/os on campus. John Hernández's (2002) study on the first-year experiences of ten Latinas/os found that at least one of the participants did not feel a sense of belonging within the Latina/o student community because of her lower socioeconomic background. These studies indicate that Latina/o student communities are more complex in terms cultural background and affiliation than is often reflected in educational research which, as demonstrated, tends to essentialize Latina/o and Mexican American communities with little consideration for differences in gender, social class, immigrant status, or linguistic attributes.

Much of the retention literature focuses on individual students as solely responsible for their retention rather than assessing institutional environments that may contribute to attrition (Hernández, 2000; Richardson & Skinner, 1990). Another mode of thought was paved by multiculturalists who focused on university administrators and faculty as initiators of change (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005). Similar to the important role of secondary school teachers in mentoring Mexican American children and encouraging them to consider college (Arellano & Padilla, 1997), the research

emphasized the important role of faculty of color who could help Mexican American students persist (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). The expectations of serving as role models and mentoring students of color, however, can prove challenging for faculty of color who are trying to obtain tenure and navigate through hostile environments within their departments and in classroom environments. The pressures to serve are not only found in the literature but also within Communities of Color. Felix Padilla (1997), for example, argued that Latina/o faculty should become more involved with assisting Latina/o college students but are so focused on “moving into the assimilation assembly line of the university academic culture,” that they neglect students of color and Latina/o students (p. 14). However, only 2.9 percent of all full-time faculty and 3 percent of administrators on college campuses are Latina/o, which creates limited opportunities for all Latina/o student populations to connect with potential Latina/o mentors (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). The emphasis in most studies is on teachers and faculty of color as mentors, not necessarily on encouraging Anglo American teachers and faculty to serve as mentors to youth and college students of color.

As a final note, there are few studies that disaggregated the Latina/o student population by gender. Latina participation rates in college increased from 16 percent in the 1980s to 25.4 percent by 2000 and completion rates rose to 65.7 percent in 2000, compared to 53.7 percent a decade earlier (González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004). Latinas have exceeded their male counterparts in matriculation to and completion of college. In a study of 12 Latinas who entered a highly selective institution, the struggles to leave home for college were the salient finding throughout the sample (González, Jovel, & Stoner,

2004). The women described their parents' concerns about who would take care of their daughters at the school. When parents made a connection to an administrator on the campus, they felt more relieved about their daughter's decision to attend the college. The Latina participants, throughout their four years in college, still felt homesick and distant from their families. Their concerns about breaking away from the family returned as some considered applying for graduate school.

Mexican American Experiences in Graduate School

A majority of the literature on doctoral student experiences focuses on graduate school socialization, mentorships between faculty and doctoral students, and attrition; topics seldom disaggregated by gender or race (Antony, 2003; Dorn & Papalweis, 1997; Lovitts, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003). A variety of institutional sorting mechanisms generate departures from doctoral programs such as program selectivity, socialization, and time-to-degree (Baird, 1993; Lovitts, 2001). Only half of all doctoral students complete their degrees, a rate that has remained consistent for the past four decades (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001). Faculty members seek graduate students who complement department cultures and will potentially become viable contributors in their fields.

Barriers are specifically constructed to encourage the early departure of graduate students who are perceived to lack academic ability or are unable to handle rigorous coursework while maintaining high levels of motivation and commitment throughout the doctoral process (Baird, 1993; Lovitts, 2001). Successful socialization processes in graduate school occur when there is an environment in which responsibilities and roles

between faculty and graduate students are articulated and clear; there are opportunities for formal and informal interactions between faculty and graduate students; the environment is not competitive and faculty have a genuine interest in graduate students' successes; and there is a balance between identifying as a student and as a future researcher/faculty member (Weidman & Stein, 2003). However, graduate socialization processes seldom mirror those characteristics. Graduate socialization processes are primary sorting mechanisms for determining which students have knowledge, skills, and abilities that emphasize traditional research values such as objectivity and independence and which students approach research from a devalued, marginalized perspective using intuition and interdependence, which affects people of color in particular (Baird, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a). Colleges and universities have limited infrastructures to track and disaggregate graduate student populations that leave, including Mexican American noncompleters, who are defined as doctoral students who leave graduate school prior to completing the dissertation (Lovitts, 2001). The lack of commitment to learn more about graduate student attrition is based on beliefs about noncompleters' lack of ability, rather than the result of any potential structural, cultural, and/or psychological barriers within graduate schools and programs (Deem & Brehony, 2000; Ferreira, 2003; Lovitts, 2001). A study of 21 faculty and 23 doctoral students in a mathematics department found that faculty believed the study of mathematics required hard work and talent and that some students in the program did not have the ability to handle the rigor (Herzig, 2002). From the doctoral students' perspective, talent was not the issue. Often, their success was due to "determination, focus, and luck" (Herzig, 2002, p. 186). In

addition, faculty viewed instruction in their classroom environments as a place where students could “prove themselves,” leaving the learning of mathematical computations and equations solely on the shoulders of the students themselves (Herzig, 2002, p. 189). Overall, doctoral students felt very little connection to their faculty, did not spend time with faculty outside of the department, and perceived that faculty did not care about them. The successful socialization of doctoral students into their roles as scholars is directly related to how students perceive their faculty’s encouragement as they engage in scholarly activities (Weidman & Stein, 2003). Faculty members, however, are not the only ones who assume attrition is based on graduate student deficiencies; doctoral students also perpetuate these assumptions.

Depending on departmental cultures, competition within cohorts for financial resources, access to faculty members and opportunities for research can result in marginalization and attrition (Herzig, 2002; Lovitts, 2001). Doctoral students in the sciences, in contrast to doctoral students in the social sciences, have a shorter time to degree, hold research assistantships on campus that cover all educational expenses, and are part of cohorts, whereas doctoral students in the social sciences are not guaranteed research or teaching assistantships and generally progress through their programs on an individual basis (Baird, 1993; Lovitts, 2001). Although there is variation in the opportunities such as financial assistance and formal student networks such as cohorts, inevitably, noncompleters blame themselves (Lovitts, 2001).

For Mexican American doctoral students, issues of race, class, and gender compound the struggles, although few studies have uncovered Mexican American

doctoral student experiences, attrition, and/or completion. The studies that consider the experiences of Mexican American graduate students include them in the aggregate of the Latina/o student population. Latina/o students who enter doctoral programs face various challenges in graduate programs including a lack of family understanding and the lack of an adequate Latina/o presence in graduate programs (Figueroa, González, Marin, Moreno, Navia, & Perez, 2001). Although one Latino doctoral student described himself as a second-generation college student, his personal narrative illustrated the hardships of entering a doctoral program, including self-doubt; changing relationships with family brought about by the physical distance from the institution to home; and adjustments to the academic rigor of his program (Herrera, 2003). Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2001a) found that “Chicana” and “Chicano” doctoral students often experienced self-doubt and imposter syndrome, which was the feeling that someone made a mistake in admitting them into their graduate programs. Another study found that Latina doctoral students developed a strong sense of academic self-confidence during their experiences in secondary schools, which helped them in their graduate study; felt supported through institutional structures such as financial aid; and found supportive students and faculty of color on campus (González, 2006). However, Latina doctoral students also had to negotiate hostile campus climates, “discrimination based on race, gender, and class...and stigmatization and tokenism” (González, 2006, p. 358). Overall, Latina doctoral students were resistant to academic socialization practices that seemed to disregard their backgrounds and culture. Speaking Spanish, confronting discrimination, and asserting their voices as Latina women in their research were a few ways in which Latinas

successfully resisted the departments' attempts to "convert" them into the types of scholars that conflicted with their "culture and academic purpose" and were reflected in White male faculty characteristics (González, 2006, p. 359). Those who were unsuccessful in resisting academic socialization that was incongruent with their cultural values felt marginalized and exploited.

There are studies that focus on Mexican American and Latina/o success in doctoral programs. Patricia Gándara's (1982) study of 17 Mexican American female J.D.s, Ph.D.s, and M.D.s found that the women's mothers were strong role models, the women had strong support from family, and that a majority of the women were educated in highly integrated schools as youth. A dissertation study on Latina/o doctoral student persistence at a Hispanic-serving institution found that Latina/o doctoral students persisted in their programs because they established small networks within their departments or campuses, had strong relationships with advisors, maintained high educational aspirations, and felt a high degree of academic satisfaction (Vaquera, 2004).

By choosing a particular route (i.e., starting at a community college, choosing a regional institution, or enrolling in a private college), potential Mexican American doctoral students are either supported and encouraged to continue in their education or "cooled out" through institutional and interpersonal barriers constructed by faculty, administrators, and even peers (Clark, 1960). To illustrate this further, Solórzano's (1993) study of "Chicana/o" doctoral student production in California found that the rate of "Chicanas/os" receiving doctorates was significantly less than the rate of growth for the entire Latina/o population in the state. "Chicanas/os" were not receiving a

comparable proportion of degrees as was expected by the general population's growth rate. Solórzano also presented several patterns pertaining to "Chicana/o" doctoral production: (1) "Chicanas" and "Chicanos" are severely underrepresented in the sciences; (2) "Chicana" doctorates are more closely distributed in the fields of education, social sciences, and the humanities; and (3) "depending on the field, it would take an increase in production of 3 to 17 times for both males and females to reach parity in terms of their proportion to the population in their cohort" (p. viii). This relatively slow increase demonstrates that the share of doctoral degrees for Latinas/os as a whole is minimal, even when the number of Latina/o undergraduates and graduate students has increased (Fry, 2002).

As more Mexican Americans enter higher education, colleges and universities should assess pathways created for graduate school and analyze structures barring doctoral completion, such as overt and covert racism, sexism, and classism inherent in the design and implementation of graduate programs and curricula. In addition, department cultures evidenced in faculty and student peer interactions should also be assessed if colleges and universities want to play a role in eradicating oppression (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; González, 2006; Solórzano, 1993). It is necessary to understand how individually and collectively Mexican Americans successfully navigated through these obstacles. Gloria Holguin Cuádriz (2006) provided a strong example of the type of research that could address these issues. Cuádriz gathered educational life narratives from "Chicana/o" doctoral students who enrolled in their programs over a ten-year period beginning in 1968. She learned about their family histories, educational experiences, and

their journeys to obtaining the doctorate. In the midst of her research she found that the participants were often touted as the exception to the rule about “Chicana/o” educational attainment. For Cuádriz, the “politics of exceptionality” meant that these doctoral students were applauded for their individual efforts and their stories were used within social policies to focus solely on individual achievement rather than institutional structures that could further increase the number of Mexican Americans who successfully navigated through educational systems and obtained Ph.D.s. Rather, they were viewed as anomalies, which fueled the negative discourse on Mexican/Mexican American communities and educational attainment.

Summary of Mexican American Educational Attainment

There is a void in the literature in terms of understanding Mexican American educational successes. Most of the literature points to academic failures that are the sole responsibility of the individual, parents, and families. The literature assumes a deficit perspective, focusing on what Mexican American students and families purportedly lack (i.e., low educational standards, lack of work ethic, lack of college knowledge, and limited English language proficiency) rather than the assets that are found in Mexican/Mexican American communities that can help students succeed, such as cultural integrity and familial support. Schools, curricula, and teacher training are based on deficit models that perpetuate negative images of Mexican/Mexican American families and communities. The literature pertaining to Mexican/Mexican American communities justifies the low rates of Mexican American education attainment by using deficit models that blame Mexican/Mexican American culture, language, and families.

Despite the negative effects of deficit models, other research demonstrates that Mexican/Mexican American parents value education and have high aspirations for their children, but these aspirations may not match with teachers' expectations which can result in placement in vocational tracks rather than academic tracks and messages of assimilation within school environments. Few studies incorporate the institutions' responsibilities at various points along educational pathways such as teachers' low expectations for Mexican Americans, curricula that ignores Mexican/Mexican American communities and histories, hostile campus climates that marginalize Mexican American student communities, and sorting mechanisms in graduate school that filter students who do not meet faculty expectations or demands. As the studies on Mexican American doctoral student experiences attest, having strong support from family, supportive advisors, social networks in departments and on campus, and a strong sense of self-efficacy help Mexican Americans to persevere and successfully complete the doctorate. More research is needed to understand the intersections of race, social class, and gender pertaining to Mexican American educational attainment, how Mexican American Ph.D.s from a variety of disciplines have successfully navigated through educational systems, and how Mexican Americans negotiate through systems created by the dominant culture.

Theoretical Concepts that Frame the Study

In order to understand why educational research focuses on Latina/o and Mexican/Mexican American communities' shortcomings in educational attainment, I discuss several propositions. I first consider the social construction of education and the ways in which individuals, including educational researchers, contribute to the

reproduction of this system. I then address the use of cultural capital in educational research that is presented as a tool to access higher education, but is a tool constructed for the dominant culture, not necessarily for Mexican/Mexican American communities. These propositions guide me in (re)presenting successful navigations through educational systems, despite the structures and mechanisms that are designed to marginalize and devalue Mexican/Mexican American communities; and in demonstrating the competing value systems between deficit models that are pervasive in the literature and Mexican/Mexican American individual, familial, and community resources that are undervalued or ignored in educational research.

Social Construction of Education

First introduced by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966, the sociology of knowledge explains the ways in which individuals construct meaning(s) in the world; also known as social constructionism. The authors asserted that society as a whole is separated by objective and subjective realities that institutions and individuals continuously (re)construct. Institutions communicate privileged knowledge through language common to the dominant culture (i.e., Anglo American culture) that is then interpreted by individuals who formulate their realities (subjectivities) based on how they understand themselves in relation to their interactions with others (Montecinos, 1995; Mumby, 1989). Marginalized communities do not have access to privileged knowledge and therefore learn to navigate through institutions by constructing their own meanings and/or internalizing and reproducing the dominant culture's interpretations.

Contrary to Berger and Luckmann (1966), I contend that “objective reality” is a myth because it is consistently reformulated by individuals, who have varying degrees of knowledge that is privileged by the dominant culture. The objective reality posed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) is more likely the dominant reality and is explained as follows: individuals construct institutions that are vessels for patterns of behavior and accepted values and beliefs (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Erdmans, 1999). In turn, institutions, such as government, media, and education, serve to socialize individuals by integrating the dominant culture’s beliefs, traditions, and values into individuals’ meaning-making and belief systems. Social control, the privileged knowledge produced, and the common language in which privileged knowledge is understood are continuously reproduced or adapted through a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the institution. Mechanisms are constructed to enforce these patterns of behavior and sanction those who break away from the prescribed, in addition to providing sources for legitimizing newly-constructed institutions and meanings. Finally, subjective reality is constructed through individual considerations of one’s position in society and through the perspectives of others. Within a given society there are multiple realities, however, those in power dictate the dominant reality for the rest of society.

Education, in particular, is cited as a conduit for social reproduction because its central focus is harvesting labor production in a capitalist society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995) in order to reproduce “the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes....” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 71). Within education, merit is utilized as a sorting mechanism to determine where children fit

as skilled or unskilled workers along the lines of production. From an early age, children are placed into social hierarchies by teachers who are generally trained in teacher-education programs that utilize deficit models to explain low levels of educational achievement (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). Teachers who have lower expectations for ethnic minority students or students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds transfer their expectations into classroom environments and their classroom behavior. In addition, teachers are trained to utilize particular stories and curricula to help shape children as citizens and good workers in society. For example, the message “We are all immigrants” is infused in textbooks and classroom discussions about patriotism and ignores Mexican American histories, perspectives, and perpetuates assimilation and living the American Dream by “pulling oneself up by the bootstraps” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 421). In addition, the voices of power in the center “appear either invisible or unimplicated in the historical and social constructions of racism,” sexism, and classism within curricula (Giroux, 1991, p. 221). Children of the dominant culture and children of color mirror their teachers’ behaviors and, in turn, reinforce “appropriate” or inappropriate patterns of behavior in accordance with their race, social class, and gender identities in order to distinguish themselves from others (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

Reinforcing the power structures in society and relationships among social classes ensures that there is a range of workers in various fields, which accounts for sorting mechanisms that push students out of educational systems at all levels. The intersection of social reproduction and cultural reproduction (i.e., transmission of cultural capital) in education is vital to understanding Mexican American interactions with

educational barriers. Students of color, therefore, are challenged to persevere despite the pervasive, hegemonic forces within institutions of higher education and ethnocentric processes of socialization that suppress and/or ignore the voices of oppressed communities.

Forms of Capital

Cultural capital is a tool used for the social and cultural reproduction of social hierarchies in U.S. society. In this section, I will discuss cultural capital as a dominant cultural artifact within the context of education and then discuss community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) that accounts for various forms of capital not necessarily recognized by the dominant culture, but cultivated within Mexican/Mexican American communities.

Cultural Capital

Individuals and communities receive privileged knowledge that deciphers institutional symbols and language. If these individuals and communities are part of the dominant culture, the symbols and language are relatively accessible; stock stories or master narratives they hear about their communities are positively reflected in educational curricula; and they are sorted into the political and cultural elite, all of which contribute to successful navigation of educational systems. The dominant culture possesses the expectations, unwritten rules, and trade secrets by virtue of social reproduction (Carter, 1997). This privileged knowledge helps members of the dominant culture navigate through the complexities of educational systems in various ways, such as knowing how to work with teachers and administrators (Lareau & Horvat, 1999),

ensuring that students are tracked into academic courses that make them more marketable to colleges (Auerbach, 2002), and hiring consultants who enhance the students' college applications and scores on college entrance exams (McDonough, Korn, & Yamasaki, 1997). Racially underrepresented populations, lower socio-economic groups, and first-generation families do not necessarily have access to this cultural capital.

Cultural capital is an extension of privileged knowledge and symbolic wealth transmitted through hierarchical systems from one generation to the next in order to sustain class status (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997). Cultural capital is connected to economic capital and social capital because financial resources can lead to membership in higher status groups and social networks that can dispense class-based knowledge about maintaining or advancing one's position in society. Cultural capital exists in three forms: *embodied* through "styles, manners, and cultural preferences contributing to cultural knowledge;" *objectified* by development of "artifacts and cultural goods;" and *institutionalized* through "academic credentials and educational qualifications" (Monkman, Ronald, & Th eram ene, 2005, p. 11). Obtaining these forms of capital helps members of the dominant culture read institutional and social signals that low-income communities and first-generation individuals and families may not be able to access.

Literature on college access cites cultural capital as a mechanism for boosting educational attainment. Individuals who are not members of the dominant culture believe they can access the knowledge of the middle and upper classes through formal education and college preparatory programs (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997;

Monkman, Ronald, & Th eram ene, 2005; Perna & Titus, 2005). For parents who actively engage in school activities or attend parent-teacher conferences, activation of the “right” social and cultural capital can gain greater access and support from teachers (moments of inclusion) (Monkman, Ronald, & Th eram ene, 2005). In the same respect, approaching teachers and school administrators with forms of social and cultural capital that are not valued can lead to barriers between teachers and parents (moments of exclusion) (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Having the right type of cultural capital affects not only the high school student who is contemplating college, but the undergraduate who is considering a graduate degree and the doctoral student who is starting his or her first year in graduate school or is close to completing the dissertation.

The literature claims that obtaining the knowledge, awareness, and skills to navigate through graduate school is mostly determined by potential graduate students’ levels of understanding graduate school processes. Perceptions of the graduate program, expectations for graduate study, and general interactions with faculty and fellow graduate students are dictated, in large part, by access to a “hidden curriculum” (i.e., cultural capital) or information not readily available in an application packet or program booklet (Lovitts, 2001; McDonough, 1997). Research on cultural capital in education, perhaps unintentionally, focuses on the “right” type of cultural capital valued by the dominant culture instead of discussing why marginalized communities’ modes of cultural capital are perceived as not valued in educational institutions and excluded from the discourse. The research remains focused on privileged knowledge that marginalized communities will, perhaps, never have by virtue of not being part of the dominant culture. Cultural

capital is only one form of capital specific to the dominant culture and the only form currently valued in education. It focuses on individual deposits of knowledge. Lack of cultural capital becomes an inherent part of the deficit discourse in higher education research.

Community Cultural Wealth

When considering factors of retention and completion one should assess if the frameworks utilized “account for how students of color may simultaneously promote the practice of both dominant and transformative forms of cultural and social capital to achieve academic success” to become change agents within Mexican/Mexican American communities and the dominant culture (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005, p. 633). Community cultural wealth is such a framework. Therefore, it is important to understand what types of capital are forming within marginalized communities and the ways that these forms of capital are valuable in journeying through educational systems. For example, in U.S. capitalist society, wealth is not merely an accumulation of income; it is an accumulation of “assets and resources, [such as] stocks, savings, owning a home or business” (Yosso, 2006, p. 40). If marginalized communities assessed their own resources, perhaps that accumulation of wealth would supersede any limitations from not having cultural capital. Alternatives to cultural capital could pull away from the current discourse and help educational researchers affirm the values inherent within Mexican/Mexican American families and communities.

Funds of knowledge (Moll & González, 2004; Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992) which focus on secondary education and the knowledge transmitted in Mexican/Mexican

American homes; and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) are examples of alternative concepts. The notion of community cultural wealth uncovers Mexican Americans' experiential knowledge based on several types of capital that are interdependent and build upon each other (Yosso, 2005; 2006). *Aspirational capital* is parental transmission of dreams and goals to children and maintenance of those dreams and goals despite real or perceived barriers. Children who know multiple languages and communication methods can serve as language brokers for their families and gather *linguistic capital* through their real-world literacy skills. At an early age, Mexican American children gain *navigational capital* by traversing through social institutions and structures built to support members of the dominant culture. Kinship networks and loose ties to other social networks and resources, or *social capital*, helps children and families gather resources and information to navigate social structures. *Familial capital* is an expression of the kinship networks and extends to include cultural identity(ies), cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997), and community history that nurtures a sense of belonging for children who may feel culturally isolated in their school environments. Finally, *resistance capital* is developed through awareness of and agency against forms of oppression.

Theoretical Framework

I employ critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) as my main theoretical frameworks because the theories place race and racism at the center of political, social, and educational discourses. The critical race theory (CRT) movement is "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the

relationships among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). CRT was developed in the 1970s by legal scholars who were initially part of critical legal studies (CLS) scholarship, but found that the research did not address racist discourse that affected the slow progress of civil rights legislation and the experiences of people of color within the judicial system (Lynn & Adams, 1987; Tate, 1999; Yosso, 2006). Scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, and Charles Lawrence, among others, met during the early 1990s to chart the major tenets of CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) proposed four themes that set the foundation of CRT scholarship: (1) racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (2) U.S. society is based on a “White-over-color ascendancy,” that is perceived as the norm with “little incentive to eradicate” racism because it advances Anglo American power and provides a scapegoat (Communities of Color) for working-class communities; (3) race and racism are social constructions; and (4) legal storytelling “urges Black and Brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (pp. 7-9).

In the mid-1990s, educational researchers began to utilize CRT in examining persistent racism against African American communities in educational systems, processes, and discourses (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) were credited with applying CRT frameworks to education, particularly in their essay centering race and racism in analyzing educational inequities, namely, suspension and dropout rates among African Americans and Latinos, academic tracking, and college admissions. Ladson-Billings’ (1999) next contribution was analyzing

curricula and instruction, as well as school segregation through a critical race perspective and set the process for incorporating CRT into educational research that included discussions on critical pedagogy (Parker & Stovall, 2004); racial microaggressions (unconscious or subtle forms of racism) experienced by African Americans in college (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and “Chicanas/os” in graduate school (Solórzano, 1998); and best practices in educational leadership (Stovall, 2004). Critical race theorists in education argued that educational agents (i.e., policy makers, teachers, and administrators) employ terms such as *meritocracy*, *objectivity*, and *race-neutrality* to support social hierarchies and “camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 313). Such terms support positivist paradigms found in science, whose grand narratives seek Truth and rationality (Lyotard, 1984), which do not exist by virtue of their construction within social contexts, and set the precedence for notions of colorblindness and other forms of blindness to oppression because they fail to consider the “persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as Other” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29).

Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and interest convergence (Bell, 1980) are concepts not yet fully explicated in educational research (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Whiteness, or “the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being White” in the United States, has evolved into a form of property that is “affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law” and is therefore a right, not simply a physical object (Harris, 1993, p. 1713). An example of the extent to which Whiteness is protected in the legal system and in educational institutions is through the reversal of

affirmative action policies, which challenges the dominant culture and “de-legitimizes the property interest in Whiteness” (Harris, 1993, p. 1715). Maintaining Whiteness as property is an important aspect for the dominant culture. However, change can occur through interest convergence, which takes place when members of the dominant culture perceive opportunities to change the status quo as potential benefits to preserve their power in society. For example, Bell (1980) argued that the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* could only occur because the racial remedies of desegregation would “secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper class Whites” (p. 523). On a global level, desegregation in the United States would lead to greater economic and political opportunities to fight against Communism. According to Bell (1980), the Supreme Court decision had very little to do with advancing African American equality. Using a CRT lens, researchers view education as an institution that can “operate in contradictory ways, with the potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with the potential to emancipate and empower” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 479).

As some scholars were incorporating critical race theory in education, other critical race theorists began applying CRT to various racial/ethnic and gendered subgroups. At the onset, CRT worked along a black-white binary and critical race theorists who were focused on other racial/ethnic identities and discourses utilized the CRT framework to develop new branches, such as Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit). For LatCrit scholars, racism is an inherent part of the struggles faced by Latinas/os in U.S. society, but one must also consider the intersections of language, immigrant status,

accent, phenotype, and surname as these aspects also contribute to the subjugation of Latina/o communities (Lynn & Adams, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b; Yosso, 2006). As CRT was introduced to education and LatCrit was forming in legal scholarship, several educational researchers⁵ bridged the two theories to discuss the experiences of Latina/o communities in education, mainly focusing on counter-storytelling, which is “a method of telling a story that casts doubts on the validity of accepted...myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144) and the permanence of racism. Evolving from this scholarship, five tenets of CRT and LatCrit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b) inform my research:

1. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.

Racism exists. It permeates every aspect of society and privileges Anglo American communities while subjugating Mexican/Mexican American communities. Race and racism intersect with gender, social class, immigrant status, sexuality, language, phenotype, and surname (Yosso, 2006). Because “class exploitation, racism, and sexism are the most conspicuous forms of dominance and oppression” (Torres, 1994, p. 431), I will analyze the intersections of social class, race, and gender, in particular.

2. The challenge to dominant ideology.

The textbooks read by students and the curricula under which they learn center stories of Anglo American culture, which continues to reinforce Whiteness as property in educational systems (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Historical figures who are people of

⁵ I wish to credit Latina/o critical race theorists Daniel Solórzano, Dolores Delgado Bernal, Octavio Villalpando, Tara Yosso, and Miguel Ceja, among others for informing my work.

color or Latinas/os in particular are left to the last pages of a chapter or a few lines in a paragraph because textbooks and curricula are framed through the perspectives of predominately Anglo American writers, teachers, and school boards.

3. The commitment to social justice.

Education is a political act and a forum to create just and equitable opportunities, processes and systems in an effort to transform society. While the Freireian discourse on liberating pedagogy and development of critical consciousness (Torres, 1994) are set in the margins and not made visible in general society, institutionalized racism and other forms of oppression will continue, especially if the eradication of various forms of oppression does not meet the dominant culture's self-interests (interest convergence). To that end, critical race theorists must present solutions that converge with the dominant culture's interests that are *perceived* to not disrupt "a normal way of life for the majority of Whites" yet create positive change for marginalized communities (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 28).

4. The centrality of experiential knowledge.

The lived experiences of Communities of Color and, in this instance, Mexican/Mexican American communities, have a place in scholarly text and research. Their voices are essential to uncovering and resolving issues of injustice. Often, counter-storytelling developed by critical race theorists is a composition of various interviews, creating a mosaic of experiences and sharing common themes. The knowledge gleaned from the lived experiences of Mexican Americans is formatted into "storytelling, family history,

biographies, scenarios, parables, *testimonios* [life narratives], *cuentos* [tales], *consejos* [advice], chronicles, and narratives” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 314).

5. The transdisciplinary perspective.

CRT and LatCrit incorporate a variety of disciplines in order to explain oppressive phenomena, particularly drawing from legal scholarship and education. In this study, I incorporate theories from sociology, legal scholarship, anthropology, Chicana/o studies, and women’s studies in my theoretical frameworks and methodological stance.

Critiques of Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Race Theory

Because CRT and LatCrit are relatively young theories still evolving in various discourses there are a few critiques to address. Critics of CRT in legal scholarship maintain that “counter-stories” developed from the experiential knowledge of Communities of Color are not representative of all people of color; exaggerate authors’ voices in the research (positionality); de-emphasize conventional analysis and academic rigor because critical race theorists present stories; and are less concerned with measuring the accuracy of these “counter-stories,” perhaps, at the worst distorting “the truth” (Delgado, 1993; Farber & Sherry, 1993). Proponents of CRT assert that there is no one “truth,” as there is no such thing as meritocracy, objectivity, or race-neutrality in the law or in any institution (Delgado, 1993; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). As noted above, position(ality) is an important aspect of any research, as authors’ voices contextualize the analysis in an effort to help the audience understand the authors’ viewpoints. Critical race theorists contend that in discussions of race and racism, CRT is best utilized by scholars of color who can address issues of oppression from within the

margins, especially in response to stories that are developed and perpetuated by members of the dominant culture in reference to Communities of Color. Reviewing much of the CRT literature in legal reviews, Delgado (1993) asserted that critical race theorists adhered to standards of rigor in their work, including lengthy footnotes with various sources of data to support their arguments. In addition, questions about research validity and rigorous scholarship are strategies incorporated by the dominant culture to subsume research on people of color (Tate, 1999). Finally, CRT is not meant to present research on behalf of all Communities of Color, but to “fashion a theory of education [in this instance] that might help to change educational inequities for students of color” (Tate, 1999, p. 255) by explaining systems of oppression that marginalize Communities of Color and elevate members of the dominant culture.

As a branch of CRT, critiques of LatCrit are also folded into the discussion above. However, I will provide a critique of the LatCrit framework as it applies to educational research. Because Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans represent the largest ethnic groups within the Latina/o population, most of the higher education literature focuses on their access and retention (Pruitt & Isaac, 1985; Solórzano, 1993; Post, 1999). Generalizing or essentializing the experiences of Latina/o undergraduate and graduate student populations is precarious, especially if studies focus on the experiences of an ethnic group within Latina/o communities and label those experiences as “Latina/o.” In this way, “Latina/o” becomes synonymous with “Chicana/o” or “Mexican American” in some of the literature. This critique also applies to LatCrit. To date, Latina/o critical race theorists in education have solely focused on Mexican/ Mexican American

communities, and have used *Chicana/o* as an umbrella term for Mexican/Mexican American communities. Although the framework as it stands is very helpful to me as I analyze the experiences of Mexican American Ph.D.s, I know that the term *Chicana/o* has political connotations that are not always readily accepted by all Mexican/Mexican American communities and there are negative consequences for choosing to utilize particular terminology in one's research, as I will discuss in the Methodology chapter.

Summary

The main tenets of CRT and LatCrit fit well with my discussion of the social construction of education and the mechanisms that assist in Mexican Americans' educational attainment or prohibit Mexican Americans from advancing along educational pathways. Solórzano (1998) defines CRT in education as "a set of...perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of [students] of color" (p. 123). Latina/o critical race theory provides an analytical tool that requires little substantiation of the existence of racism, sexism, and classism because the contexts within which individuals and communities experience racism, sexism, and classism are valued as primary sources within the research. There are also different ways of learning and knowing (Delgado Bernal, 2002) that incorporate the knowledge gained through family, community, and personal experience that may not have a connection to a formal educational system, but have as much validity in the lives of Mexican American scholars as noted in their life narratives.

Challenges to the Dominant Ideology: Master Narratives and Counter-Narratives

Although I incorporate the five tenets of critical race theory (CRT) in my analysis, I want to highlight the tenet on challenging the dominant ideology, as it provided the basis for the design of the study and (re)presentation of the findings through the dialectic of master narratives and counter-narratives.

Master Narratives

Based on the earlier discussion on social constructionism, the dominant culture creates institutions that produce particular forms of knowledge and the type of language that can decipher that knowledge. The knowledge produced at societal levels is transmitted through “stock stories” or master narratives told repeatedly that “legitimate[the dominant culture’s] power and position” (Tate, 1997, p. 216) through “overarching themes or templates that present the literature, history, or culture of a society” (Aldridge, 2006, p. 681). These master narratives are rendered from a “virtual stockroom of stereotypes [about racial, classed and gendered communities] developed through history and distributed through individuals, groups, and institutions...” (Yosso, 2006, p. 9). Master narratives mediate individual constructed realities, the production of meaning at the macro-level, and the ideologies through which oppressive language and discourse are “translated to real policies, practices, and laws” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 420). The dominant culture crafts these stories “with the conviction that they are not stories at all, but the truth” (Delgado, 1993, p. 670). Master narratives work to simplify complex issues and present individuals as one-dimensional rather than recognizing women and men as social actors with complex identities, experiences, and cultural lives (Aldridge, 2006; Montecinos, 1995; Trueba, 2002). In addition, master narratives are

reflected in multiple forms of media that “shape ideas, provide images, and supply meaning to events in everyday social realities” (Erdmans, 1999, p. 341). They are entrenched in the social fabric to the extent that colonization, in this case, of Mexican/Mexican American communities occurs not through brutal force, but through “construction of the word, ‘through the very frameworks by which self and others are experienced, [and] subjectivity and self-understandings made known’” (Sampson, 1993 as cited in Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 418).

One example is the discourse on immigration and Mexican American educational access. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2007), over 1500 immigration bills were introduced at the state level in 2007, 244 of which were enacted by 46 states; Alaska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Wisconsin were the excluded states. The bills targeted identification cards, driver’s licenses, public benefits, employment, and education. Immigration rhetoric centers on Mexican/Mexican American communities and individuals who identify or are perceived as Mexican, which elicits images of undocumented individuals who take advantage of opportunities that should only be afforded to Americans. This rhetoric is evident in denying social services to undocumented individuals and revoking in-state tuition to undocumented students, particularly those who have lived in the U.S. most of their childhoods. Children who hear this rhetoric and the verbal assaults on their communities and families suffer psychological violence (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), which is then perpetuated in the school curricula.

Master narratives are stories woven by the dominant culture into the fabric of social structures as a means of garnering and maintaining power, while justifying the subjugation of marginalized communities. Because marginalized communities must navigate through oppressive structures in society, they are exposed to master narratives and internalize them to the extent that members of marginalized communities begin to reproduce the master narratives. Therefore, the dominant culture is able to sustain and maintain control in society by crafting master narratives. Some master narratives are well-grounded and well documented, while others remain uncovered because they are so deeply embedded within the consciousness of individuals, communities, and societies until they are brought to light and challenged through critical analysis.

Counter-Narratives

Although this discussion is focused mostly on institutions and individuals as products of institutions at the macro-level, resistance is occurring at the micro-level through counter-narratives that present new paradigms and disrupt social reproduction processes (Cuádriz, 1997). The intent of counter-narratives is not to prove that racism, sexism, or classism exists; their purpose is to deconstruct the master narratives that perpetuate racism, sexism, and classism. Marginalized individuals and communities are not simply victimized; they build resistance through agency or “the confidence and skills to act on one’s behalf” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, pp. 315-316) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000). One such example is the concept of *educación* whereby Mexican/Mexican American families incorporate the values of personal development and respect for others as part of what it means to be educated, as well as layering lessons

taught in the home with lessons taught in the classroom (Auerbach, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006).

Dialectic Relationships and the Decolonial Imaginary

In crafting this study and (re)presenting the findings, I utilize several concepts that reflected dialectic relationships, as is evidenced in the relationship between master narratives and counter-narratives, which are derived from research on slave narratives. Some scholars who study slave narratives have incorporated Hegel's (1977) dialectic of master and slave in their analyses (Burns, 2006; Cassuto, 1996). Hegel posited that the master's identity as master was predicated on the slave's acknowledgement of the master as the person in power; identity was therefore dependent on an external source to legitimize the master's position. As a means of self-preservation, the slaves willingly acknowledge the master and become objectified as the Other (Said, 1994). The slaves' identities, however, are not necessarily dependent on the master, and are transformed from an Other into human beings who are conscious of the master's dependence and develop counter-narratives that "first articulate the profound cruelty, the very grotesqueness of slavery...[and secondly] recount the acts which free them from that" (Cassuto, 1996, p. 234). Their objectification as the Other is thus transformed back into their humanity through the storytelling.

Through this perspective, I believe that master narratives are constructed by dominant groups but must be reproduced by marginalized communities in order to maintain social positions and power in U.S. society (Tate, 1997), as well as receive recognition as the group(s) in power. Without this recognition, the dominant culture is

not dominant (Cassuto, 1996). The purpose of counter-narratives is to challenge dominant ideologies found in master narratives and negate master narratives, in this instance, that justify low educational attainment for Mexican/Mexican American communities. Critical race theorists uncover master narratives and then craft counter-narratives to delegitimize dominant ideologies. Returning to an earlier discussion as an example, Whiteness is meaningful to White communities, regardless of social class and gender, because it privileges Whiteness in the legal system and treats it as a valuable property (Harris, 1993). However, “it is a concept based on relations of power...predicated on White dominance and [Mexican American] subordination” and White communities have a vested interest in maintaining that dialectic relationship (Harris, 1993, p. 1761). By calling attention to master narratives and recognizing the power of the dominant culture, does one, in fact, add legitimacy to the dominant culture’s position in society? I acknowledge that my use of terms such as *dominant culture* and *marginalized communities* may add credence to these power relations. However, the purpose of doing so is more connected with first exposing racism, sexism, and classism and then advocating and empowering marginalized communities. This study uncovers counter-narratives that not only negate master narratives but transform Mexican American lived experiences by utilizing the concepts of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903/1989) and the third space (Bhaba, 1994) or decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999).

Developing and sharing counter-narratives builds transformational resistance that occurs when marginalized communities collectively learn to manipulate oppressive systems, “confront negative portrayals and ideas,...and are driven to navigate through the

educational system for themselves and others,” thus transforming present realities into new realities (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 319). Counter-narratives provide a format for recounting histories that were subsumed in master narratives and were silenced by the dominant culture. Inevitably, as counter-narratives are shared, communities that were marginalized, rejected, and disregarded are brought to the center. Scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois (1903/1989), Franz Fanon (1967), and Homi Bhaba (1994) provided imagery that depicted the position of marginalized communities as they navigated between the dominant reality formulated by the dominant culture and reproduced by marginalized communities and from within marginalized realities.

DuBois (1903/1989) posited a double consciousness experienced by African Americans as they navigated between the dominant reality and their marginalized communities. Simultaneously, African Americans felt their “twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois, 1903/1989, p. 3). In a similar vein, Fanon (1967) examined the psychological effects of colonization. By acquiring the language of the colonizers, the colonized begin to separate from their identities as the Other by wearing the white masks of colonization. The masks begin to erode the black and brown faces of the colonized. Similar to Hegel’s dialectic, the white masks can only exist in relation to the black and brown faces that wear the masks. Thus far, the discussion has focused on dialectic relationships, but scholars recognize there may be another dimension to these binary concepts.

The buffer between Fanon's (1967) masks and faces is what Bhaba (1994) terms *third space*, which is a place of resistance between "competing cultural collectives" such as "colonized-colonizer, indigenous-foreign, local-global, traditional-modern" (Bhatt, 2008, p. 178). The third space locates culture, beliefs, traditions, and meanings that do not fit into dominant cultural norms and challenges marginalized communities to make meaning from the tensions of opposing ideologies in an effort to emerge from the third space transformed; rejecting dominant paradigms, the dominant culture's sanctioning mechanisms, and/or the pulls from social reproduction. This concept accounts for agency within marginalized communities through the act of resistance, a "form of refusal that highlights, either implicitly or explicitly, the need to struggle against the social nexus of domination [dominant culture] and submission [marginalized communities]" (Giroux, 1983, p. 109).

Feminist scholars of color discussed the tension between domination and submission through their study of intersectionality or the "interlocking systems of oppression" that locate women's positions in society (Cuádriz & Uttal, 1999, p. 158). Intersectionality analyzes race, social class, and gender within the context of lived experiences.⁶ Understanding only one aspect of identity obscures a deeper analysis of how multiple identities converge. For example, by interrogating race, social class, and gender, one can understand how "capitalist patriarchy profoundly shapes male/female relations generally [and is further] complicated by racial dynamics" (Brewer, Conrad, &

⁶ The complexity of analyzing multiple social relations is discussed in greater detail in the Methodology chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, I wanted to provide a brief overview of intersectionality and how the third space (Bhaba, 1994) was incorporated into Chicana feminist epistemology.

King, 2002, p. 4). According to Lynn Weber (1998), there are six common themes in the study of intersectionality. Race, social class, and gender are contextual. They are “socially constructed hierarchies of domination” (Weber, 1998, p. 20) based on dialectic relationships of dominant-subordinate groups. Race, social class, and gender relations are found within social structures at the macro-level and psychological resources (i.e., resistance) at the micro-level. The intersections of identities are simultaneously expressed, giving individuals “power and options in some arenas while restricting...opportunities in another” (Weber, 1998, p. 24). Finally, by analyzing these intersections, feminist scholars can expand knowledge while seeking social justice and empowering marginalized communities.

Blending the third space and intersectionality, Chicana feminist scholars reclaimed Mexican/Mexican American identities and histories that were often neglected in traditional feminist scholarship (Pérez, 1999). In reclaiming these identities and histories, Chicana feminist scholars uncovered systems of oppression within Mexican/Mexican American communities themselves. From this perspective, “the voices of Chicanas, *Mexicanas*, and *Indias* [indigenous women]...are still minimized, spurned, even scorned” (Perez, 1999, p. xv), yet still resist within the third space to make their narratives known within Chicano history, which has traditionally placed Chicana experiences in the margins. Chéla Sandoval (2000) described resistance against various forms of oppression as *differential consciousness*, which attended to racialized and sexualized identities excluded from U.S. feminist discourse. Differential consciousness “allow[ed] for mobility of identities between and among varying power bases...” within

feminist discourse as a means of challenging Eurocentric ideologies (Pérez, 1999, p. xvi). Emma Pérez (1999) introduced the concept of the *decolonial imaginary* as another tool that could accompany differential consciousness as a means of “uncover[ing] the voices of Chicanas...relegated to the silences...” within historical contexts (Pérez, 1999, p. xvi). Pérez articulated the colonization of Chicana/o and Mexican American communities by (en)gendering histories to include the voices of women who were marginalized yet resisted in the third space, the imaginary. As Bhaba (1994) explained, the third space is not static; it is dynamic and fluid, floating between the dominant culture and the marginalized community and serving as a location for resistance against colonization. Similarly, the decolonial imaginary mirrors the third space, but focuses on how Chicanas in particular negotiate between their intersecting identities of race, social class, and gender and resist subjugation by both the dominant culture and Chicano men in their communities. Because I am interested in the intersections of race, social class, and gender as experienced by Mexican Americans within educational contexts, I find value in the nature of the decolonial imaginary as a location for resistance against and reproduction of master narratives, as well as a location for transforming and empowering Mexican/Mexican American communities.

Summary

I believe that this study helps to resolve some of the critiques about critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) as my theoretical frameworks by not only considering race and racism as experienced by Mexican American Ph.D.s, but also the intersections of social class and classism; and gender and sexism. By doing so,

the study can provide a venue for different Mexican/Mexican American educational perspectives that are not currently discussed in CRT and LatCrit research. In addition, CRT and LatCrit have not been utilized to uncover educational life journeys from secondary school to graduate school and the ways in which resistance against, marginalization in, and reproduction of the dominant culture's power structures are developed and molded through time. Finally, although CRT and LatCrit do not necessarily account for Mexican Americans' involvement in reproducing master narratives, I provide a venue for that discussion recognizing that however difficult and challenging, this discussion must be brought into the discourse in an effort to unmask how oppression works in U.S. educational systems.

The master-slave dialectic (Hegel, 1977), double consciousness (DuBois, 1903/1989), and white masks of colonization (Fanon, 1994) demonstrate that black-white, oppression-victimization, and oppression-resistance binaries do not account for intersections of multiple identities that lead marginalized individuals and communities to reproduce and resist master narratives. Bhaba (1994) articulates the space between the binaries as the third space, which is then reconfigured to include Chicana experiences and resistance as expressed through Sandoval's (2000) differential consciousness and Pérez's (1999) decolonial imaginary. Mexican American women, men, and communities negotiate the dominant culture and their marginalized communities and may become transformed within the decolonial imaginary as they resist and reproduce master narratives and oppression. Throughout the study, I will make reference to these three locations, as participants interact with the dominant culture, Mexican/Mexican American

communities, and Mexican/Mexican American individuals/communities/environments that resist or reproduce master narratives.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Inherent in qualitative analysis is placing one's research within epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). I begin this chapter by presenting the research questions. Then, I discuss the use of narrative inquiry within a methodological framework that was comprised of critical race methodology, which accounts for the intersections of race, social class, and gender; (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b); narrative analysis, which exposes power relations (Riessman, 1993), and *testimonios* [life narratives], which craft a collective consciousness within marginalized communities (Acevedo et al., 2001). Next, I discuss my position(ality) within the research; participants' backgrounds; the methods employed to uncover and contextualize participants' *testimonios* [life narratives]; and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This study is based on the premise that education is a social construction that simultaneously empowers and marginalizes Mexican/Mexican American communities through dominant ideologies reflected in master narratives that rationalize low rates of Mexican American educational attainment. As a means of uncovering community cultural wealth (i.e., the assets and forms of capital within Mexican/Mexican communities) and the ways in which Mexican American scholars, researchers, and administrators from working class and middle class backgrounds, who were first-generation college students and students whose families attended college for generations reproduced and resisted master narratives, I chose to provide a forum for sharing their

lived experiences along educational pathways to the doctorate. In that effort, my research is guided by the following research questions:

Research Question #1: To what extent has racism, sexism, and/or classism surfaced in Mexican American Ph.D.s' journeys to the doctorate?

Supporting Question A: To what extent do Mexican American Ph.D.s reproduce master narratives that support racism, sexism, and/or classism?

Supporting Question B: To what extent do Mexican American Ph.D.s craft counter-narratives against racism, sexism, and/or classism?

Research Question #2: To what extent do the ways in which Mexican American Ph.D.s share their narratives reflect the intersections of race, gender, and social class?

Research Question #3: What structures or mechanisms (e.g., kinship and social networks, academic/professional socialization) are employed in Mexican American Ph.D.s' journeys to the doctorate?

Supporting Question A: To what extent are structures or mechanisms activated differently by gender?

Supporting Question B: To what extent are structures or mechanisms activated differently by socio-economic status?

Methodological Stance

Narrative inquiry was utilized to examine Mexican Americans' struggles and successes along their journeys to obtaining the doctorate through *testimonios* [life narratives], which are narratives told by marginalized communities as a means of exposing oppression and developing a collective consciousness (Acevedo et al., 2001).

To craft a collective consciousness about Mexican American educational attainment, I based my methodological approach on narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) and critical race methodology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b). As I began to weave the stories of 33 Mexican American Ph.D.s from various backgrounds and disciplines, I needed a methodological approach that incorporated an examination of power, multiple facets of oppression, and the intersections of race, social class, and gender, particularly in relation to reproducing or resisting master narratives that justified low Mexican American educational attainment.

Narrative Analysis

I utilized narrative analysis in the study because it provides a venue for analyzing Mexican American voices and interpretations of their educational experiences. Narrative inquiry is the best type of qualitative inquiry for this study because it is an “amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). Narratives are “retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). At its most basic level, narrative analysis “takes as its object of investigation the story itself” and analyzes how the story is ordered (Riessman, 1993, p. 1). This approach dispels dominant cultural assumptions and encourages “reflexive relationships” between the researcher and participants (Auerbach, 2002). As the researcher-interpreter, I gathered participants’ educational life narratives, co-interpreted those narratives with the participants, and then analyzed how participants crafted their narratives to either

reproduce master narratives justifying low Mexican American educational attainment or resist through counter-narratives. Some master narratives openly exist in educational discourse while other master narratives are so deeply embedded in our social consciousness that they have yet to be challenged or researched. Narrative analysis provides the tools to uncover and expose master narratives and their corresponding counter-narratives.

In general, during the course of an interview, participants will naturally share stories in response to questions when there is a “breach between ideal and real, self and society” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). I contend that this “breach” is the third space (Bhaba, 1994), a location that challenges the participant to make meaning of the tensions between opposing ideologies found in the dominant culture and in Mexican/Mexican American communities, and then leave the third space transformed through the (re)interpretation of his or her experience. Because I analyzed Mexican American *testimonios* [life narratives], I drew from Emma Pérez’s (1999) concept of the decolonial imaginary, a tool that mirrors the third space but specifically calls attention to reclaiming Chicana and Chicano histories and identities in educational contexts. As members of marginalized communities and communities that have privilege in U.S. society (e.g., male participants and participants from middle class backgrounds), the participants crafted narratives with plots, characters, and moral messages that explained the ideal world of educational equity and the real world of racism, sexism, and classism they confronted or witnessed their families confront in their educational life experiences, as well as those who knew of oppression only in the abstract, rather than through concrete experience.

Because I did not personally know the participants, I did not have access to their lived experiences. Therefore, I could only rely on the stories they chose to share and how they interpreted those stories. Anthropologists and historians argue that even while attempting to capture a memory of an experience, there is a gap in time between the actual experience and the remembering so that the past is never fully captured even in the telling and retelling of that experience (Spence, 1991). However, as memories are shared, participants can gain insight about themselves and their lives that they did not know before. The knowledge generated by understanding self can lead to understanding oneself within the context of social relations and the greater society (Gregory, 1995). As the researcher-interpreter, my role was to (re)present participants' stories and (re)interpretations, considering five levels of representation within narrative analysis.

Participants first think about their experiences (attending to experience) and then decide the ways in which they will share those experiences with others (telling about experience). The audience will largely determine how those experiences are explicated, as the telling of experiences demonstrates how participants want to be "known" to the audience. The experiences are recorded and then (re)presented in text, which is a "fixation of language...into written speech" (transcribing experience) (Riessman, 1993, p. 11). Determining exactly what to transcribe from the participants' narratives is challenging. Should one transcribe every pause, "um," "like," or "mm hm" that is said? The answers are based on one's theoretical perspectives. The researcher-interpreter then critically evaluates the transcribed experiences and based on her theoretical framework and position(ality) formulates similarities and differences in experiences across the

sample and then determines what “happened by telling what the interview narratives signify; editing, and reshaping what was told” (Riessman, 1993, p. 13). The final level in representation is reading experience whereby participants or external readers encounter the written work and provide feedback on how the narratives are (re)presented. The narratives that are gathered and (re)presented have “the power to shape the deepest contours and textures of the readers’ emotional, moral, and intellectual life (Gregory, 1995, p. 35).

Testimonios [Life Narratives]

Context is an important aspect of sharing narratives because it involves the “historical moment of the telling; the race, class, and gender systems the [participants] manipulate to survive and within which their talk has to be interpreted” (Riessman, 1993, p. 21). It is important to study the intersections of racial, classed, and gendered identities and to acknowledge that Mexican American voices and identities are often subsumed in educational scholarship (Cuádriz, 2005). A form of narrative is *testimonio* [life narrative] which connects Mexican/Mexican American ethnic identities and gendered identities to narratives and urges the narrator and the reader to face the lived experiences of marginalized communities, confront the forces that constrain marginalized communities, and formulate a collective consciousness that can transform Mexican American educational experiences (Acevedo, et al., 2001; Beverley, 2005).

The concept of *testimonio* was (re)claimed by Latina writers, poets, and researchers who recognized this form of narrative as a “crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the

alchemy of erasure” (Acevedo et al., 2001, p. 2). In this sense, *testimonios* do not simply tell a story, but explain lived experience from the perspectives of Mexican/Mexican American communities to bring to light systems of oppression and power structures, construct past events, claim identities, expose contradictions, and build community (Acevedo et al., 2001; Beverley, 2005). At first glance, *testimonios* seem to essentialize (Spivak, 1988) Mexican/Mexican American communities. However, generalities about Mexican/Mexican American communities are not characterized rather; the actions taken (resistance or reproduction of master narratives) and collective consciousness formed by a group of Mexican American Ph.D.s who navigated through systems of oppression are (re)presented. *Testimonios* build solidarity within Mexican/Mexican American communities, resisting hierarchies of oppression by acknowledging multiple identities and backgrounds, as well as potential shortcomings in addressing differences within Mexican/Mexican American communities.

Upon (re)presenting the *testimonios* [life narratives] shared by participants, I also included participants’ emotions and interpretations. I analyzed the narratives as “verbal action...explaining, informing, defending, complaining, and confirming or challenging the status quo” or, in this case, the dominant ideology formulated in master narratives (Chase, 2005, p. 657). I contextualized participants’ narratives by including racial/ethnic, gender, and social class identities, as well as the educational settings and circumstances through which they successfully navigated in obtaining the Ph.D. In addition, I understood the power I had as an interviewer to guide the conversation and my role as a narrator, weaving together participants’ lived experiences into a larger story about

Mexican American educational attainment and taking the responsibility for (re)presenting these *testimonios* [life narratives] with care and respect.

Critical Race Methodology

This study is guided by a critical race methodological framework that “seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). The paradigms taught in educational systems are overwhelmingly Eurocentric and often presented as truth when truth itself is a social construction created by individuals, groups, and societies to explain particular circumstances within particular contexts (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a). The nature of qualitative research and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) involves exploration and creation of space for Latina/o voices and experiential knowledge through the construction of “storytelling, family history,...parables, *testimonios* [life narratives], *cuENTOS* [tales], *consejos* [advice],” and counter-narratives that are utilized in the process of exposing master narratives of race neutrality and meritocracy, as told through dominant cultural perspectives (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 319). Counter-storytelling can be autobiographical, biographical, or a composite of several individuals; for the purposes of this study, I am using biographical data in the form of counter-narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling serves four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions. It builds community among those at the margins of society by putting a human face to educational theory and practice; challenges the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform

established belief systems; nurtures community cultural wealth, memory, and resistance (Yosso, 2006); and teaches others that, by combining elements from both the story and the current reality one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 475).

As Latina/o critical race theorists assert, counter-storytelling incorporates participants' responses into a story that reflects perspectives separate from the master narrative that are often hegemonic and racist in its discourse. Counter-narratives help to expose power differentials within Mexican/Mexican American communities and are tools for cultural survival by sustaining community identities, resources, and cultures. I believe that master narratives and counter-narratives have a dialectic relationship in which the purpose of counter-narratives is to negate master narratives. If these narratives serve to cancel one another, are there any transformative properties through the sharing of counter-narratives? I believe that counter-narratives can help transform Mexican American lived experiences if they are crafted within the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999), which is a dynamic, Chicana feminist space that relocates the lived experiences of the Other (Said, 1994) from the margins to the center of educational discourse. Formulating counter-narratives through critical analysis helps participants (re)claim their past to make sense of their present and future experiences and “open new windows into the reality of [the marginalized] by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). They promote community perspectives in recounting historical events and describing individual actors with complexity, including race,

gender, social class, immigrant status, linguistic attributes, phenotype, and parental educational attainment.

Summary

The combination of narrative analysis and critical race methodologies, particularly counter-storytelling through counter-narratives, examines gender inequalities, racial oppression, and other practices of power to challenge and transform established belief systems pertaining to Mexican American educational attainment. The *testimonios* [life narratives] shared and analyzed are co-interpreted with the participants as re(presentations) of the realities experienced by the participants at particular moments in time and contextualized within the intersections of race, class, and gender. Gathered together these narratives have the power to transform traditional paradigms pertaining to Mexican American educational attainment and, through the use of counter-narratives, combine elements from both participants' experiences and the current reality to construct another reality for future generations of Mexican American Ph.D.s.

Positionality

I believe that this extraordinary experience was an opportunity to reflect on a lifetime of struggle and success as I and my family journeyed to obtain the doctorate, and to analyze my position(ality) within the study. Positionality “describes the relationship between the researcher and her participants and the researcher and her topic” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 31). From a feminist legal perspective, positionality is a “rejection of objective, neutral truth in favor of a truth situated and partial...emerging from particular...relationships...that define [the researcher's] perspective and provide the

location for meaning, identity, and political commitment” (Harris, 1993, p. 1727). I first discuss my relationship with the topic and my epistemological perspective. Then, I discuss my relationship with the participants.

My Relationship to the Topic

My decision to analyze the testimonios [life narratives] of Mexican American Ph.D.s was based on uncovering and addressing my own journey as a Mexican American/Chicana, middle class, first-generation college student, who is not fluent in Spanish, and the first in my extended families to obtain a doctorate. How did this journey happen for me and not for members of my extended families? As a military family, we moved around the country and the world very often and I was accustomed to being one of few students of color in classrooms and/or schools. I articulated my survival by exceeding teachers’ expectations of me. I was tracked into the highest academic tracks available at the schools and the honors and advanced placement tracks in high school; an opportunity I attribute to my parents’ advocacy. I always knew I was going to attend college and my middle class background afforded me an opportunity to attend a private, residential Hispanic-serving institution. Although my parents were worried about leaving me at a college 500 miles away from home, they were assured that the administrators and faculty at St. Mary’s University would “take care of your daughter” throughout the undergraduate years.

After college, I attended graduate school in Ohio and struggled with my identity as a Mexican American and one of few students of color in the higher education program because I was accustomed to robust Mexican American communities at St. Mary’s and in

San Antonio. Everyone around me identified as Mexican American when I was in college and I never felt marginalized based on my race or social class background. When I moved away from these communities, however, I realized that I was an Other, and that, due to my light complexion, was consistently confused with being Italian, Greek, or someone from the Mediterranean. I felt that my identity was stripped from me and dedicated a majority of my time in the master's program reclaiming my Mexican American identity by participating in the intellectual work. I enjoyed my graduate studies at the onset but as I read more about Mexican American and Latina/o educational attainment and college experiences, I felt distanced from the research. I did not seem to fit the prescribed Mexican American characteristics and images crafted by educational researchers. Not "seeing myself" in the research made me feel marginalized from Mexican/Mexican American communities and from the dominant culture that used my experience, along with fellow "high-achieving" Mexican Americans, to fuel the discourse on the American Dream, namely, that success is possible if you work hard enough. I acknowledge that, prior to my graduate studies, I also perpetuated this master narrative, especially because my family identified as immigrants and, to add another layer, were proud to serve in the military and defend American values, even if these values did not coincide with our cultural values.

Although I did not readily identify with the portrayals of first-generation Mexican American undergraduates who came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the intersections of race, gender, and immigrant status provided some similarities. I analyzed my experiences as a racial and racialized person and addressed my concerns in classroom

settings and informal discussions to the extent that I acquired a reputation within my cohort as the spokesperson for Latina/o communities and the one who “always talks about diversity.” I was frustrated that I was one of few students of color in my program and I never saw Latinas/os on the campus or in the community. I was disappointed that it had taken years to publicly identify myself as a Mexican American and a woman of color because my survival as a child actually meant trying to ignore my racial/ethnic difference in order to acclimate to predominately White environments.

After graduation, I returned to Texas and began working as a student activities advisor at a university in Dallas. Because of my previous experiences as the only person of color, I was not intimidated about being the only person of color on the staff. My actions, however, worried some of the higher level administrators who commented on the number of students of color who were taking leadership positions in the traditionally White organizations I advised. At no point did I hear that my White counterparts were chastised for not having enough students of color in the organizations they advised. I was beginning to disrupt the status quo, which made some White students and administrators uncomfortable. I learned that I needed to strategize by increasing the numbers of students of color involved while ensuring “accurate representation” of White students in the organizations I advised. I needed to find ways to resist tradition, create welcoming environments for students of color and White students, and stifle administrators’ concerns. I believe that the concerns raised against me were based on racism, but were cloaked in language that was not perceived as racist. As expressed by many of the participants in this study, I had not yet found the words to fully articulate my experiences

with covert racism and could not fit those experiences in the stories of racism I read in books or heard from my family. I decided that the means for obtaining the language to speak about and take action against racism in all its forms was to obtain a doctorate.

Based on my personal experiences and the limited studies that reflected my experience as a successful Mexican American college and graduate student, I chose to craft a qualitative study that would uncover and contextualize *testimonios* [life narratives] of Mexican Americans who earned their Ph.D.s and the ways in which they reproduced or resisted master narratives constructed by the dominant culture as well as from within Mexican/Mexican American communities. The participants' narratives that were collected and are (re)presented in this study reflect struggle and survival, privilege and merit, as well as overcoming obstacles and not finding any barriers along the way. These narratives have the power to reshape, reframe, and transform discourses of deficiency to those of empowerment and resiliency in K-12 education, postsecondary education, and graduate school in order to create more environments where Mexican American children, college students, and graduate students do not have to wonder what it must feel like to learn in supportive, empowering environments.

My Relationship with the Participants

My "insider" status in this study is based on my identity as a Mexican American/Chicana with college and graduate degrees. Some participants perceived me as an insider because we attended the same institutions of higher education at some point in our journeys, came from the same geographical region of the country, or had mutual friends. Although I can read, write, and understand Spanish, I cannot speak Spanish very

well, but that was not a deterrent to establishing rapport with participants who spoke Spanish or code-switched between English and Spanish throughout the interviews. I was an insider for participants who were first-generation college students, middle class participants, female participants, and participants whose parents were born in Mexico. I was an “outsider” in terms of my social class, immigrant status, gender, and discipline. As a former student affairs practitioner, I naturally wanted to counsel participants as they shared their educational life narratives. However, because the participants had extensive experience as researchers, many assisted me with staying focused on obtaining the data I needed and clarifying any lingering questions or misunderstandings as we interpreted the data together.

In qualitative research, blurred boundaries are known to frequently occur and this study was not an exception (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). With each hour-long interview, participants seemed more willing to share stories of oppression and privilege along their journeys to the doctorate. At the end of each interview, I invited participants to ask me questions, especially because they disclosed a considerable amount of personal information. Most of the participants wanted to know more about me and my doctoral experiences. They shared their interests in helping me with my research, which would inevitably add one more Mexican American Ph.D. to the small numbers currently represented, as well as their interests in contributing to a project that focused on perseverance and resistance in education and, hopefully, to making positive change for future generations of Mexican American Ph.D.s. They provided advice ranging from beginning the job market process to establishing social networks. Some sent me

publications and personal essays as well as data regarding Latina/o scientists and engineers because they thought the information could inform my work. Several of the participants offered to review paper presentations I submitted for conferences and requested copies of the completed dissertation for their personal and university libraries. One participant offered to serve as a matchmaker if I moved to central Texas. Overall, the relationships I established with the participants helped us to co-construct the findings for the study, to engage in the discourse on Mexican American educational attainment, and to establish networks with administrators, faculty, and researchers from across the country.

My personal philosophy on education is infused throughout the study and reflects my discomfort with essentializing Mexican/Mexican American communities in educational research. In particular, I want to confront traditional paradigms that characterize a monolithic Mexican American *community*, rather than the multiple identities and dimensions found within Mexican/Mexican American *communities*, including social class, gender, immigrant status, parental educational attainment, linguistic attributes, phenotype, sexualities, racial/ethnic identities, and geographic location, to name a few. Recognition of diversity within Mexican/Mexican American communities helps to transgress boundaries, borders, and the confines of stereotypes that subjugate Communities of Color in education. I also recognize that my role as researcher-interpreter is based on my personal history, social class, gender, immigrant status, and racial/ethnic identity that may (dis)connect with the participants' backgrounds and with my interpretations and (re)presentations of participants' narratives (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005). I re(present) participants' narratives within the context of education, with particular emphasis on the ways in which the participants (re)interpreted their experiences with racism, sexism, and classism. Rather than attempting to frame this study as "truth" that can transcend bias, I present multiple truths about Mexican American educational attainment that are (re)interpreted through my personal and theoretical lenses.

My approach is grounded in a constructivist perspective whereby knowledge is gathered from individuals' lived experiences and then interpreted within social contexts (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). I believe that a dominant culture exists and that those in positions of power in education and government, among other institutions, can construct the realities that center members of the dominant culture in all aspects of society while devaluing communities whose knowledge, language, and skills are not part of the elite. However, in formulating this argument, I characterize the dominant culture as a monolithic entity without necessarily disaggregating the multiple communities that are part of the dominant culture. Similar to the manner in which Mexican/Mexican American communities are described as a single entity in educational research, the dominant culture is rarely discussed in terms of multiple communities and identities such as social class, gender, immigrant status, sexuality, and parental educational attainment. I recognize that there are members of the dominant culture who actively resist hegemonic forces and are working from within to advocate for marginalized communities. However, as part of the dominant culture, these individuals enjoy privileges by virtue of their membership that marginalized communities may never enjoy. Future research could

problematize the concept of the dominant culture. For the purposes of articulating the assumptions and conceptual frameworks that guided the study, I utilize the term *dominant culture*, but discuss particular dominant culture communities (i.e., White male communities, White middle and upper class communities, and White heterosexual communities) in contrast with the Mexican American participant sample of the study in the Findings chapter. The challenge of complicating research by intersecting multiple forms of subordination is that Mexican Americans may be part of the dominant culture in terms of social class (middle and upper class), gender (male), and sexuality (heterosexual), while also identifying as part of a racially marginalized community. If members of marginalized communities do not take action to resist their membership in dominant culture communities, they become participants in their own colonization by reproducing power structures and master narratives found within the dominant culture and formulated within the marginalized communities themselves. The findings illustrate this challenge, particularly in the ways in which participants articulated resistance, which is further explicated in the Conclusion chapter.

This study is situated between the power of the dominant culture to perpetuate master narratives justifying low rates of Mexican American educational attainment and the colonization of Mexican/Mexican American communities that reproduce these master narratives. I want to address the ways in which Mexican/Mexican American individuals, families, and communities navigate through structures, barriers, and master narratives constructed by the dominant culture to deny equitable educational opportunities for all communities. I also want to uncover the ways in which Mexican/Mexican American

communities formulate master narratives from within, especially because I believe that Mexican/Mexican American communities are not merely victims, but active agents resisting and reproducing power structures. Therefore, I de-center the dominant culture and shift the focus to Mexican American Ph.D.s who make meaning within the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999), the location of tensions between the opposing ideologies of the dominant culture and Mexican/Mexican American communities, and reproduce master narratives or resist through counter-narratives.

Participants

This section focuses on the recruitment of participants, procedures for gathering informed consent, and general participant information.

Recruitment of Participants

Originally, I wanted to interview Ph.D.s of Mexican descent who graduated within the last five years from the top ten Research I institutions with the highest levels of Latina/o doctoral production (Hixson, 2006). These institutions were Arizona State University, the University of Arizona, the University of California-Berkeley, the University of California-Los Angeles, the University of Florida, the University of Miami, the University of Michigan, the University of New Mexico, the University of Southern California, and the University of Texas.

After receiving approval to conduct the study from the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board, I sent recruitment e-mails to several electronic mailing lists such as the National Latina/o Psychological Association, *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* [Women Active in Letters & Social Change] (MALCS), and the Society

for the Advancement of Chicanas/os and Native Americans in the Sciences (SACNAS), as well as to graduate coordinators at each institution who could distribute the e-mail to recent Mexican American doctoral recipients. I then utilized personal networks at institutions and organizations across the country. I attempted to contact alumni associations at each of these institutions, that could potentially distribute the message to their members, but only the University of Arizona and the University of Florida responded to my requests. The recruitment email was distributed widely and, in some instances, I was not certain how particular entities such as Los Alamos National Laboratories or Sandia Laboratories received the e-mail. I contacted several Mexican and Mexican American scientists, engineers, and postdoctoral fellows from these entities who were willing to participate or forward my information to their colleagues. When contacting potential participants using the snowball effect, I was not always certain that the individuals were of Mexican descent and did not want to assume their racial/ethnic backgrounds based on surname. Therefore, I encouraged them to forward the e-mail to individuals who were of Mexican descent and, in the event that they met the criteria, to consider participating in the study. I distributed approximately 200 recruitment e-mails to individuals, organizations, and institutions.

I realized the error of recruiting from only ten institutions and setting a limit of five years from obtaining the doctorate when I began to receive interest from fifteen potential participants who earned their Ph.D.s more than five years ago or who earned their Ph.D.s at institutions other than the ones I listed. I quickly adjusted the requirements, resubmitted the new consent forms to the University of Arizona

Institutional Review Board and began the next phase of coordinating the participant sample (see Appendix A). The one requirement I did not change was that participants should have attended college and graduate school at U.S. institutions of higher education, which allowed for individuals born in Mexico or, in one case, born in Canada to participate.

Informed Consent

After sending out the recruitment e-mails, 67 potential participants requested additional information. I sent them an overview of the interview format, including timeframe and subject areas. I also requested a confirmation indicating that they were of Mexican descent, as well information about their doctoral disciplines, doctoral-granting institutions, and fax numbers or mailing addresses for the consent forms. I filed all correspondence in order to keep record of who was contacted, if consent materials including a demographic information sheet, were sent, and if potential participants had returned the materials. Thirty-eight potential participants returned confirmation messages and 33 completed consent forms.

Consent materials included the term *Chicana/o* to describe participants of Mexican descent and indicated that my study focused on the intersections of race, social class, and gender. As noted in my positionality, I identify as Mexican American/Chicana. My Chicana identity did not emerge until I entered my doctoral program and felt that the term *Mexican American* did not fully encompass my interests in action research and social justice work. In addition, a majority of research in Latina/o critical race theory employs the term *Chicana/o* and I wanted to mirror my language with

the current research. However, I did not realize that the terminology I used for the consent form would result in at least one participant leaving the study, not to mention potential participants who may have chosen not to contact me because I used *Chicana/o* terminology. The terms *Chicana* and *Chicano* hold special significance within Mexican American communities. Evolving from activism in the 1960s and 1970s that centered on the needs of Mexican migrant farm workers and first-generation Mexican Americans from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, *Chicana* and *Chicano* are considered political and nationalist in nature (Kaplan, Alarcón, & Moallem, 1999). The terms are racial/ethnic identifiers that individuals assign themselves and not necessarily terms embraced by all Mexican American communities, which can affect an individual's participation in a study focused on Mexican American issues (Kaplan, Alarcón, & Moallem, 1999). I contacted the participant who chose to leave the study after she sent me an e-mail indicating that she was offended by the terminology. I asked her to reconsider because her narrative could provide a different perspective on Mexican American educational attainment, but she chose not to participate. By the time she contacted me I had received a majority of the signed consent forms and decided not to change the form. Rather, I included a question on the interview protocol pertaining to participants' rationale for the racial/ethnic identities they included in the demographic information form; namely, Hispanic, Chicana, Chicano, Mexican American, Mexican, and combinations of terms such as Mexican American/Chicana. Clarifying which term was most appropriate within the context of my writing did not end with the loss of a participant. I decided to change the terms *Chicana* and *Chicano* in the title of the study

to “Ph.D.s of Mexican Descent” and then changed the title again to include the phrase “Mexican American,” which seemed less controversial and less cumbersome in the title. Terminology used in the text of the study were changed multiple times as I struggled to utilize different racial/ethnic identifiers based on the language used in studies I cited, in participants’ *testimonios* [life narratives], and in reference to participants’ communities. How I incorporated participants’ terminology in the study is discussed in the next section.

Participants

After consent forms were collected and interviews were scheduled, the participant sample consisted of 33 Ph.D.s of Mexican descent; 25 females and 8 males. Participants completed a demographic information sheet that included open-ended questions about racial/ethnic identity(ies), gender, current occupation, pseudonym, and contact information. A majority of participants selected their pseudonyms or asked me to select one for them. If a pseudonym was the actual name of one of the participants in the sample, I changed the name. Three of the participants identified as bi-racial, namely Mexican and White. I ascertained participants’ social class backgrounds during the interviews, as well as additional background information regarding their immigrant status and parental educational attainment. The participants were raised in Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, and Texas; two of whom could trace their family lineage at least seven generations in New Mexico. Three participants were born in Mexico and one was born in Canada. The participants identified as poor/low-income (4 participants), working class (14 participants), and middle class (13 participants). One participant’s social class identity was unknown because she interviewed once and never

completed her set of interviews. Despite e-mail messages and phone calls, I was not able to complete our interviews.

Twelve participants had at least one parent who received a minimum of a two-year postsecondary degree; two identified as 3rd-generation college students. All but one participant, who earned his doctorate in the late 1970s, earned their doctorates within the past 15 years from the following institutions: Arizona State University (6 participants), California State University-Sacramento (1 participant), Colorado State University (1 participant), Ohio University (1 participant), Stanford University (1 participant), the University of Arizona (2 participants), the University of California-Berkeley (2 participants), the University of California-Los Angeles (2 participants), the University of Iowa (1 participant), the University of Michigan (3 participants), the University of New Mexico (2 participants), the University of Southern California (2 participants), the University of South Florida (1 participant), the University of Texas-Austin (7 participants), and the University of Texas-San Antonio (1 participant). In addition, I indicated participants' doctoral disciplines based on the National Research Council's (2006) taxonomy of doctoral fields. The disciplines represented in the study were Arts and Humanities (3 participants); Education (9 participants); Life Sciences (1 participant); Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering (5 participants); and Social and Behavioral Sciences (15 participants). Participants held a range of occupations, although faculty positions were the most represented in the sample (22 participants), followed by researchers/analysts (6 participants), student affairs administrators (2 participants), secondary school administrators (2 participants), and a therapist.

As discussed in the section regarding my relationships with the participants, I felt an obligation to (re)present the participants' narratives in a responsible manner. Although these narratives are incredibly captivating and readers of this study will want to know more about the individual participants, I am refraining from developing participant composites, especially because the stories shared are deeply personal, discussing racist, sexist, and classist issues the participants confronted or may have reproduced in their educational journeys and continue to confront in their daily experiences. In addition, many of these participants are the only Mexican Americans or faculty of color in their departments, laboratories, and schools and may be easily recognizable depending on their discipline and social identities. In an effort to protect their anonymity, I did not include the names of the institutions when discussing participants' narratives and only describe the institution type and general geographic location.

Methodological Procedures

This section discusses how I developed the interview protocol, gathered and transcribed the data from the interviews, and coded the interviews.

Interview Protocol

Finding the right questions to ask when conducting a qualitative study is very important because how questions are constructed is based on the researcher's epistemological and theoretical perspectives (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) and the participants' interpretations of the types of narratives shared based on the questions asked (Riessman, 1993). This section retraces my steps in developing the interview protocol through a pilot study and revisions of the interview questions.

Pilot Study

At the onset of the proposal for study, I developed an interview protocol for current Latina/o doctoral students at various stages of their doctoral programs in an effort to understand issues of retention and completion in graduate school. I then tested the interview protocol with two Mexican American doctoral students at the University of Arizona who were from Education and the Physical Sciences. I utilized the counter-storytelling method by presenting a conversation between “Tómas” and “Sol,” two doctoral students who attended a brown-bag discussion at the university’s Latina/o cultural center.

The preliminary findings suggested that both Tómas and Sol, as first-generation and second-generation college students, respectively, shared stories of uncertainty and concern about applying and matriculating into college and graduate school. Discussions of meritocracy and affirmative action indicated that Tómas and Sol received messages that Mexican Americans who advanced to graduate study were only accepted as affirmative action cases. The doctoral students cited seasoned administrators and professors who were people of color and invested in their graduate education by helping to fund their tuition, provide opportunities to network with researchers from across the country, and publish.

Sol and Tómas differed in terms of their graduate program experiences. Sol was frustrated with the lack of attention on the educational experiences of students of color in her program, while Tómas, as the only Mexican American in his department, did not indicate that he felt marginalized. In his interview, he quoted his mentor, who was

Latino, as saying, “*No te cosas en la misma sopa* [Don’t cook yourself in the same soup],” which meant that Tomás should not rely on meeting other Mexican Americans in the same field; he needed to find support from other racial and ethnic groups.

The findings suggested that structures within doctoral programs promoted individualism, competitiveness and socializing Mexican American doctoral students to conduct research and publish (some of the unwritten rules in the doctoral process). Developing relationships and establishing networks within the Mexican/Mexican American communities, according to Sol’s and Tomás’s perceptions, were viewed as unimportant or undervalued. They felt pressured to set aside their cultural values in order to adopt the departments’ values and receive assistance from their faculty in obtaining the doctorate. Rather than considering how institutional and departmental structures enforced cultural sacrifice for students of color, the focus was on the student, who was the only person held responsible for his or her doctoral program completion.

Although an interview protocol was in place, the discussion often diverged into other topics that were not on the list of questions. I was more interested in the experiences of the doctoral students prior to their doctoral study, their social networks, racial/ethnic identity development and how they negotiated multiple structures in their educational formation. I redesigned the interview protocol to incorporate Mexican American educational pathways (secondary, college, and graduate school), with particular attention to the topics listed above, rather than solely focusing on one aspect of their educational experiences. I also decided to interview individuals who had completed

their doctoral studies, as their experiences could help reframe the deficit models used to describe Mexican American educational attainment from a vantage point of success.

I then presented the interview protocol at a summer writing institute. Based on the feedback I received and my reflections on the research, I revised the interview protocol with fewer questions that were considerably more open to co-constructing the interviews with potential participants. With the help of four additional Mexican American colleagues, I tested the revised interview protocol and added supporting questions based on preliminary responses. The interview protocol consisted of questions pertaining to participants' family histories; how their race, social class, and gender affected their educational aspirations; potential obstacles to accessing and completing college and graduate school; individuals, groups, and/or programs that helped them apply to college and graduate school; navigation strategies in educational systems; navigation among family, community, and academe; rationale for racial/ethnic identity label(s); and advice for future generations of Mexican American Ph.D.s. The final version of the interview protocol is in Appendix B.

Interviews and Interview Transcriptions

After receiving the signed consent forms, I scheduled two interviews with each participant during the course of the spring 2007 semester and sent reminders about the interviews at least a week prior to the scheduled times. After each interview, I transcribed as much of the conversation as possible and sent the transcription drafts to the participants for review before the next appointment, as a way to maintain trustworthiness with the participants and the data collected. During the subsequent interview, I asked

participants if the transcription drafts prompted any additional stories or thoughts they wanted to share. If we did not complete the interview protocol within the scheduled interviews, I organized an additional interview. The interviews consisted of open-ended, semi-structured questions ranging from the development of educational aspirations in K-12 education to the processes involved in applying and matriculating into college and graduate school.

A majority of the interviews were conducted via telephone and I used a device that connected the digital recorder to a land line in order to record the interviews/ conversations. Most interviews lasted at least one hour per participant and a total of 101 hours of interviews were collected. Although I had a relatively large sample size for a qualitative study, I was consistent in developing “thick description” by allocating several hours to each participant until all questions were answered. I transcribed 90 percent of the interviews and sent the remaining interviews to an external transcription service. I reviewed the interviews transcribed by the external service to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. Twenty-three participants spoke English and Spanish and often “code-switched between the two languages, while 30 participants with varying levels of Spanish proficiency occasionally used Spanish descriptors. I translated their comments, but acknowledge that my translation may not fully articulate participants’ sentiments expressed in Spanish. As stated earlier, I can read, write, and understand Spanish, but have limited proficiency speaking Spanish. I maintain that I accurately translated Spanish words because I sent the transcriptions that included the English and Spanish

translations to participants at least once during the transcription process (see Delgado-Gaitan, 1994 for a discussion about translating family *consejos* [advice]).

A critical tool in narrative analysis is the use of member checks or external readers who can provide feedback on the (re)presentations and (re)interpretations of participants *testimonios* [life narratives] (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). When asked to provide feedback on the transcription drafts, several participants added new narratives, requested edits to their responses in order to protect themselves when referencing racism, sexism, or classism in their interactions with colleagues and faculty, and several returned the actual transcriptions with corrections using “track changes” in their Microsoft Word files. I utilized the finalized narratives when interpreting the findings. My experience with participants’ concerns about (re)presentation will be discussed in future research.

Coding

I approached the data through a narrative analysis perspective, which meant that I first reviewed the participants’ lived experiences by turning to the question of educational attainment, adding the layers of race, social class, and gender as I continued to turn over the question of how the participants journeyed through their educational experiences and how I would interpret their narratives (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). A cornerstone of narrative inquiry is the shifting in the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The “interviewees become the narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own,” which sometimes conflicted with answering the questions I asked (Chase, 2005, p. 660). Therefore, disclosing one’s understandings, beliefs, biases...and theories”

are helpful in addressing how the researcher (re)presents the findings (van Manen, 1990, p. 47).

I was interested in uncovering how the participants articulated their narratives about racism, sexism, and classism (narrative analysis) and how these narratives reproduced or resisted master narratives developed by the dominant culture and within Mexican/Mexican American communities (critical race theory). As I transcribed the interviews, I first began with a preliminary list of codes based on participants' discussions of race, social class, and gender, as well as their responses to the interview protocol. It is important to note that I coded the data and developed the themes without the use of qualitative software. The preliminary codes were social class, racism, gender, perceptions of struggle/obstacles, social networks, external perceptions, posturing/performance, perceptions of self, resistance, parents (parental education, parental activism), siblings/extended family, catalysts, regional/geographic affiliation, college/graduate school aspirations, secondary school/college/graduate school experiences (academic tracking, public/private school, co-curricular involvement, financial aid, research opportunities, advisor relationships), peer groups, language, phenotype, and terminology. After I completed the transcriptions, I listed the preliminary codes in a separate document and included a brief summary of participants' narratives, including page numbers from the transcriptions as they applied to each code. I continued to sift through the transcriptions, looking for narratives that pertained to race, social class, and gender. With the quality and richness of the data, I needed to focus on the codes that addressed my research questions and group the codes into themes. Thematic analysis

occurs while rereading and rethinking the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The resulting themes were parents/family; obstacles; social networks; gender/sexism; navigation through systems; social class/classism; balancing family, community, and research; race/racism; and advice for future generations. Subthemes focused on how race/racism, gender/sexism, and social class/classism affected participants' experiences and relationships within each of the larger themes as well as how race, social class, and gender intersected within each theme. Although themes about college and graduate school access, retention, and completion and the experiences of Mexican American scientists also emerged, they were not consistent with the research questions pertaining to master narratives and counter-narratives and I decided to set those themes aside, along with earlier codes, for future research. I maintained a journal of my interpretations from the interviews in an effort to (re)consider the themes that were emerging and the multiple interpretations that could explain the participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] as they journeyed to obtain the Ph.D.

Analysis of the intersections of race, social class, and gender helped me to understand the “relationships of inequality” within the sample of Mexican American Ph.D.s, respecting the demand for complexity inherent in the study of intersectionality (McCall, 2005). Complexity is developed by analyzing how each identity relates to another, which, at first glance, appears as a reductive process. Turning again to the discussion of essentialism (Spivak, 1988), intersectionality becomes a “synthetic and holistic process that brings the various pieces of the analysis together (McCall, 2005, p. 1787). The challenge of this process is contextualizing Mexican Americans' lived

experiences with racism, sexism, and classism within larger social structures that privilege some groups while subordinating others, particularly if the participants do not explicitly articulate those power differentials within their *testimonios* [life narratives] (Cuádras & Uttal, 1999). As the narrator of the findings, it was my responsibility to “pose inductive questions of the interview data and the influence of structural forces [i.e., master narratives]” I was trying to expose (Cuádras & Uttal, 1999, p. 159). I read through the narratives within each theme. How did the participants’ frame their stories? Why did they share their stories in a particular way? How do I interpret the silence within their narratives, the underlying dimensions of racial identity(ies), gender and social class? For example, when I asked how their parents and families shaped their educational aspirations as children, the typical response began with the statement, “My parents always valued education.” It appeared that the participants were responding to stereotypes about Mexican/Mexican American communities, a master narrative that described Mexican/Mexican American families as *not* valuing education, which is obviously inculcated in a majority of educational research.

The master narratives emerged from sorting through the *testimonios* [life narratives] and analyzing how participants told their stories and why they told them in a particular way. Some master narratives were relatively easy to find because they were well documented in research, such as Mexican Americans do not value education, everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and should not be dependent on programs like affirmative action, and we should strive to be a colorblind society. Others seemed deeply embedded “knowledge claims” that had become “universalized” (Montecino,

1995) to the extent that they were not yet challenged and needed further exploration, such as performance of masculinity by both men and women, rather than the traditional view of *machismo* expressed solely by men, and the notion of hard work as a determinant of success.

Because I was focused on uncovering master narratives formulated by the dominant culture, I did not anticipate two master narratives that emerged from within Mexican/Mexican American communities. Although these master narratives were not necessarily articulated in the literature, the participants shared stories about struggle and, for some, the guilt associated with not having to struggle, as well as the pressures from within their communities to research Mexican/Mexican American issues. The final version of the findings were grouped together as master narratives constructed by the dominant culture and reproduced by the participants; master narratives constructed by Mexican/Mexican American communities and reproduced by the participants; and counter-narratives that resisted master narratives.

Limitations

When I first began crafting my study, my goal was to understand the educational experiences of Mexican Americans who obtained their doctorates at the top ten research universities with the largest production rates for Latina/o doctorates. I did not anticipate at the time the Mexican American Ph.D.s who wanted to share their stories and did not fit into the parameters I originally devised. As an eager, young researcher, I created rules and boundaries that held firm to my original research design and did not contemplate the potential of individuals who were seeking a platform to share their *testimonios* [life

narratives]. There were a few instances where I rejected participants because they graduated from institutions other than the top ten I listed or were in a discipline I believed was overrepresented in the participant sample. After discussing my decisions with my advisors, I realized my mistake and quickly made adjustments. However, the time between the initial recruitment e-mail and the revised e-mail may have caused some potential participants to refrain from interviewing. In addition, the use of Chicana/o terminology may have detracted potential participants who were either offended by the terms or did not identify as Chicana/o.

The final limitations are based on the purpose of the study. Although I was not specifically addressing sexuality, many of the participants discussed their involvement in heterosexual romantic relationships. One participant identified as a lesbian, but I did not address her sexuality along her educational pathway because I did not directly address the sexuality of any of the participants involved in heterosexual romantic relationships. Perhaps, by adding the intersection of sexuality in the study, I could have added greater complexity to the analysis of the findings, addressing sexuality as a topic not often discussed in educational research pertaining to Mexican/Mexican American communities. Finally, regardless of the wealth of data I gathered and co-constructed with the participants, this study illuminated the experiences of a small group of successful Mexican American Ph.D.s who were able to navigate through educational systems to obtain the doctorate. Although their stories can inspire future Mexican American Ph.D.s, this study does not provide a step-by-step process for that successful navigation. Perhaps

the readers of this study will provide their own (re)interpretations and assist in constructing multiple tools for accessing and completing higher education.

Summary

Based on my educational experiences and constructionist perspective, I developed a qualitative study focused on the *testimonios* [life narratives] of 33 Mexican American Ph.D.s who successfully navigated through educational systems in the United States, with particular attention to how participants framed their experiences by reproducing or resisting master narratives constructed by the dominant culture and Mexican/Mexican American communities. I conducted multiple open-ended, semi-structured interviews via telephone focused on participants' family histories, experiences in secondary and postsecondary education, and the structures or mechanisms they employed to successfully navigate to complete the doctorate, accounting for the intersections of race, social class, and gender. I analyzed the narratives using a combination of narrative analysis and critical race methodology, namely counter-storytelling, which helped me (re)present the findings based on master narratives that perpetuate deficit models and counter-narratives that transform the deficit discourse on Mexican American educational attainment.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Participants' educational pathways were shaped by their family histories, childhood experiences, social class backgrounds, and gender. I begin this chapter with participants' relationships with their parents, siblings, and extended families in relation to the participants' educational aspirations (Mexican/Mexican American Familial Involvement). The next section, Social Constructions of Gender and Education, is dedicated to Mexican/Mexican American constructions of gender attributed to cultural traditions and how all participants navigated through traditional Mexican/Mexican American gender roles and forms of masculinity. The next section focuses on the concept of "The Struggle" crafted by Mexican/Mexican American communities to explain the challenges Mexican Americans face in accessing and completing secondary and postsecondary education. Perceptions of "the struggle" are juxtaposed to the Horatio Alger Myth of individual determination as the supposed key to overcoming educational barriers in the next section. The Choosing Not to See Oppression section uncovers participants' articulations of survival in educational systems through participants' (sub)conscious decisions to (not) recognize racism, classism, or sexism in their interactions with faculty, students, and communities. Participants often felt that they had to defend their presence in college and graduate school, particularly while facing anti-affirmative action legislation or distancing themselves from the affirmative action rhetoric, which is discussed in the next section (Affirmative Action). Finally, I uncover tensions regarding the perceived obligations to research issues pertaining to Mexican/Mexican American communities, especially because of the small numbers of

Mexican American Ph.D.s in academe and the pull from Mexican/Mexican American communities to research community issues.

Throughout this chapter, I present information regarding participants' racial/ethnic identities and socioeconomic backgrounds, as I introduce their narratives or use quotations from their narratives. In some cases, participants chose multiple terms for their racial/ethnic identities; in others, participants chose to include hyphens. Additional information such as parental education, immigrant status, and doctoral disciplines are included if this information is directly connected to the stories participants shared. Finally, many of the participants were the only Mexican Americans in their academic programs in college and graduate school and may be the only people of color in their departments and work sites. In order to protect their anonymity, I refrain from disclosing the names of the institution(s) they attended and the actual names of family members, advisors, friends, and colleagues mentioned in their narratives.

Mexican/Mexican American Familial Involvement in Education

Participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] reflected the ways in which families and kinship networks influenced their educational aspirations, indicating that a majority of Mexican/Mexican American parents, siblings, and extended family members resisted the master narrative that Mexican/Mexican American families do not value education. Counter-narratives expressed resistance against assimilation and racism within educational systems that were traced to participants' formative years and even further back in generations past. A majority of the participants actively sought to resist these forces using their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006), which is comprised of

multiple forms of capital. There were, however, four participants' stories that supported the master narrative. The stories that reproduced the master narrative and the counter-narratives found in the participants' interviews illustrated the complex ways in which Mexican/Mexican American families contributed to their children's educational aspirations in terms of social class, immigrant status, linguistic attributes, and parental educational attainment.

Reproducing the Master Narrative

[My uncle asked] “[W]hy is Dr. O even going to school?” I mean, it was a foreign concept and mind you, people on my mom's side, many of them dropped out [of high school]. So my mom said, “He's going because he wants to better himself.” And my *tio's* [uncle's] response...was, “Why do you want him smarter than you? Once he thinks that he's smarter than you, he's going to treat you differently. In fact, he's going to have less respect for you.” And my mom says, “I beg to differ. He's going to respect us more....” (Dr. O⁷, Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student).

The master narrative, “Mexican/Mexican American families do not value education” was demonstrated in participants' stories of parents/families that projected low or conflicting educational expectations upon their children and were potential obstacles to participants' educational aspirations. As simplistic as the master narrative seems, valuing education was indeed evident throughout all the narratives. I contend that educational attainment was valued; however, the tension between values within the

⁷ A majority of the participants selected pseudonyms for the study. If the pseudonyms chosen conflicted with any of the participants' real names, I changed the pseudonyms.

family unit and the realities of negotiating through society constructed by the dominant culture led several family members to reproduce the master narrative. I present two stories as examples of reproducing the master narrative through assimilation and social reproduction.

You're On Your Own

Cuahtemoc (Chicano, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) was born in Mexico and moved with his parents and five siblings to California. As the sole financial supporter, his father worked constantly and his mother was responsible for the children's upbringing and assisted in the schools. His parents were challenged with working multiple jobs and handling the daily activities of the children and Cuahtemoc concluded that their decision to change the manner in which they raised their children was a reflection of these pressures:

[A]t some point [my parents] realized the whole concept of biculturalism and that they were in a new environment...and you have...a lot less control over your kids, especially if you have six of them...so...I grew up in the *barrio* where there was absolutely no parental supervision....[T]elling you when to eat dinner, when to come home, when to go to sleep, none of that.... So [I] learned, "Holy shit...I need to study 'cause no one's gonna tell me to study. If I don't do it, I fail....[N]obody cares what I do."

Cuahtemoc believed that transitioning to a new country and a new culture, along with the strains of trying to support the family, led his parents to set aside their cultural traditions and espouse what they perceived as American cultural values, which were individualistic

in nature. He perceived that his parents' newly adopted sense of individualism led to a laissez-faire approach to his upbringing and, as he concluded, a lack of investment in his educational aspirations. He felt that he was on his own to construct his educational success and keep track of his homework and school responsibilities without parental assistance. Despite his efforts to downplay the critique of his parents, Cuahtemoc presented a story that reproduced the master narrative in which his parents left him to create his own educational opportunities.

As shared in several poor and working class participants' narratives, parents often relied on external sources to help their children succeed in school. They trusted teachers and counselors to help their children navigate through the system because the cultural wealth that was gathered in families was not necessarily valued at the schools. In this sense, it is understandable that Cuahtemoc and participants like him felt abandoned in their educational pursuits; however, from the parents' perspectives, it may have been the best choice to ensure that their children had greater access to education.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the U.S. capitalist society relies on social reproduction to maintain social class hierarchies and constrain the roles of workers, particularly those in subservient positions. Although attending college was perceived as a way to advance in social class hierarchies, Araceli's (Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) story illustrated that the pull of maintaining class status could be stronger than the goal of higher education.

We're Service People, Araceli

Growing up in a Texas town with few Mexican families, Araceli relied on her family for support. While her father cleaned tables at a local cafeteria, Araceli's mother, who spent most of her childhood working in agricultural fields, found work for the seven children, cleaning cotton fields on a local farm. Araceli and her siblings worked in the fields for "four years up until high school." When Araceli was a sophomore, her father was promoted through the ranks to restaurant manager in a nearby city and gave her a job as a waitress. Working in a larger city gave her an opportunity to escape the racism she experienced in high school. She witnessed teachers favoring the White ranchers' children, who were encouraged to apply for scholarships and meet with college admissions counselors while the Mexican children were ignored. In her senior year, Araceli earned a scholarship based on a beauty contest held by the local Rotary Club and began discussing the possibility of attending college:

[I]t was about the summer time when my parents were talking about me going to college and I think they were hesitant about it. Even though I had, by my senior year, gathered \$12,000 to go somewhere...I remember my dad saying, "What are you gonna do with a college degree? What are you gonna study?" because they were working-class people. It's like, "Well, what are you gonna do, practically?" because...my dad had a fifth grade education; my mom had a sixth grade education....

Moving outside the confines of service work was beyond her parents' hopes and seemed impractical. Obtaining an education was only a means for "employment in the service industry," but anything beyond that was deemed only appropriate for the wealthy, "I

think [my dad] highlighted the fact that, ‘We’re the working-class of America and education is for the *ricos* [rich people] and...we’re not rich.’” Araceli’s narrative illustrated the difficult challenges some Mexican American children face as they apply for college. Araceli felt a sense of shame and guilt for admitting that she did not want to remain a cafeteria worker:

[W]hen I laid it out for them, I said, “Well, I graduated from high school. What am I gonna do?” And I didn’t want to degrade what my dad was doing. I didn’t want to say, “What? Work at the cafeteria the rest of my life?” I just told them, “Am I gonna be a waitress for the rest of my life? I wanna go to college and get an education.”

Araceli’s parents, particularly her father, indicated that college was not the place for the working-class and that earning a college degree was a futile exercise if it did not provide skills that helped her serve others. His resistance and limited perceptions of advancement through education encouraged the reproduction of social class positions. Her parents’ fears may have also been connected to gender, although she did not allude to traditional Mexican gender roles that would have kept her close to home as a means of maintaining a daughter’s virtues. Araceli was able to leverage her educational goals by obtaining the scholarship, enrolling at a nearby junior college, and subsequently transferring to a four-year institution.

Themes in Reproducing the Master Narrative

Stories that reproduced the master narrative were prevalent in the *testimonios* [life narratives] of participants from poor or working class backgrounds who identified as

first-generation college students. Participants often portrayed their parents as generally disengaged from their children's education. A majority of the stories supporting the master narrative involved reproducing social class positions. For some families, social reproduction might have been a better alternative than the physical, emotional, and perhaps intellectual distances that they feared could result from a college or graduate degree. Perhaps parents who were perceived as unsupportive were protecting their children from potential failure in educational systems, especially those who had recently moved to the United States. Participants who interpreted their parents as not valuing education were given the freedom to make decisions about their education. From the participants' perspectives, parents did not provide tangible tools for navigating educational structures, which illustrated the power of educational systems to press upon children a negative, deficit discourse about Mexican/Mexican American communities. I believe that these portrayals, in many respects, fed the deficit discourse about parents as well, failing to consider the potential struggles to maintain households with limited incomes and the potential cultural wealth inherent in Mexican/Mexican American families and communities.

Counter-Narratives

[W]e are the products of our parents. We are the manifestations of all of our parents' hopes and dreams....[W]e carry whatever it is that we carry in our strength or in our convictions or in our hearts or the good things that we do. It's because of them. It's always because of our parents. That's the way I see it. I

belong to them and whatever I become was just because of them (Christine, Mexican American/Chicana, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student).

The following counter-narratives, like the quotation above, described aspects of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) as conduits for cultural capital and dispelled the master narrative that Mexican/Mexican American families do not value education. Building resistance, familial, and aspirational capital were at the forefront of the counter-narratives shared and fell along two main themes: The Value of Education Through Work and The Value of Education Through Familial Experience. Despite the racism witnessed and experienced by participants and their families, I believe they maintained their community cultural wealth in the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999), a Chicana feminist location between the dominant culture and marginalized communities where Mexican Americans resolve the tensions between oppression and marginalization and empower their communities.

Carlos and the Sewing Machine

Throughout his childhood, Carlos's (Mexican, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) family maintained a small clothing factory. He remembered his home filled with garments and *máquinas de cocer* [sewing machines]. He and his siblings were responsible for trimming the thread from the garments on a daily basis, "[O]ur responsibility, as kids...was routine... 'Come home, do your homework and then, start trimming some of these things.'" Carlos, along with some of the other participants interviewed, did not always enjoy being part of the family business, "I knew when there

was going to be a lot of work that day when I saw that big bag of stuff, ‘Oh my goodness! That’s mine! That’s my bag right there!’”

From a deficit perspective, putting children to work in the family business deters from their studies. However, as Carlos mentioned above, completing homework was always the first priority. In addition, he understood the invaluable role he played in contributing to the family income:

What I understood was that I was trying to sell stuff that my parents made, but, as you grow older, you start looking at some of these things and you realize, “[T]hey really counted on that five bucks,”...or maybe on a Sunday I sold \$25 worth of things, that probably bought the milk and bread and some of the necessities, right? I think me and my older brother...were at the age where...we could start appreciating some of that stuff because we saw how hard my parents were working.

Through his parents’ example, Carlos understood the value of hard work as well as the importance of education, especially evidenced in his parents’ actions. Although there was plenty of work to do, Carlos knew that he and his siblings were never “pushed towards becoming more involved in the family business...at the expense of our...schooling.” Because Carlos’s parents had limited English language proficiency and limited educational attainment, they could not review his homework, but they fostered a sense of responsibility in Carlos to study. He remembered receiving stern messages from his father when he did not want to complete his homework:

[My dad] would say, “Look, if you don’t wanna do your homework, if you don’t wanna do good in school, that’s fine. Let me know and I’ll buy another *máquina de cocer* [sewing machine]...You could help your mom sew.” I think the effect he was after was for us to say, “Oh, hell no,” because, [I thought,] “I hate trimming, I don’t wanna be sewing,” and so, from a young age...school was important.

Understanding that the consequences of not doing well in school meant going into the family business, Carlos was motivated to succeed in academics. In this sense, the shame of sewing clothes as a career, particularly because it seemed to be equated with women’s work and the hard, isolated labor it entailed kept Carlos focused on completing his homework and aspiring for a different life. Although Carlos did not discuss the level of parental involvement at the school, I interpret his narrative as representative of aspirational capital, as his parents used their work as a tool to leverage their children’s educational aspirations.

Although parents were often cited more than other family members in supporting participants’ educational goals, several of the participants described older siblings as influential in developing their educational aspirations. Older siblings often served as intermediaries for their parents by explaining the importance of attending college, as well as role models and advisers to younger siblings pertaining to academic issues such as choosing a major and registering for courses. A majority of participants who identified as the oldest in their families felt responsible for helping their siblings and cousins transition to college and aspire for graduate study. Their roles in helping their family

members contributed to familial capital by connecting their education to their sense of belonging and cultural integrity.

There Are No Borders For You

Monique's (Chicana, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) family lived in the same town on the West Coast "since before desegregation." Stories passed down through the generations detailed the extended family's experiences with racism and segregation within the town. Older family members utilized that history to share advice and talk about possibilities with younger generations at family gatherings:

[A]t family parties, my uncles would say, "[Y]ou were born [on the West Coast] and your family's from Mexico. There are no borders for you here. You should be able to go wherever you want. You should be able to cross wherever you want"...and so [my university] was cited as another place where there were no borders.

Monique's generation of cousins were raised with a form of resistance capital transmitted through the men in the family that was based on the belief that the cousins were entitled to cross physical and metaphorical boundaries in their journeys to college.⁸ The messages transmitted through the stories were then solidified in seventh grade when Monique's father expressed his expectations:

[My dad] sat me down formally and said, "I expect you to go to college and we expect you to help all your cousins go." [M]y dad's, I guess, hierarchical? [M]y oldest uncle is always the one who's in charge of things and since I'm the oldest

⁸ Monique's female family members' perspectives on education are discussed further in the Social Constructions of Gender and Education section in this chapter.

cousin I have the responsibility [to attend college] and then the next oldest cousin who's male, has other responsibilities....

The male cousin's educational attainment is unknown and one is quick to assume that his and Monique's responsibilities fell along specific gender roles within the family, namely, that the woman's role was to serve as educator for her family, while the man's role was to provide for the family through work. This assumption, however, is uncertain. What is known is that Monique took this role very seriously and relied on this family obligation when the pressures of attending a private Research I university were overwhelming. The power of familial capital was vital to her educational survival and coaxed her younger sibling and cousins to consider college.

The perspectives of extended kin were further explained in Dr. O's (Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) counter-narrative:

I had *primos* [cousins] that were roughly my age...who thought that Dr. O walked on water. As a matter of fact, one of my *primos*...went for his master's because he said I inspired him to go on. And oh, that was just amazing to hear. And after he heard that I was pursuing a Ph.D. program, he's even talking about that now.

[H]e says, "Dr. O, when I saw that you did it and we grew up together...I thought, 'Man...if Dr. O can do it, I can do it.'"

Juxtaposed to the conversation between Dr. O's uncle and mother at the beginning of the discussion on counter-narratives, this quote demonstrates the philosophical transitions that occurred in Dr. O's family. Although earlier generations feared how educational attainment would influence their children (i.e., lack of respect), by paving the way for his

cousins, Dr. O demonstrated that educational attainment was possible and could keep him connected to his family. His narrative and the quotation that began this section illustrated the complexity within individuals and family structures to simultaneously reproduce master narratives and resist through counter-narratives.

Themes in Counter-Narratives

Counter-narratives were presented in 4 of the *testimonios* [life narratives] of 14 participants who identified as first-generation college students and were from low-income, working class backgrounds. Participants' parents were often subjected to labor-intensive and, as a few noted, humiliating jobs that yielded little pay and limited respect from the White middle class communities that hired them. As children, the participants understood the importance of education because their parents articulated the sacrifices that they made by ensuring their children attended school and placed homework above work.

Although their parents often told participants that education was important, it was rarely forced. Parents challenged their children to make their own decisions about obtaining an education, which supports earlier research on Latina/o parental facilitation of autonomy (Ceballo, 2004). They were given a choice: Do this labor-intensive work or get an education. Obtaining an education was perceived as a way to move out of the current class stratum. Although their parents did not necessarily know how to navigate through educational processes, they believed that education was the key to success and to "indoor work." The children learned that hard work was important, but if hard work did not lead to something substantial, they would never advance. Working smarter instead of

harder and fighting for fair payment for their labor were aspects of these participants' belief systems.

The commitment to family was a central theme of the counter-narratives and parents, as well as extended kin, encouraged participants to attend college in order to pave the way for their younger siblings and cousins. The pressures to achieve these high aspirations were supported through various forms of cultural wealth, particularly resistance, familial, and aspirational capital, which aided many in negotiating barriers in their college and graduate school experiences, even with limited cultural capital.

Discussion

The master narrative “Mexican/Mexican American families do not value education,” is prevalent in educational research and in the general society, blaming Mexican/Mexican American parents, in particular, for not instilling the importance of education and higher education in their children. I contend that this myth is developed by the dominant culture to justify low Mexican American educational attainment, which is attributed to perceived deficiencies in Mexican/Mexican American communities and not as an issue resulting from assimilation pressures and oppression within social structures. At first glance, the myth seems simplistic, but the verb “value” in this statement is more complicated. The verb “value” is cloaked in the rhetoric associated with cultural capital, which is inherent in the dominant culture’s discourse and resulting behavior regarding higher education.

According to the *Webster’s New International Dictionary* (1971), the verb “value” is defined as “to consider highly, esteem” (p. 2531). When reviewing

participants' counter-narratives and stories that reproduced the master narrative, I found that all families, including families from low-income, working class backgrounds, and limited educational attainment, highly regarded education and higher education; what differed was how their regard was manifested and perceived by the dominant culture. As discussed in Chapter Two, cultural capital is symbolic wealth and knowledge that is transmitted from one generation to the next (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997). When applied to college access, retention, and completion, having cultural capital in earlier generations helps students navigate through educational systems. On the other hand, limited access to cultural capital in earlier generations limits students' successful educational navigation because the dominant culture disregards community cultural wealth that is accumulated in families where children are the first to attend college. This may explain why the stories that reproduced the master narrative were connected with actions and behaviors associated with assimilation and social reproduction.

The findings in this section are focused on the experiences of participants from low-income backgrounds who were the first in their families to attend college. When invoking the master narrative, the primary communities targeted in deficit discourses were low-income, first-generation college students. Participants from middle class backgrounds whose parents attended college were more likely to readily support their children's educational aspirations, as is discussed in the sections that follow, by paying for school or transmitting their limited cultural capital to their children, although there were unanticipated consequences for doing so. Specific to this section, the findings suggest that participants employed self-efficacy, familial relationships and community

cultural wealth as mechanisms to form educational aspirations and successfully navigate through educational systems. These mechanisms were employed specifically in low-income and working class Mexican/Mexican American communities, regardless of gender.

I believe that when Mexican Americans and their families resist hegemonic forces in the dominant culture that support school, rather than community expectations of parental involvement as well as assimilationist messages in school curricula, and maintain cultural integrity by accessing forms of community cultural wealth, they are (sub)consciously operating within the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999). Therefore, what is perceived externally as valuing education may, in fact, match the internal messages of what higher education means for Mexican/Mexican American families, but because it is not validated by the dominant culture, it is defined as “not valuing” education. Unfortunately, community cultural wealth cannot substitute for cultural capital and Mexican/Mexican American families will continue to shoulder the blame for limited access to, retention in, and completion of higher education, and may, in fact, reproduce the master narrative. However, the accumulation of various forms of capital can provide the springboard for Mexican Americans to navigate through educational systems and gather aspects of cultural capital by activating the knowledge gathered in Mexican/Mexican American families and communities.

Social Constructions of Gender and Education

An integral component of participants’ narratives along educational pathways was their gendered identities, particularly as gender roles intersected with Mexican cultural

traditions. Participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] regarding gendered identities seemed to reproduce or resist two master narratives constructed by the dominant culture based on traditional interpretations of *machismo*. As I disentangled these stories, I found that the master narratives were "Mexican American women are not allowed to get an education" and "Reproducing the masculinist ideology,"⁹ which is evidenced within gender performance and is a master narrative that is pervasive within the dominant culture *and* in Mexican/Mexican American communities.

Reproducing the Master Narratives

Both female and male participants received *consejos* [advice] about obtaining a college education, however, the type of advice given was gendered. The female participants were advised to obtain an education in order to gain independence from men and the male participants were advised to obtain an education in order to have power and control over their labor and knowledge production. As I (re)interpreted the *testimonios* [life narratives], I only found counter-narratives that resisted the master narrative "Mexican American women are not allowed to get an education" and will present the findings on female participants' *consejos* first. Then, I will present the stories that reproduced the master narrative "Masculinist ideology" as expressed in the male participants' *consejos* and counter-narratives that resisted the "Masculinist ideology." Finally, I will address how performance of masculinity by female and male participants was manifested within Mexican/Mexican American academic communities.

⁹ Traditional masculinist ideology is a social construct that has four components: "men should not be feminine; men should strive to be respected for successful achievement; men should never show weakness; and men should seek adventure and risk, even accepting violence if necessary" (Levant, 1996, p. 260).

Counter Narratives Resisting Master Narrative #1: “Mexican American Women Are Not Allowed to Get an Education”

A large majority of the participants in my study were women; all of whom shared, regardless of social class or parental educational attainment, the ways in which gendered identities influenced their educational trajectories, particularly through the *consejos* [advice] they received from parents throughout their childhoods. Many of the participants from poor and working class backgrounds concluded that their mothers’ *consejos* were framed within a belief that education was liberation. These *consejos* were based on their mothers’ own struggles, which detailed how mothers believed they were denied educational opportunities during their youth or could not escape troubled marriages because their levels of educational attainment precluded them from earning fair income on their own. The following *consejo* is an example of the intersection of social class and gender, as mothers from poor and working class backgrounds were dependent on a two-person income to sustain their families:

[My mom] was pregnant first before they got married [and] she was very open about...how she felt...there [were] some limitations on her; what her choices in life were because she felt like she couldn’t support herself financially and especially with children. [S]he did tell [me and my sister] that it was important for us to be able to support ourselves in case we ever were in a relationship that wasn’t working out, that we didn’t feel like we had to stay in it because of financial concerns (Natalia, Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student).

For participants whose mothers had college degrees, *consejos* [advice] were also connected with Mexican traditions and presenting a positive family image within Mexican/Mexican American communities and general society. In some cases, mothers who attended college still succumbed to customary roles as primary caregivers in the home because the families could afford to live comfortably on the fathers' salaries or because of concerns about social criticism within Mexican/Mexican American communities. In this sense, the master narrative was not only constructed by the dominant culture, but co-constructed by Mexican/Mexican American communities that transferred their experiences in Mexico to the United States. For example, Fernanda's (Mexican, Middle Class, 2nd Generation College Student) parents earned college degrees and her father was a doctor in Mexico. Despite her education, Fernanda's mother was not allowed to work outside of the household, "because my dad was more like the traditional Mexican *macho*¹⁰ man [who asked], '[W]hat are these people gonna say if they find out that the wife of Dr. Cervantes is working?'" Fernanda perceived that her father's concerns were more focused on his reputation as a man who could provide for his family and not necessarily tied with his wife's interest in "putting her degree to work."

In some cases, mothers reinforced traditional gendered identities, while fathers stressed independence. For example, Alicia (Mexican, Middle Class, 3rd Generation College Student) and her mother were part of a strong tradition of women in her family

¹⁰ The construction of the *macho* is attributed to two Mexican *pensadores* [philosophers/intellectuals], Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz, who described *machismo* as a heterosexual expression of power and virility that fits into a sexual and gender category, as well as a category of race and class (Amaya, 2007).

entering science fields, beginning with Alicia's great-aunt, who obtained a science degree in Mexico City during the 1930s or 1940s. Her mother also attended graduate school with Alicia's father in Canada, where Alicia was born. Her father became a professor in the physical sciences and moved the family to the southeastern United States. The transmission of cultural and social capital routinely occurred at the dining room table with stories of life in the laboratory coinciding with discussions on art and culture. The boundaries of home and university dissipated as graduate students visited Alicia's home and as Alicia visited the campus and watched her parents work in the laboratory.

Retention of cultural and gendered identities, however, remained firm:

[M]y mom would have liked me married off right after my undergrad because she came from a different time period....I think she was proud of me to continue with my education and go as far as I did but...there were fears because she wanted to see me looked after by a [man]....

Her father argued against that tradition, telling Alicia, "You can't depend on anyone but yourself." Surprisingly, his advice seemed to contradict his relationship with Alicia's mother:

[When] he comes home, he wants dinner on the table and...certain things taken care of by my mother but, when it comes to me, he's very different. He's much more liberal about it and more progressive in terms of how I should live my life.

As illustrated in Alicia's narrative, the messages some participants received from their parents contradicted their parents' behavior across generations. Alicia's father

reproduced the master narrative with his wife, but incorporated a counter-narrative as he advised his daughter.

In Rosa's (Hispanic, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) narrative, her father's insistence on delaying marriage until after college resulted from what Rosa perceived as guilt from perpetuating the *macho* image in his relationship with Rosa's mother:

[M]y mom used to wash clothes in those big *tinias* [wash tubs]. [My dad] said, "I would see her struggling to pull it full of water 'cause it was heavy and...I really wanted to go help her, but I couldn't because somebody might see me." And I thought to myself, "That was his own wife." And so, I think he didn't want...the girls to have to go through that. [I]f he had made that mistake with his wife he didn't want...someone else to make that mistake with us.

Rosa's father advised her that, "*Si un día te va a dejar* [If one day your husband leaves you], at least *tienes educación* [you have an education] and you can...support yourself. [Y]ou have to be able to center your own feet without a man." Rosa's narrative described a gendered division of labor whereby women's work involved maintaining household chores such as washing clothes. For Rosa's father, to participate in those chores, even to assist in carrying a wash tub, may have been perceived as taking on a woman's role and challenging his role as a man. In addition, her father's *consejos* were focused on the daughters in the family, urging them to acquire independence, which could be interpreted as acquiring skill sets in both male and female divisions of labor in order to not depend

on a man. It is unknown whether his *consejos* to Rosa's brothers involved disrupting or adhering to traditional male gender roles.

Fathers' motivations for providing *consejos* [advice] were not as thoroughly interpreted by the participants as the mother's *consejos* and some of the female participants reproduced traditional Mexican male stereotypes of *machismo* as they interpreted their *testimonios* [life narratives]. I believe that these *consejos* may have been called upon based on fathers' previous experiences with gender inequalities with patriarchal systems in Mexico and/or the United States, as well as efforts to maintain their daughters' virtues (González-López, 2005), which may or may not have been connected with the concept of *machismo*. As one participant noted, the advice the women received pertaining to education was a version of "Mexican Feminism," using education to liberate oneself by accessing more choices, while remaining within the confines of (hetero)sexist, male-dominated environments.

Stressing the importance of education for female participants may have dispelled the master narrative that "Mexican American women are not allowed to get an education," but it was also a mechanism for control of women's social positions within Mexican/Mexican American communities. In this sense, *consejos* [advice] from both parents were based on ensuring the image of a "good girl;" the kind of girl who would not get pregnant before she was married, would marry and produce children after college (not considering graduate education), would live near family, and maintain a respectful and respectable public image. Female participants who became "too liberated and too independent" were often criticized by their mothers or female family members.

Liberating oneself from a man did not equate to independence from the family unit. Nevertheless, the very education that families sought for their daughters became a device that separated daughters from their families and from prescribed gender roles. The findings suggest that the terms “freedom,” “safety,” and “independence” had different connotations within Mexican/Mexican American families. Unanticipated and, in some participants’ opinions, unwelcomed were newly-educated daughters’ exercises of knowledge and individualism upon completing college and graduate school. This contradiction illustrated the pervasive nature of (hetero)sexist interpretations of women’s positions in Mexican/Mexican American cultures and communities.

Yesenia’s (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) story of feeling ostracized exemplified several of the female participants’ experiences with navigating between their personal aspirations and familial responsibilities. Yesenia portrayed her father as concerned about the consequences of becoming too educated, “*Es bueno estar educada, pero ¿tan ambiciosa?* [It’s good to be educated, but so ambitious?].” Educational goals that moved female participants physically and intellectually away from their families were viewed as selfish. Yesenia believed that her decision to separate herself from her family in order to form her faculty career “marked me as a traitor in my family.” She was conflicted because following her family’s advice and gaining independence did not seem to fit her role as a dutiful daughter-in-law. Obtaining a doctorate was a “double-edged sword.” On one side, she was fulfilling her family’s expectations of obtaining a higher education, which placed her

in a position where she did not have to rely on her husband for income. On the other side, her independence had boundaries:

[T]his is exactly what you want, somebody to be independent...successful, want to stand on their own two feet, right? [Mexican/Mexican American communities say], "Yes...but we want the men to do that, not the women." The women can do that to a certain point, but they still need to be close to their families because their families need them to take care of the older members of the family and the children, [and] I'm not doing that.

Yesenia felt guilty for choosing a faculty position in another part of the country, especially because her decision, which her husband supported, kept their child from connecting with extended family. As a result, her ambitions were considered selfish and, in her reflections, potentially emasculating her husband's image within the family.

Contending with pressures to get married and have children was also prevalent in the female participants' *testimonios* [life narratives]. As the female participants advanced in their educational attainment, their mothers' discourse seemed to interpret education as "postponing children." *Consejos* [advice] changed to reflect fears that daughters would not have opportunities to marry due to their advanced education and age. Monique's (Chicana, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) mother, in particular, was presented as the most aggressive in stressing the importance of getting married, "[A]fter my bachelor's degree, my mom was like, 'Enough is enough.'" When Monique decided to obtain a Ph.D., her mother advised her to refrain from disclosing her level of education to potential dates. She encouraged her daughter to tell the men that she worked at the

college instead of saying that she was attending graduate school. Monique deduced that her mother feared she “would be out of the market. People would rather have somebody who was easier to handle. [B]eing too educated meant [being] too smart...you’d be able to think on your own a bit more.” Now in her thirties, Monique acknowledged that her level of education might affect her potential to marry and have children, although she was willing to wait until she reached a point of financial stability and was in a committed relationship. Monique’s narrative uncovered the tension between education and marriage, as the female participants who obtained their Ph.D.s before they were married were warned that they would have to choose one or the other.

Her mother’s fears, however, were confirmed in many of the female participants’ heterosexual romantic relationships as they realized that having a Ph.D. was potentially precluding them from meeting men who seemed willing to date and marry educated Mexican American women. Conversely, some of the women who were married at the time of the study married men who identified as “househusbands” and maintained the household and child rearing responsibilities while the women worked as faculty and researchers. Incidentally, all of the “househusbands” were identified as Anglo American. For the female participants, escaping tradition meant marrying the “elusive Chicano” marrying a non-Mexican American, or not marrying. Yesenia (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) used the phrase “elusive Chicano” in her narrative to explain how her husband was different from other Chicanos she met. She explained that the characteristics of the “elusive Chicano” was a man who was supportive of women obtaining higher education and having an equal partnership in

home life and child rearing, which, in some respects, perpetuated stereotypes about Chicano/Mexican American men. Male stereotypes were also pervasive for female participants who married non-Mexican Americans and stated that they made conscious decisions to marry outside of Mexican/Mexican American communities because they believed that *machismo* was an obstacle to maintaining independence garnered through the women's education.

Themes in Counter-Narratives

Despite parents' messages of the importance of education, for female participants, once college degrees were attained, pressures to reproduce hetero-normative gender roles returned. Connecting the educational aspirations developed in the Familial Involvement section of this chapter, the findings suggest that there is disconnect between aspirations and attainment when gender intersects with race. As a springboard to independence and liberation, education brought about greater pressures to successfully navigate among careers, family, and children. The consequences for not balancing familial responsibilities and career aspirations, from the female participants' perspectives, were emotionally taxing, such as contending with perceptions of being a traitor to the family and placing work ahead of one's culture and community.

Reproducing Master Narrative # 2: Masculinist Ideology

I first discuss the findings pertaining to male participants' *consejos* [advice] about education that reproduced a masculinist ideology. Then, I present how female and male participants performed masculinity within the contexts of academic departments and

academic conferences. Finally, I include counter-narratives that resisted a masculinist ideology.

Obtaining an education in order to take care of family, extend power from within marginalized communities into the dominant culture, and retain control over one's labor and knowledge production were the primary *consejos* [advice] given to the male participants. Few of the male participants acknowledged the reproduction of masculinity during their formative years or in their navigations through college and graduate school, perhaps due, in part to male privilege in U.S. society.

Jesús (Chicano, Working Class, 1st Generational College Student) remembered hearing his mother's *consejos* [advice] to his sister, which were similar to the female participants' messages discussed above, but did not connect his educational aspirations with gender until his doctorate "gave me the language" to understand his gender socialization. Jesús noted that his "goal orientation" was based on "my quest for power...for authority" because he witnessed the ways in which White men mistreated his father at work sites. His father's *consejo* was, "Get an education so you don't have to put up with this shit." Jesús, as well as other male participants, believed that their fathers' ideas about education were connected to earning high salaries and avoiding the overt racism fathers experienced.

Carlos's (Mexican, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) father, whose work-based *consejos* [advice] were discussed in greater detail in the Familial Involvement section of this chapter, stressed the importance of going to school in order to become a lawyer and "make a lot of money." Carlos believed that his father's

educational aspirations to become an attorney or a judge were curtailed when he was forced to “stop school to work in *México*” and then proceeded to project his goals onto his sons. Carlos’s father first discussed his educational expectations with Carlos’s older brother, who attended a Research I institution on the West Coast and returned home to teach in the local schools, much to his father’s dismay, “You go to [this prestigious university] just to come back and be a teacher...instead of [becoming] an engineer or doctor or lawyer.” After acquiescing to his oldest son’s arguments, Carlos’s father began encouraging Carlos’s brother to become a principal:

My dad was like, “Always aspire. Don’t settle for anything.” Even now he’ll [ask] me, “Eduardo *todavía puede tomar más clases, ¿verdad?* [Eduardo can still take more classes, right?] [Because] if there’s a principalship open, he’s not gonna be competitive.” And I tell my dad, “Yeah, but he needs to want to do that. If he’s content as a teacher and that’s what his calling is...” but my dad said, “No, aspire for more and [don’t] settle.”

Aspirations for a better life and higher social class status were the cornerstones of Carlos’s father’s *consejo* [advice] and he modeled those aspirations through constant work, which often prevented him from assisting in child rearing, although he coached his children’s athletic teams as a way to connect with his children. Working extended hours outside the home was a salient theme in male participants’ relationships with their fathers, which illustrated the intersections of social class and masculinity articulated in several of the narratives. In addition, fathers were often described as disengaged from the family unit, particularly in relation to educational aspirations, and several were recalled in

situations involving heavy alcohol use. I believe that the fathers, who were the primary wage earners, may have felt constrained by their roles as men in lower social class positions and reproduced oppressive masculinity by exerting power and control within the family unit or encouraging their sons to do so, despite their perceived emotional distance.

A majority of the male participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] discussed the sons' adoption of their fathers' performances of masculinity. Manuel (Mexican American/Chicano, Working Class, 2nd Generation College Student) believed that he "infiltrated...the elite networks of power and money" by attending a private college preparatory school in order to "serve my people and serve this politically-informed egalitarian agenda from a position of power. Power narrowly defined in terms of success and wealth." However, infiltrating a White male space was not "as easy a game as [I] thought" because Manuel was still viewed as a visitor, not as someone (i.e., a White man) who belonged. As a result, Manuel's educational aspirations changed from becoming a powerful attorney to "a different kind of publicly engaged intellectual," a journey that he believed entailed violence and increased alcohol use and reproduced many of his father's behaviors:

I'm lucky it didn't kill me....I lived in that world [of violence and alcohol abuse] and then just had to find a way out of that world where I could still respect that world...and then make those tools and skills [learned] available in ways that could work in other spaces, other sites like a graduate seminar or organizing a meeting.

Manuel's narrative consisted of various examples of asserting his role as a publicly engaged intellectual and how the skills learned at the local bar (i.e., creating a strong presence, asserting oneself in the space, commanding attention from bar patrons) could be replicated in classroom and community settings. However, his perspective was focused on performing masculinity and commanding space as a man, not necessarily examining how these skills could be replicated by a woman in similar settings. I (re)interpreted his description of a publicly engaged intellectual as reproducing the master narrative and potentially limiting the roles of women in public spaces.

Themes in Reproducing the Master Narrative

Similar to most of the male participants in the study, Manuel's perceptions of masculine performance were made visible in his reflections of graduate school and in his expressions of male privilege through research and teaching within Mexican American academic communities. Masculine performance was recalled by most of the male participants as expressing "a violent attitude and a violent disposition," as Jesús (Chicano, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) explained. I contend that these expressions were in response to feelings of powerlessness and a way of gaining power. Providing for the family through high-powered, high-paying jobs were salient in male participants' discussions of educational attainment. Education was viewed as a mechanism for gaining power and resisting racism, although the findings in other sections of this chapter suggest that racism became more nuanced along educational pathways to the doctorate.

Performing Masculinity in Academe

Gendered identity performance occurred in female and male participants' postsecondary education and in their academic and research careers. As discussed in Chapter Two, because realities are socially constructed within marginalized communities and the dominant culture, gendered identities and resulting performance of these identities mold in accordance to accepted norms within those spaces. Successful navigation through various situations and environments occurs when the individuals adopt the norms of particular communities, which regulate and subjugate members. In this way, graduate school and academe socialize men and women into particular academic cultures and "acceptable" (i.e., masculine) behavior in those cultures. Therefore, performing professional masculinity is the standard.

Based on participants' *testimonios* [life narratives], male participants did not feel that they had to think about their gender within academic environments as contrasted with their female counterparts. The female participants from all academic disciplines described how they navigated between performances of femininity and performances of masculinity in graduate school and in faculty/researcher careers, particularly in situations such as academic conferences, job markets, and faculty interactions. I contend that performing femininity and masculinity within different contexts was a tool of survival for the female participants who felt they had to compete for resources with White women and/or were the only women in their disciplines.

After a few years in graduate school, Alicia (Mexican, Middle Class, Physical Sciences) explained that she had acclimated to the department culture. She admitted that she "closed my eyes to gender" in the laboratory and developed a safe environment for

herself, although it seems that Alicia subconsciously adapted her performance in the laboratory to match the masculine environment (e.g., wearing slacks and wearing little make-up). Her “eyes were reopened,” however, during an international conference when she was approached by a group of male scientists from another country who were “looking at me strangely or at least I perceived it strangely because I hadn’t had that kind of [male] attention in a while.” Alicia felt uncomfortable, especially because the men “pos[ed] questions to me in a very cutsie manner.” In order to assuage their advances Alicia focused on discussing her research in a direct manner and, as a result, “their faces changed;” she no longer amused them. Her interaction reminded her that the world outside of her department still portrayed her as an exotic commodity within the discipline, “[I]t was a reminder to me that I have to act a certain way if I want people to take me seriously.”

“A certain way” alludes to negotiating academic environments through masculine performance, which the female participants defined as direct eye contact, firm handshakes, speaking loudly, and wearing pantsuits. The female participants believed that femininity’s uniform, as performed by some of their female colleagues, was composed of make-up, jewelry, long hair, skirts, wandering eyes, and “flittering eyelashes.” Alicia asserted that first impressions were crucial to one’s reputation as a scholar, “[Y]ou want the visual recognition to line up...with who you are and what you represent.” As illustrated in this example, the decision to perform masculinity in academic environments was a response to the inability of men in the female participants’ disciplines to interact in a non-sexualized manner.

Several of the female participants observed gender performances play out among their female and male colleagues who were White. Contrasting Alicia's experience, Yesenia (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences), identified as "low-feminine" and, according to her, worked very hard to present herself in a feminine way to match the game she witnessed occurring between the heterosexual men and women in her department, "[The women faculty] are really into men. Like, really sit down, pay attention to what they have to say and I don't do that shit. I don't even do that to my own husband." Yesenia observed that the female faculty performed "a lot of emotional work" with their male colleagues and would often hug them at social functions. Yesenia refused to participate in that performance, "I just pull out my hand...and I shake it hard, too," but admitted that she willingly participated in presenting herself as feminine in the classroom as a way to receive higher scores on her teaching evaluations. Her Mexican American female colleagues encouraged her to perform femininity in order to draw White male faculty members' attention during times of need, such as letters of recommendation and resource allocation.

Justifications for performance of femininity were further expressed by Aztlan (Chicano, Poor, Life Sciences), one of the male participants, "[Mexican American women] have to worry about Latino males, they gotta worry about males per se. And then they got to worry about the White women...because I'll tell you, White women do little to nothing to help the Latinas in science." Aztlan's observation was further supported by several of the female participants' reservations about gaining support from White women in their disciplines.

Performing masculinity and femininity in various situations was an additional challenge for a majority of the women in the study. When entering the job market, several participants discussed the advice they received from their female colleagues about attire and appearance, which added greater stress in relation to performing appropriately within their disciplines. The female participants were advised to not wear jewelry or perfume, to wear skirt suits in dark or subdued colors such as navy blue and black, and to be prepared for the “*sin vergüenza* [shameless] sexist guys who make sexist comments and ask inappropriate questions over dinner” (Yesenia, Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences). Monique (Chicana, Working Class, Education) was advised to cut her hair and wear glasses, although she did not need them, in order to portray herself as older and more serious.

The male participants’ descriptions of attire focused on not wearing a tie in classrooms or at academic conferences, although the female participants argued that not wearing a masculine symbol in these environments did not affect perceptions of authority:

I have to wear a suit jacket to [college meetings] and if I’m not...it makes a difference because all the men aren’t even wearing ties, but the women are in full suits. That is a form of being institutionalized...that’s what you’re supposed to do [if you’re a woman] and I think more about...what I’m wearing because of having learned that there’s certain levels of respect based on the way you dress.

As participants began to engage in research with their Mexican American colleagues at a national level through academic and research conferences, many of the

female participants remarked about performing masculinity in contrast to how Mexican American men performed masculinity. Rachel (Mexican, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) described the latter as “male showboating.” Rachel was a doctoral student when she first attended an academic conference focused on research by Mexican Americans. She assumed that the conference would provide opportunities to engage in the academic discourse in an environment where one’s racial/ethnic identity was supported. Her first experience, however, was disappointing as she attended panels that were mainly dominated by “*macho* men who love[d] to hear themselves talk.” She felt that there was “no space for women to speak.” Rather than confronting the performance of masculinity at the conference or finding ways to call attention to this performance, Rachel chose not to return to that conference, an action taken years before by her older, Mexican American female colleagues who organized a separate conference specifically for Mexican American women. Her silence and their action, in a sense, reproduced a patriarchal environment that not only oppresses women, but men as well, who may feel that they have to perform this masculinity at the conference every year. Her observations of “male showboating” were not only found at academic conferences but in classrooms during graduate school. Rachel believed that there was a difference between espoused values and behavior:

In seminars, my [Mexican American male] peers who are...good leftist, socialist, communist, whatever...they’ll spout a million things about the *Mujeres Zapatistas* [Women members of the Zapatista Movement in Mexico] or Gloria Anzaldúa [prominent Chicana feminist writer] or just how they respect *La Mujer*

[The Mexican Woman] but they won't listen to the [Mexican American] woman sitting next to them. How can they value a woman in the abstract but not...shut up and listen to what she has to say...when she's sitting next to them?

Themes in Performing Masculinity

Perhaps in academic environments, Mexican American men, as demonstrated in the male participants' *consejos* [advice] discussed earlier, perform a particular masculinity such as talking loudly and interrupting colleagues at academic presentations and during classroom discussions to assert power and control over their knowledge production. This performance may preclude them from deferring to women in the classroom or at academic conferences because the women may usurp their power. In addition, male participants admitted that they were barely beginning to understand their male privilege at the time of the interviews, although some of the male participants claimed to understand Chicana feminist theory, to advocate for Mexican American women, and to advocate for the eradication of racism. Rarely, however, did the male participants express how they would extend their power to their Mexican American female colleagues or make the power structure equal for women.

Regardless of discipline, a majority of the female participants discussed how they performed masculinity and femininity in academic environments. They performed masculinity at academic conferences and job interviews because they were concerned with their images as scholars and wanted to be taken seriously. Some of the female participants performed femininity in order to placate to department cultures, compete with White women for resources, and, I contend, to survive in academe.

Counter-Narratives Resisting Master Narrative #2: Masculinist Ideology

I found two counter-narratives that illustrated how participants navigated through prescribed gender roles and disrupted gender socialization by entering gender-specific disciplines and occupations.

Dr. O (Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) described a troubled childhood filled with violence and trauma. He identified himself as a “sissy” in elementary school because he cried at the beginning of every school year until he entered middle school due to personal insecurities and instability at home. As a result, he perceived himself as a loner and isolated himself from contact with the rest of his schoolmates. His reputation continued into high school when the boys at school were recruited to join gangs:

I was exposed to both drugs and gangs since elementary school and somebody asked me, “Why didn’t you join a gang?” I was dumbfounded by the question and my only response, Michelle, was, “I didn’t join a gang because they didn’t ask me to join a gang.”

Dr. O seemed to find security with his mother and great-grandmother, who he admired for their willingness to help others in the community, “[I]n my opinion, [my great-grandmother] was your poor man’s psychologist. This woman helped everyone...migrant or not.” Gender was not of concern to Dr. O, as these women were “strong role models who were also in the helping profession,” despite their limited educational attainment. He connected his experiences in childhood and exclusion from local gangs to sensitivities that were more traditionally developed in women, “I’m

more...in tune with people than most guys are.” As a result, Dr. O aspired to enter what he termed as a helping profession, although “it’s predominately women, no? But, somehow, it seemed to fit.”

Dr. O perceived himself as not fitting into traditional forms of masculinity, which are described as not expressing femininity or weakness (Levant, 1996), as a result of the level of “traumatic” violence between his parents in the home. Perhaps if he had not lived in what he described as a negative environment, he would not have found security in his relationships with female relatives and aspired into a helping profession. His counter-narrative illustrated that male gender socialization can take a variety of courses that do not automatically lead to performance of masculinity, although he equated his masculinity as less than (i.e., being a sissy).

Similarly, Darcy (Hispanic, Middle Class, 2nd Generation College Student) explained that she displayed masculine behavior at an early age and identified as “tomboy” who was “very interested in mechanical stuff,” particularly in using tactile functions such as taking apart broken clocks or radios and putting them back together. Darcy believed that her parents encouraged her behavior and helped her develop educational aspirations centered on science careers. Her grandparents, who “ran a welding and machining shop” also noticed her inclination toward fixing items around the house and were very supportive of her aspirations in science. When Darcy turned 15, her family gave her a *quinceañera*, which is a formal presentation of a young woman to the community upon her fifteenth birthday, “[F]or my *quinceañera* [my grandparents] gave me a real tool box, full of tools and all engraved with my name...I still have it, I mean,

it's excellent." Darcy's example illustrated a clear moment when gender binaries were broken down, particularly through a public display such as a *quinceañera*, which focuses on becoming a woman and receiving a gift that was traditionally masculine.

The terms "sissy" and "tomboy" were invoked by Dr. O and Darcy in their counter-narratives, and seemed to be utilized as a way to separate themselves from traditional gender roles in Mexican/Mexican American communities. Dr. O was the only male participant who identified himself in this way, while there were a few women who considered themselves "tomboys" in their childhoods because they either were mechanically inclined, as explained in Darcy's example, or played mostly with boys in their neighborhoods or with their brothers. However, none reflected on their behavior as antithetical to traditional gender socialization, as expressed in Dr. O's and Darcy's counter-narratives.

Discussion

The findings demonstrated two master narratives within participants' testimonios, "Mexican American women are not allowed to get an education" and "Reproducing masculinist ideology." The findings indicated that education was presented to the female participants as liberation and that the women were supported and encouraged to attend college, which supports previous research on Chicanas in higher education and dispels that dominant culture master narrative (Achor & Morales, 1990). However, once the female participants received their undergraduate degrees, the pressures to conform to traditional female hetero-normative social roles as wife and mother entered their parents' discourse. For the female participants, this resulted in mixed messages about seeking

independence while fulfilling familial expectations. These messages were particularly evident for first-generation college students and for Mexican American women from working class backgrounds. As evidenced in the *consejos* [advice] from highly educated parents, gendered identities were still manifested, especially after college.

A majority of the female participants reproduced masculinity in their school and work environments, although, as a tool of survival or “challenge tempered by accommodation” (Achor & Morales, 1990, p. 282), Mexican American women played into prescribed hetero-normative gender images of “high femininity” (wearing make-up, dresses, low-cut blouses, and having long hair) in order to receive assistance from men in their departments and compete with White women for resources. In predominately male spaces, survival was defined as blending into the environment by downplaying physical attractiveness through clothing and limited use of make-up and, I contend, as a response to unsolicited male attention.

Most of the male participants exerted their masculinity through demonstrations of power by activating their male privilege within the dominant culture out of a sense of powerlessness and in an effort to gain power, regardless of social class. Not reproducing masculinity was equated by at least one male participant with being a “sissy,” while not reproducing traditional feminine traits was equated with being a “tomboy.” These findings confirm that masculinity is contextual and is reproduced in a variety of settings. Gender socialization and performance of masculinity occurs early through the use of parental *consejos* [advice] and manifests itself in academic environments such as classrooms, departments, and conferences.

The Struggle

I really want you to share some of the trials and tribulations that we have faced.

The only reason I'm sitting in this office is sometimes I think I'm too stupid to know any better. To other people, it's really [having] strength and courage. Ten people standing beside me who faced the things I faced would have given up a long time ago (Teresa, Mexican-American, Poor, 1st Generation College Student).

As I sifted through participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] I found that participants crafted their journeys to the doctorate along a binary of adversity and advantage. Their *testimonios* reproduced or resisted a master narrative constructed within Mexican/Mexican American communities, namely, that "Mexican Americans must struggle through educational systems." Although the participants cited particularly difficult moments, especially in their doctoral experiences, not all of these examples, in their opinions, were based on fighting against oppression. However, there were stories that reproduced the Mexican American master narrative of "The Struggle" based on participants' race/ethnicity, social class backgrounds, and parental educational attainment. I focus the findings on participants' perspectives of "The Struggle" from the standpoint of facing challenges as well as having limited obstacles during their educational journeys.

As a final note, presenting narratives about participants who perceived themselves as advantaged or privileged and did not perceive adversity along their journeys to the doctorate contributes to my goals as a researcher in presenting greater complexity of social classes, genders, linguistic attributes, and immigrant status, among other identities

to the discourse on Mexican/Mexican American communities. However, presenting these findings is complicated because the Mexican American master narrative of “The Struggle” is reproduced by Mexican American researchers to advocate for educational equity. What are the consequences of presenting a complex Mexican American aggregate featuring various forms of privilege? What are the implications of uncovering difference when crafting educational research or enacting educational policy pertaining to the needs of Mexican/Mexican American communities? With these questions in mind, I present the findings and provide a few thoughts about addressing these questions in the discussion at the end of this section.

Reproducing the Mexican American Master Narrative

I incorporate stories that reproduced the Mexican American master narrative of “The Struggle” along participants’ educational pathways, beginning in secondary school and finishing with graduate school.

The Struggle in K-12 Education

Challenges faced in primary and secondary education were most attributed to social class status and perceptions of social class at home and in school environments. Teresa’s (Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) father was murdered in Mexico over a land dispute when Teresa was one year old; her mother was eight months pregnant with their fourth child. Although Teresa’s parents were financially secure prior to the murder, once her husband was gone, Teresa’s mother had limited means for earning money because she had no formal education. Teresa recalled instances when their electricity was turned off, yet her mother stood firm in maintaining a

sense of security by encouraging the children to “finish your homework before the sun goes down.” Years later, when Teresa entered college, she was denied admission into a particular major because of a disability. She left college for a year, and determined a plan of action to fight against the discrimination that prevented her from accessing that particular major. Her mother’s example inspired her to fight back, “My mother always taught us, ‘You make choices for yourself. You don’t allow other people to make them for you.’” Unfortunately, the department refused to admit her even after threats of legal action and Teresa decided to transfer to another institution.

When participants from poor and working class backgrounds shared their obstacles in secondary education, most connected those struggles directly to social class. Although their families did not have a lot of money and several qualified for free or reduced lunch during elementary school, the participants noted that they never worried about having food to eat or clothes to wear and usually felt very secure in their homes and with their family units. When they went to school, however, several explained feeling different from their classmates. Rita (Mexican, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) grew up in Michigan and remembered standing in a different line for students who qualified for free or reduced lunch, “[P]eople look[ed] at me...and I know they were saying stuff about me.” Rita felt embarrassed and decided to bring her lunch instead so that, “I could avoid being singled out as being poor.” Her embarrassment, I contend, was also based on being one of the only Mexican Americans in her school and perhaps she did not want to equate herself with negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans.

A theme throughout all of the participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] was the notion that if one wanted to gain access to opportunities, he/she was the best advocate to make those opportunities happen. Advocacy also meant learning how to "hustle" and strategize. Several participants, particularly those who were second-generation college students, noted that they served as advocates for themselves to access better classes in high school or placement in college preparatory tracks. Darcy (Hispanic, Middle Class, 2nd Generation College Student) successfully negotiated a grade promotion when she was in seventh grade. Her family moved to a new town and, because of her high academic achievement, Darcy convinced her family and teachers that she could start high school instead of entering eighth grade. In middle school, Mike (Mexican, Middle Class, 2nd Generation College Student) decided that he wanted to become a physicist and "made sure I was on the right track to take Physics" in high school. When school administrators placed him on the wrong track, he convinced them that he needed to take a higher level Math class so that he could take Advanced Placement Calculus and Advanced Placement Physics during his senior year in high school. Yesenia's (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) narrative was not tied to placement in better classes, but to proper instruction from her Trigonometry teacher, whom she believed was racist and treated her as if she was a burden to educate. When she asked him for help, Yesenia remembered smiling and saying, "You may not like Mexicans, but you need to teach me. Don't ignore me. You may not like me and I may not like you, but I need to get an education. It's important." Fighting for one's education and challenging social conventions were central to many of the working class participants'

narratives, especially because their goals were deeply connected with their educational aspirations.

Although Cuahtemoc (Chicano, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) faced difficult challenges, as discussed in the Familial Involvement section of this chapter, he found a way to turn a perceived deficit into an advantage. As a “skinny kid,” Cuahtemoc learned that he was a skillful runner and earned a position on his high school’s varsity team for track and field. He used a particular incident as a metaphor that guided his educational aspirations. When he first began running, his strategy was to keep a steady pace to “safe myself ‘til the end,” but he soon found that running at a slower rate kept him from advancing far enough to win, “You’re never even in the race if you’re holding back and waiting....” After reflecting on his experiences, he changed his philosophy:

I have to race as hard as I can, even if I die to get there. I had a skill that I didn’t know I had because I was holding back and that right there...the philosophy of running can change your whole life.

Although these examples illustrated many of the participants’ resiliencies in overcoming perceived obstacles in their education, their stories criticized arbitrary institutional policies as barriers to students’ educational achievement, and yet reproduced the Mexican American master narrative of “The Struggle.” Araceli’s (Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) story of two academic tracks in a high school with a total senior enrollment of 25 was an example of how institutional policies are enacted to segregate students of color and students from low income backgrounds from White,

affluent students. Araceli's high school had an A track composed of White students and a B track that was composed of all the Mexican children and low-income White students, "We weren't expected to go to college, so [the school] put us in bookkeeping or...other classes that didn't require much math." As a result, Araceli felt unprepared for college and failed three courses her first semester. I believe that Araceli's struggles were not necessarily a reflection of her abilities, rather a reflection of her secondary school education and unnecessary tracking that masked racism in her school. Despite the obstacles presented, working class participants managed to aspire to college and matriculate.

The Struggle in College

Stories about college obstacles focused on social class and race as participants left the comforts of their communities and navigated through hostile, predominately White environments. Prior to starting college, many of the participants from poor and working class backgrounds were concerned about financing their tuition. Some participants stated that they were unaware of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and held part-time jobs in high school and full-time jobs in college in order to pay for school. Those who applied and qualified for the FAFSA were allocated funding through work-study and student loans, along with grants such as the Pell Grant and Cal Grant. Natalia (Mexican-American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) noticed social class differences at the beginning of every term when the tuition bills arrived:

Some of the girls that I shared the suite with...their parents fully [paid] for their education, writing the check, basically. I noticed [at] the beginning of the term,

I'd stand in line and worry about what my balance was going to be so I could buy books and then try to make sure I had a job that [gave me] enough time to study....I remember thinking about those extra hassles that I had to deal with because I didn't have parents who could pay for my education.

From the perspectives of some middle class participants, whose parents had to write the check for tuition, their struggle was defined as not qualifying for the FAFSA because their family incomes exceeded a particular income bracket. Even though Alicia (Mexican, Middle Class, 3rd Generation College Student) believed she had good reasons for receiving aid (an Hispanic female in the sciences), she “quit applying for...financial opportunities [as an undergraduate] because the only way I could get money was if I took out a loan and I thought that was unfair.” Her parents paid for her undergraduate and doctoral degrees. Financing college for their children meant that some parents set particular expectations, such as living on campus throughout college or threatening to pull funding if the participants did not have particular grade point averages. Despite the financial dependency on their parents, most of the middle class participants expressed gratitude for not struggling with tuition payments.

As the first in their families to attend college, a majority of the participants expressed fear and concern about transitioning to college. Although they found support at home, the 18 participants who were first-generation college students could not necessarily rely on their families to help them navigate once they were on campus. Some participants noted difficult transitions to academic work, which led to several instances of academic probation, as well as difficulties maintaining relationships with family at home

and with friends who did not attend college. Throughout all of the *testimonios* [life narratives], participants shared the ways in which they analyzed and rationalized difficult moments. Often, they reported that they assessed difficult situations and thought about what they should prioritize or improve in their college experiences. Images of self-composed, reflective college students were promoted in the narratives. It is uncertain if the images portrayed were exactly what were represented, but the following examples demonstrate a framework for those images.

As evidenced in these stories, the struggles faced in college were not simply singular events; the struggle continued throughout college as the participants developed new scripts for handling obstacles. Participants shared that if they struggled with a class or a particular discipline, they would find other pathways to achieving their goals. Nieves (Chicano, Poor, 1st Generation College Student), for example, recalled moments in his undergraduate years when he felt lonely and isolated, but “just stuck it out and it all got better. I didn’t panic.” Nieves recalled an instance when he worked at a copy store and a Chicano student approached him and asked to sell back his course readers because he was dropping out of school. Nieves saw himself in this student and tried to convince him to stay, “You should stay. You’ll make it. Just hang in there.” However, the student was at “that cracking point,” that was very familiar to Nieves, “There were these moments where I always wanted to bail and I just stuck it out a little longer and it pass[ed].” Nieves convinced himself to stay, but could not convince the student. In every *testimonio* [life narrative], participants demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy and determination, regardless of the circumstances.

As one of few people of color in the classroom, several participants felt isolated, yet also felt that they were the centers of curiosity for their classmates. Darcy (Hispanic, Middle Class, 2nd Generation College Student), was the only woman of color in her science courses, which affected her interactions in the classroom. She did not think she was smart enough to contribute to class discussion, “I always sat in the back of the class, never raised my hand, never said anything; just wanted to be as inconspicuous as possible.” I believe that Darcy’s goal of being “inconspicuous” was directly connected to being the only woman in the class and subconsciously fighting negative stereotypes about women despite her strong academic self-concept, especially in the sciences. Her male counterparts did little to ease her concerns and Darcy felt very isolated throughout her undergraduate years.

Although the term “token” was never spoken in front of Monique (Chicana, Working Class, Education), students in her English class seemed enthralled by her experiences living in a predominately Latina/o neighborhood and gravitated to her because, as she explained, “This is their one chance to talk to a poor Mexican about what her life is like.” In fact, a very wealthy student visited her house at one point during her junior or senior year and asked her if he could learn more about her “fascinating story.” She felt objectified as a research subject rather than a classmate. When she shared her concerns with her family, her father told her, “Oh, you can handle it. You’re being too sensitive,” but Monique knew that she was experiencing racism and classism in the classroom and around campus. Monique’s tipping point came during her junior year when a drunken White female student approached her at Monique’s apartment, which

was directly behind fraternity and sorority housing units known as “Greek Row.” The student told Monique to “go back to the neighborhood where you belong.” She felt antagonized to the point that she physically beat the female student. Monique did not attend classes for a week and half, ashamed of her actions, “How could I have let it get to me?” She felt pressed between the predominately White academic environments and the neighborhood where her family lived and tried to separate them from each other as much as possible, maintaining a strong image of herself even when she felt she could not handle the obstacles.

The Struggle in Graduate School

It’s interesting to recall these stories because we survived and we became stronger....[T]hese battles, whether...physical, mental...that you go through in graduate training [are meant] to prepare you for this profession...(Araceli, Mexican-American, Working Class, Humanities).

Despite overcoming challenges in secondary education and at their undergraduate institutions, some participants observed that they created their own obstacles at the onset of graduate school out of fear and doubt in their academic abilities. Fernanda (Mexican, Middle Class, Education) drove with her mother across Texas to her graduate program. As they entered a town a few hours away from the university, Fernanda “just stopped and made a u-turn.” She started driving back home:

My mom was like, “¿*Qué te pasa?* [What’s wrong with you?]” I’m like, “No, no, I cannot do it.” I was afraid of the unknown, going to a new place, and I think

deep inside of me...I didn't think I could do it...It was like, "No, that's too much. I'm not that smart."

Fernanda continued to struggle during her first year. Because she developed a strong bond with her advisor, she periodically "broke down," during their meetings, and told her advisor that she wanted to leave. Fernanda described her advisor as very patient, an attentive listener to Fernanda's frustrations, and someone who believed in her. She credited her advisor for helping her stay in the program.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, most graduate programs are not designed to ensure the success of graduate students in general, particularly Mexican American students, although some faculty resist those mechanisms as illustrated in Fernanda's example. For the most part, in an effort to maintain a level of prestige, graduate programs often develop mechanisms and structures to weed students out of programs and use a deficit discourse to explain the limited numbers of Mexican American students graduating from these programs. Darcy's (Hispanic, Middle Class, Physical Sciences) graduate faculty actively sought to expel her from the program because she received a C in one of her first graduate classes. Darcy suspected that the faculty's motivation was based more on the fact that she stayed at the same university where she received her bachelor's degree, although the department admitted her knowing that Darcy was an undergraduate from that very program. Darcy was placed on probation and required to retake the course. The fight continued, unfortunately, as another professor openly stated that Darcy was a "poor student...and was never gonna get the Ph.D.," at which point, a high-ranking

administrator in the graduate school, who was known for advocating on behalf of students of color, was called in by Darcy's advisor to mediate the conflict:

I never really saw it as a minority issue. I thought they didn't like me because I was staying on against what they thought was the accepted way....[T]he more I think about it the more I wonder if their insistence that I was a poor student had to do with being a minority...."

After this incident, Darcy managed to obtain external funding for her research and rarely interacted with her department because she knew the faculty did not support her. By obtaining external funding, she may have precluded the faculty in her department from finding another reason to force her out of the program.

Despite the various obstacles participants experienced along their journeys to the doctorate few were prepared for the final obstacle that many described as "the wall." Many participants described the last few months of working on their dissertations as more difficult than other obstacles they experienced. Participants remembered feeling mentally exhausted and questioning their decision to obtain a Ph.D. Others, like Nieves (Chicano, Poor, Humanities), spent years procrastinating and applied for teaching assistantships and fellowships rather than focusing on completing the dissertation, "You become this really excellent graduate student." During those last moments, many asked for support from advisors and peers, as well as medical assistance. In some instances, participants focused on the outcomes that would result from paving the way for others, knowing that their sacrifices would lead to better opportunities for their siblings, extended families, and future generations. As Fernanda (Mexican, Middle Class,

Education) reminded her Latina friends, “*Si una Gringa...no termina* [If a White woman doesn’t finish her doctorate] it’s okay. *Pero tú eres Mexicana y lo que tú haces* [But you are Mexican and what you do] reflects on your whole community.” Going back home would not necessarily disappoint their families, but the participants shared that they would later resent their decisions to quit. Pride and potential shame played significant roles in keeping the participants focused on completing their dissertations. Regardless of the obstacles that contributed to “The Struggle,” the participants, many of whom were the only Mexican Americans in their programs, knew that they had to persevere if only to help the next Mexican American who would enter their programs.

Themes in Reproducing the Mexican American Master Narrative

The findings (re)presented in this theme exemplified the values of persistence and individual determination coupled with pride, particularly for participants who were first-generation college students and felt they could not fail because they were paving the way for others. In most of the *testimonios* [life narratives], participants relied on campus, community, and family networks to navigate obstacles. Therefore, the narratives were not examples of individual processes in overcoming the struggle in college or graduate school. The way in which the narratives were shared could provide a dangerous message to others who are preparing to take similar educational pathways because the focus remains on the marginalized individual to take action rather than the institution’s responsibility and obligation to support all students. The Mexican American master narrative of “The Struggle” permits institutions to maintain racist policies and practices because the few Mexican Americans who graduate from college and/or graduate school

reproduce messages of resiliency and self-efficacy while institutional agents are not held accountable for creating hostile campus climates.

Certainly, developing future faculty, researchers, and practitioners should be a central focus of graduate programs; however, I contend that the focus on maintaining or garnering greater levels of prestige pushes Mexican American students and students of color out of these programs. As Jesús (Chicano, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) explained, “[There is] a lot of hype that racist institutions propagate in order to legitimate their elite status and...to justify discrimination of people who are perceived as inferior.” As evidenced in participants’ *testimonios* [life narratives], graduate programs and faculty invoke a deficit discourse in reference to Mexican American graduate school success and/or failure rather than assessing the ways in which graduate programs and faculty serve as barriers. In many instances, the primary means of survival against forces attempting to push participants out of their graduate programs was the attainment of external fellowships. By obtaining these financial resources from external institutions, participants were no longer tied to their departments under threat of pulling funding; in some respects, they became somewhat impervious to departmental obstacles.

Counter-Narratives

As evidenced in the one counter-narrative I found, a majority of participants cited obstacles throughout their journeys to the doctorate. Nieves’s (Chicano, Poor, Humanities) *testimonio* [life narrative] involved struggles during his childhood, but he provided an interesting counter-narrative of advantage he created for himself during graduate school. Nieves’s story of receiving a prestigious fellowship reflected how

external funding could help Mexican American students transform into valuable commodities for graduate programs. As part of the graduate application process, Nieves was invited to visit multiple campuses. On the second day of his visit to a Research I institution on the West Coast, he was informed that he received a prestigious fellowship, “The next thing I know, I was the center of attention. [T]his wasn’t the affirmative action grant, this was the White competition grant. Everyone wanted to be my friend.” Nieves perceived that he was a strong candidate without the fellowship, but felt that the department seemed to think otherwise until the fellowship, as a signal of value inherent in perceptions of prestige, transformed him into a person of interest. He thought, “This is crap, but I’ll take it,” because admission into this particular program would garner greater recognition for him in the future. After entering the program, he felt that the competitive environment was a “political snake pit,” but he maneuvered through the department culture by staying “under the radar.” Perhaps the reason he could disengage from the program politics was due to external funding. In addition, he did not interact with faculty very often until he reached candidate status when the faculty determined that he was serious about his research. However, he knew how to strategize and advocate for himself from previous experiences and reported few problems adjusting to the independent nature of his graduate program.

Discussion

An aspect of the study involved understanding how Mexican Americans navigated through potential obstacles in their journeys to the doctorate. Discussions of obstacles in secondary education and college were more connected to issues of racism

and classism. I believe that by the time participants entered graduate school, the acquired community cultural wealth provided enough of a support mechanism to establish internal locus of control and motivation. Despite the obstacles, participants felt a high degree of self-efficacy in surmounting the obstacles; after all, every participant in this study managed to navigate through various educational levels to earn the doctorate. I argue that these rationalizations, in part, are due to participants identifying as first-generation college students, who were forced to pave their own journeys to obtaining the doctorate. In order to achieve their educational goals, participants walked away from situations that could have been remedied through the restructuring of institutional policies and practices, although there was no accounting for changes in department culture. Graduate school obstacles were more focused on funding; building positive relationships with advisors and peers; and navigating between family responsibilities and graduate programs, regardless of social class status and parental educational attainment. The Mexican American master narrative of “The Struggle” is vital to recognize and (re)interpret as Mexican American students navigate through educational systems. However, the focus on individual self-efficacy and resiliency cloak the role of institutional actors and structures that are constructed in an effort to prohibit and/or remain indifferent to Mexican American academic achievement.

The Horatio Alger Myth

An example of how stories of individual self-efficacy and resiliency can be used against Mexican Americans is the Horatio Alger Myth. Simplistic in form, Horatio Alger’s stories present “a model people can supposedly easily duplicate in their own

lives, to overcome economic, cultural, or political frustrations” (Moraru, 1999, p. 240). Placed in the context of Mexican American educational experiences, the Horatio Alger Myth is an extension of the master narrative, “If Mexican Americans work hard enough and persevere, they can succeed in education” and is used to explain that lower levels of Mexican American educational attainment are attributed to Mexican American complacency. Rather than considering the structures that prevent many Mexican/Mexican American communities from advancing within education and in the general society, blame is placed on having the wrong cultural values or not having enough determination and work ethic to find success. I argue that, through the use of cultural capital, White middle and upper class communities garner greater access and power in society, while drawing attention to the few individuals from marginalized communities who manage to succeed in the dominant culture or demonstrate resiliency, as described in the section above, and thereby reproducing the master narrative. The tools that the dominant culture utilizes to navigate social systems are constructed to favor White middle and upper class communities and are based on having knowledge of the hidden rules and curricula that aid in obtaining educational success. However, Mexican/Mexican American communities are (mis)led to believe that they can achieve success using the dominant culture’s tools, which results in reproducing the Horatio Alger Myth.

The findings demonstrated that, although a majority of the participants reproduced the master narrative “If Mexican Americans work hard enough and persevere, they can succeed in education,” they activated their community cultural wealth to

succeed, rather than the limited cultural capital they may have acquired along their journeys to doctorate. Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) is composed of several types of capital, including linguistic (real-world literacy skills), social (kinship networks and loose ties to other social networks), navigational (manipulation of the educational system), resistant (awareness of and agency against racism, sexism, and classism), aspirational (high expectations for academic achievement), and familial (cultural identity and sense of belonging).

Reproducing the Master Narrative

If, as Bourdieu (1973) asserted, the means of obtaining cultural capital is either through symbolic inheritance or proper schooling, one can argue that educational systems have an obligation to illuminate the pathways to college and graduate school by teaching the hidden curriculum, the very mechanism that provides cultural capital as described in Chapter Two. However, as evidenced in participants' narratives, school administrators, counselors, and teachers in high school as well as advisors and faculty in college/graduate school, whom participants considered as authority figures, served as obstacles to achieving educational aspirations. Some participants' parents activated social capital by connecting with school workers such as teachers' aids and cafeteria staff, many of whom they knew from childhood. Yesenia's (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) mother received advice from the teachers' aids at the beginning of each school year regarding the best teachers at Yesenia's grade level, "*Ésta teacher es buen maldita* [This teacher is very mean]. Go to this teacher, she's really nice." Utilizing her working class networks, a form of social capital within

Mexican/Mexican American communities, Yesenia's mother tried to give her daughter the best education available.

As participants progressed through college, many of them did not feel encouraged to pursue doctorates. Teresa (Mexican American, Poor, 1st Generation College Student) stated that she knew of other students with lower academic grade point averages who were advised to apply for graduate school, while none of her faculty talked with her. Her graduate school interests were fostered through conversations with her friends, which is an example of social capital. Teresa always felt that school and college agents underestimated her abilities because of her race, social class, and disability and their neglect spurred her to "prove them wrong," which is an example of resistant capital. A few years ago, Teresa participated on a panel at a conference and saw her undergraduate professor in the audience:

I told her, "I don't think you remember me, but I was in your undergraduate class. I have a Ph.D. now." [My professor said], "Oh, Teresa, there was never any doubt in my mind that you would eventually earn a Ph.D.," and I said, "But you never told me to even pursue a graduate degree."

Her confrontation with her former professor resulted from Teresa's frustration with the ways in which faculty sorted their undergraduate students according to what they valued in potential graduate students. In numerous *testimonios* [life narratives], the theme of stratification in educational aspirations was prevalent. Although children are told that they can aspire to enter any profession, there is a ceiling to those aspirations for marginalized communities. This ceiling is reinforced by advisors, teachers,

administrators, and faculty who believe they are well-intentioned, but purposely sort students into categories of success or failure. Participants were often steered in various directions such as entering community college instead of a four-year institution, not studying science, or earning an Ed.D., rather than a Ph.D., as Monique (Chicana, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) explained. She met with a White woman in her university's Education program and asked about the Ph.D. program. The advisor told her, "I really see you as much more of an Ed.D. type...because you're so practice-oriented. I don't know how you would fit into doing research." Monique was incensed that the advisor did not perceive her as a researcher and decided to apply for the Ph.D., "I'm gonna see what I have to do 'cause I'm getting a Ph.D. 'cause I want this woman to know." Monique's drive to earn a doctorate (aspirational capital) coupled with fighting racist stereotypes (resistant capital) gave her enough motivation to apply for Ph.D. programs and later resulted in receiving multiple dissertation fellowships.

Because most of the participants decided to apply to graduate school with limited guidance from undergraduate faculty, knowledge about the application process was often gained through social networks. Participants' activation of social capital reflected Horatio Alger's image of "the benefactor" who becomes invested in helping, in this instance, a college/graduate student or junior faculty member achieve academic success. In the case of first-generation participants, social networks were constructed with members of local Communities of Color, affluent White communities, university administrators, and faculty. Araceli (Mexican-American, Working Class, Humanities) first attended community college after high school. She was involved in fine arts and met

a local fine arts patron who offered to help her if she experienced any difficulties. Araceli applied to various four-year colleges and received a large scholarship from a private university, which she thought would cover her tuition expenses. When she transferred to the university, however, she found that she could not afford to stay and contacted the fine arts patron. The patron and his wife were impressed with Araceli's tenacity (aspirational capital) and offered to give her \$5000 every semester until she graduated, "I couldn't believe how generous people were...because, of course, my other option was...to drop out." Araceli attributed part of her success to White individuals who invested time and resources to help her because there were no Latina/o role models in her local communities and college campuses.

As a secondary school teacher, Fernanda (Mexican, Middle Class, Education) remembered reading journal articles that informed her work as a practitioner and decided to contact one of the primary researchers in her field, "I had a lot of questions as to what I was doing in my class and [asked the professor] about the best practices I was using to teach my kids." They began to correspond regularly and the professor sent Fernanda several articles and resources she could utilize. As a result of their correspondence, the professor encouraged Fernanda to apply to the doctoral program and offered her a research fellowship.

Several participants discussed the challenges they faced in repeatedly applying for graduate school. When Nadia (Hispanic, Middle Class, Education), who worked on campus after college, was first denied for her master's program, she met with the department chair whom she knew through her connections with faculty across campus:

[I] told her, “I’m not a moron. I’d like to get into this program. I know my GPA doesn’t reflect what I can do. What can you suggest to me that I can do in order to get admitted the next go-round?”

The chair advised her to retake a few of her undergraduate courses and register for graduate classes in the department, which Nadia completed, but she was denied a second time. The third time, noting Nadia’s determination, the outcome differed:

[B]ecause I had done everything that she told me to [do] she was gonna take a chance on me. I had a really good reputation at work [on campus] and I came across as mature so...she wanted to see what I could do...and [the first semester I] earned almost all A’s.

Nadia’s story was an example of aspirational capital, having high expectations for academic achievement by pursuing a Ph.D.; navigational capital, fulfilling requirements to gain admittance into the doctoral program; and social capital, developing connections to the department chair through her university networks. Many of the participants’ *testimonios* [life narratives] highlighted the role of academic advisors who supported and empowered the participants during their graduate study. Some advisors helped to decipher the hidden curriculum so that participants understood what was implicitly and explicitly expected of them throughout graduate school; some of whom used that knowledge to uncover the hidden curriculum as faculty members. A majority of the participants cited teaching assistants, many of whom were students of color, as the unsung heroes and heroines who inspired them to enter graduate school and had profound effects on many of participants’ aspirational capital.

Discussion

Although educational research presents cultural capital as the primary means for entering and completing college and graduate school, participants who had limited cultural capital still managed to successfully navigate through educational systems by activating their community cultural wealth. After reflecting on participants' *testimonios* [life narratives], I believe that the concept of cultural capital in educational research has created a dependency on demystifying a hidden curriculum that will always remain hidden to Mexican/Mexican American communities. In this sense, Mexican/Mexican American communities must develop their own tools (community cultural wealth) to successfully navigate through social systems controlled by the dominant culture or critique the model and expose it.

Choosing Not to See Oppression

Sharing experiences related to racism, sexism, and classism were difficult for several of the participants, as many of these instances of oppression were still emotional for them. After interviewing all of the participants at least twice, I believe that relationships were formed in which participants felt more comfortable disclosing uncomfortable experiences. Their apparent openness, however, not only focused on challenging moments in confronting their own oppression, but moments when participants actively chose not to recognize racism, sexism, and/or classism in their experiences. I contend that these particular stories reproduced the master narratives of colorblindness, gender blindness, and class blindness. I first present stories that

reproduced these forms of blindness to oppression and then discuss counter-narratives that demonstrated participants' resistance against oppression.

Reproducing the Master Narratives

My dad grew up with a lot of discrimination and he would say, "*Déjalos que vayan primero* [Let them go first] 'cause [the people] were White. *Ellos son más importantes. Tú te puedes esperar* [They are more important. You can wait]." I think about it now and [my dad] was telling me, "They count more than you do" and it's like, "No, that's not right. There's an inequity here" (Rosa, Hispanic, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student).

Some participants shared instances that they perceived as racist, sexist, and/or classist yet tried to rationalize the oppression experienced. One such example of choosing not to see sexism was Rosa, a secondary school administrator. She knew of hiring inequities at her school and explained that in her district administrative positions and "work promotions go [to] the male coaches." She claimed that it was "just politics" and then explained how she coped with the discrimination, "[F]or a while you stew about it and you have yourself a little pity party and then you get over it...." What was striking about Rosa's *testimonio* [life narrative] was how she rationalized not being considered for promotions, despite her credentials and years of experiences, "[I tell myself,] 'This is the place I'm supposed to be.'" Perhaps rationalizing was the best way to cope with the apparent discrimination that was occurring at her work site, although it seemed that Rosa was reproducing her father's advice about deferring to people in positions of power. Rosa acknowledged that she tended to respect authority figures and not question

individuals' decisions, even if these decisions were incorrect, "If you make a mistake, I still need to be loyal to you because you're giving me this opportunity, [it's] just out of gratitude. [I think to myself], 'No, I owe them something 'cause they believed in me.'"

It is possible that Rosa's sense of loyalty and gratitude for the opportunities she perceived she was *given* (i.e., not earned) kept her from holding individuals accountable for decisions that were potentially racist and sexist in nature. Her narrative alluded to subordination to the status quo, although she did not connect her inaction with the subordination she described in her father's statement that opened this theme.

Other participants argued that opportunities were available to everyone and that some Communities of Color used oppression as an excuse to not succeed. In some instances, participants from middle class backgrounds chose not to see racism or classism nor acknowledge the social structures created to keep Mexican/Mexican American communities from garnering power in society. Nadia (Hispanic, Middle Class, 1st Generation College Student) contended that she did not receive particular opportunities because, "I [didn't] work hard enough for it or I [wasn't] smart enough. It's not because I wasn't given the opportunity or anything race-related." The intersection of race and social class and resulting access to educational opportunities were not at the forefront of her reflection. Similarly, as a first-generation immigrant, Alicia (Mexican, Middle Class, 3rd Generation College Student) seemed to support the myth of the American Dream, believing that everyone had an opportunity to succeed, especially Mexican Americans because "there's things like Hispanic programs or grants or fellowships. So you can't use your race as an excuse for what you cannot achieve. Everybody has barriers to cross."

Certainly, one can understand Alicia's perspective that everyone has difficulties. However, missing from the discussion, as in Nadia's story, is the connection between opportunity and social class. Alicia had opportunities because her father was a professor with an advanced degree and her family was able to pay for all of her educational expenses. She chose not to recognize how these factors contributed to greater access to opportunities than for less affluent Mexican Americans.

Mike (Mexican, Middle Class, 2nd Generation College Student) began his narrative by describing the day his sister shut the door of the car on his thumb. Knowing that his sister would not open the car door, he had to reach to open the door himself. This story served as the basis for his philosophy on obtaining success in education and in life. He believed that he was the best advocate for himself and did not believe he needed help from school agents, "The person you can count on the most is yourself. I knew that if I wanted to be a success then I needed to go out and make myself a success, which is true for everybody." The intersections of social class and his parents' educational levels were apparent in Mike's narrative, as he explained the importance of "pulling yourself up" and believing that "you're gonna be successful," which evoked the Horatio Alger Myth and the idea that anything is possible if only one believes. Mike also believed that failure was a result of "the actions [Mexican Americans] took, not because of the actions other people took upon them." He conjectured that any type of discrimination that he could have experienced in college would not have kept him from achieving his goals, "[W]e have to take ownership in our futures and if you leave anything to chance...your chances of success go down. I choose to not leave anything to chance."

Themes in Reproducing the Master Narratives

As the findings suggest, believing that one can be successful does not always open doors or clear pathways to success. Although Mike stated that he was dedicated to “teaching people to fish” in order to rely on themselves, his actions did not change institutional and societal structures that prevented marginalized communities from accessing equal opportunity and equity in education. In this sense, his and other participants’ narratives that reproduced blindness to forms of oppression did not account for the ways in which the dominant culture creates ceilings to one’s aspirations. Choosing not to see forms of oppression meant choosing not to see social inequalities that were based on social structures devised by the dominant culture to garner greater power while subjugating marginalized communities. Rather, the emphasis was placed on the individual and his/her apparent complacency or inaction as the root cause of low Mexican American educational attainment.

Counter-Narratives

Several of the participants refused to reproduce the master narratives of colorblindness, gender blindness, and social class blindness. They found ways to fight against the oppression they experienced and witnessed along their educational journeys. By choosing to confront racism, sexism, and/or classism, participants shared counter-narratives and the consequences resulting from such confrontations. Cuahtemoc (Chicano, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student), for example, believed that leadership was not connected to race, class, or gender. During college, he was involved in student government and during one particular election, ran a campaign with a White

student who included Cuahtemoc in his cabinet because he could outreach to students of color. At the time, Cuahtemoc thought the student was “trying to be nice,” but soon learned that the student was using Cuahtemoc to his advantage. After the election, when Proposition 187 in California was introduced, the student offered to buy Cuahtemoc, “my one-way ticket back to Mexico.” Cuahtemoc realized that he shielded himself from racism by believing in the colorblind rhetoric, but, “once you start entering leadership positions...you’re a threat. I’m really looked at as a deficit.” Learning about the racist perceptions of others continued into his master’s program at a Research I institution in the Midwest. Cuahtemoc chose this institution, despite full-funding offers at other institutions, because he sensed that the program did not want him; he later admitted that his arrogance in accepting an offer out of spite was a detriment. Despite his philosophy on running as fast as he could (see the section on The Struggle), he felt that the program “wore me down intellectually...but I survived.” These experiences reshaped his views of White students and racist institutions, as well as his role in perpetuating the master narrative of colorblindness.

Yesenia (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) was encouraged from an early age to defend herself and take action against the racism she experienced (see the section on The Struggle). Her parents’ advice kept her motivated throughout her educational journeys, including her work as a faculty member, where she was labeled a troublemaker because she questioned the department culture and the unwritten rules that seemed to support some faculty and not others, namely faculty of color. Her friends urged her to “just conform, Yesenia, [and] you would have an easier

life.” Yesenia explained that she found it difficult to not discuss inequalities in society and within educational institutions, but could not garner many allies, “Nobody wants to talk about inequality and power dynamics. It’s depressing.” However, she refused to maintain a level of ignorance about these issues and “kept on trying to buck the system, trying to break those barriers.” Yesenia felt she had purpose in taking action and encouraged her students to take similar paths. She reminded them that in order to fight against oppression, one must develop strategies “to be calm and resolve it,” which she learned from watching César Chávez who would “sit at the table to bargain...face-to-face with the persons who were treating him like shit. That’s diplomacy and I learned that you could really solve a problem in a very positive way.”

Discussion

For participants who chose not to see oppression within their experiences or the experiences of other Mexican Americans, the notion of taking advantage of “opportunity” was prevalent in their narratives. I argue that “opportunity” was manifested differently along social class hierarchies and that access to resources and social networks resulted in educational and economic “opportunities” which were reflections of social class, gender, parental level of education, and language acquisition. In addition, participants seemed to choose which oppressions they would recognize based upon their own rationalizations for success, as Rosa illustrated by seeing racism but not sexism.

The middle class participants’ stories that reproduced the master narrative of colorblindness, gender-blindness, and class-blindness were not surprising, nor the counter-narratives from mostly working class participants who were first-generation

college students. However, when considering the findings from previous sections in which working class participants argued for development of mechanisms such as self-efficacy, strategy, and hustle, it seemed that they would reproduce the colorblindness master narrative. I believe the reason they did not was due to how those individual mechanisms were actually survival tools used to break through oppressive systems. Working class participants' use of these mechanisms was not only connected to advocating for oneself, but as a way to maintain one's educational aspirations in the midst of racism, sexism, and classism. Middle class participants' narratives that reflected educational attainment and success as individual triumphs and not outcomes from one's environment and social context continued to perpetuate a master narrative that successful navigation in U.S. society was based on colorblind, gender-blind, and invisible social class structures.

Affirmative Action

Discussions about meritocracy and affirmative action indicated that hegemonic forces within secondary and post-secondary educational institutions spread messages that Mexican Americans who enter college and graduate school are only accepted as affirmative action cases. The master narrative, "Mexican Americans are only in college/graduate school because they are minorities" attempts to discount Mexican American students in higher education, crediting the creation of affirmative action policies as the only reason for Mexican American presence on colleges and universities. Monique (Chicana, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student), for example, was often confronted in her residence hall with comments such as, "You must have a really

great scholarship” or, “Am I smart or is it because I’m low income and that’s why [the university] needed me for a quota.” As a result of racist comments such as these, Mexican Americans are more prone to leave college or graduate school because they face hostile environments in which they are constantly interrogated about their intelligence and skill levels and held under suspicion because they supposedly have not “earned the right” to be in college and graduate school.

In the midst of controversy, affirmative action stands as a tool for equity in higher education, helping Mexican American students gain access to and successfully complete college and graduate school. Many of the participants disclosed that they were recipients of equal opportunity programs and affirmative action policies, while other participants distanced themselves from those connections as a reaction to the master narrative “Mexican Americans are only in college/graduate school because they are minorities.” Some participants did not want to attribute their college/graduate school admissions, financial assistance in the form of minority scholarships/fellowships, and/or employment after graduate school on racial factors. Instead, they focused on stories that justified participants’ educational successes through hard work and internal motivation, as discussed in the section on the Struggle discussed in this chapter. I contend that affirmative action programs and policies enable Mexican Americans to access opportunities and networks that are not available to them, not because they do not deserve them, as the master narrative explicates, but because some Mexican/Mexican American communities have limited access to cultural and social capital that make those opportunities for White, affluent communities more readily available.

A majority of participants received minority-based financial aid or applied for minority research opportunities during college and graduate school. As a result, few participants could argue against affirmative action, although I present one participant who distanced herself from the affirmative action discourse. Then, I present counter-narratives that supported the use of affirmative action policies and programs in higher education.

Reproducing the Master Narrative

Applying to several graduate programs increases one's chances of entering a graduate program, as well as the chances of making decisions based on fit and potential funding, rather than risking one's graduate school opportunities with one choice. This advice is part of the hidden curriculum in accessing graduate school as several participants explained. However, applying to graduate school is expensive and, for several of the participants, finding assistance to off-set the costs of application fees was essential to accessing graduate school. Three participants utilized a particular service dedicated to increasing the number of underrepresented graduate students. Participants completed one application, which was distributed to participating institutions. Two of the three participants found the service very useful. However, the first time Valeria (Mexican-American, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) utilized the service, she was denied from all of the programs to which she applied. The second time she applied, she decided not to use the program because she was concerned that "I was already setting myself apart from the applicants and not in a positive way. [W]hen you go in with the [service]...your application is different because you're using the

[service's] application, not the school's application." Although the service was focused on helping underrepresented students, participants similar to Valeria felt that utilizing the service automatically Othered students of color. It is unknown if graduate programs perceive graduate students of color differently when they utilize services such as the one cited in Valeria's example but the fears of negative perceptions helped to reproduce the master narrative.

Counter-Narratives

Prior to entering college, several participants were involved in summer bridge programs sponsored through equal opportunity initiatives. Sara (Hispanic, Working Class, 1st Generation College Student) enrolled in a summer bridge program focused on science-related courses. By the time she entered college, Sara felt more connected to the campus and to a community comprised of students of color who became "family." Many of the participants who attended college in California utilized campus centers dedicated to serving students of color, which were often funded through Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) offices and budgets. During his first year in college, Jesús (Chicano, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) thought of racism as an abstract phenomenon. He had an understanding of how racism worked, but found difficulty "talking about [racism] as the exclusion that I faced, the disrespect that I experienced." Racism became more concrete for him during a particular incident regarding a protest against the student government, which was revoking the budget for the EOP office. However, Jesús did not realize the extent to which the cuts to EOP funding would directly affect him because limited budgets led to few resources and limited salaries for

counselors who could serve underrepresented and first-generation college students, “I just knew that the [student government] was cutting money to the racial minority counselors on campus. I knew that it was because they didn’t take us into consideration, they didn’t care about our success....” The actions taken by the student government illustrated the negative rhetoric surrounding affirmative action with apparently minor consideration of how such budget cuts affected students of color, first-generation college students, and low-income White students as well.

Undergraduate research programs provided seven participants with research experiences and funding that encouraged them to aspire to graduate school. Natalia (Mexican-American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) applied for a research opportunity during her junior year and visited a Midwest Research I institution for the summer. She described the program as a venue to develop strong bonds with students of color from across the country who shared “common struggles and common ambitions.” Natalia was assigned to a notable faculty member in her field who served as her mentor, took GRE preparation courses, and learned about graduate school. Because her mentor was often conducting research, his graduate student, who was half-Mexican and half-White, served as an informal mentor. She credited him with helping her understand statistical software and particular research methods that were essential for the successful completion of her honors thesis. Through her summer experience, Natalia felt prepared to enter graduate school. A few participants who received similar undergraduate research funding did not connect the programs with increasing graduate school aspirations; rather, these programs were viewed as avenues for increasing

financial aid. Nieves (Chicano, Poor, Humanities) applied for multiple research funding programs throughout his undergraduate career because he could “get money and an apartment for the summer.” As a low-income student, Nieves consistently sought opportunities to make money, a “survival instinct,” as he explained. Applying to graduate school was not a priority for Nieves and when he graduated from college he thought he would never return to school. However, his experiences conducting research set him on a pathway that eventually led to the doctorate.

Opportunities to commiserate with fellow doctoral students of color were available through annual meetings of minority fellowship programs. Twelve participants received pre-doctoral, dissertation, and/or post-doctoral fellowships through the Ford Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the American Sociological Association, American Psychological Association, and the Lumina Foundation. The participants who received these fellowships were grateful that they could concentrate on their research because they had this external funding and, most importantly, they had the opportunity to build social networks with future faculty of color from across the country. In addition, as a result of developing these networks, participants connected with potential employment and publishing opportunities after graduate school.

Although many of the affirmative action counter-narratives were focused on students of color, it is important to note that affirmative action also assists women, particular those in male-dominated disciplines and work environments. Several of the female participants who were scientists were involved in programs centered on increasing the number of women in the sciences through high school and college outreach. The

gender-specific programs were facilitated by female scientists, which inspired participants such as Darcy (Hispanic, Middle Class, Physical Sciences) to major in the sciences once they entered college.

Darcy's counter-narrative against the "reverse discrimination" rhetoric was one of the most striking examples of confronting racism in graduate school. One of the members of her graduate research group constantly remarked that he, as a White male, was "oppressed because all the fellowships go to the minorities" and engaged Darcy in heated debates about affirmative action. Darcy explained in her narrative that all graduate students in her department were fully funded as teaching or research assistants, but she recognized that there were some fellowships designed to assist students of color and women in the sciences. As many of the participants who were scientists asserted, regardless of how they were admitted to their programs or funded throughout graduate school, they still had to produce "good science" and work hard to maintain high levels of achievement; in their opinions, exceeding the minimum standards for all graduate students in general. Nevertheless, Darcy felt there was a tone in the discussions with her White male colleague that implied, "I worked very hard to get to where I am today and you just got stuff handed to you." At times, Darcy empathized that her colleague did not have the same access to the few fellowships available to students of color, but also shared her frustration with the accusations that she was only an affirmative action case, "I wish that we did move in a world where [race and gender] didn't matter because people sort of look at you [like], 'Are you here on one of those scholarships?'" The affirmative action programs that supported increasing the representation of women and people of color in

underrepresented fields had complex outcomes. These programs were, in many instances, the only mechanisms that helped female participants enter science fields, despite their academic achievement, yet these programs could not necessarily protect the participants from hostile environments perpetrated by White men who felt disadvantaged because they were not minorities or women and therefore, could not access particular opportunities.

Participants also discussed contending with affirmative action rhetoric in their faculty and staff positions. Rhonda (Chicana, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) learned that she was a “target of opportunity” hire after she was hired at a university on the West Coast and “you encounter people telling you, ‘The only reason you got this position was because you’re a person of color,’ and...they’re implying that you’re not qualified.” According to several participants, the Target of Opportunity program in the University of California system was designed to encourage departments to hire faculty of color, although literature on these programs explained that the purpose was to diverge from traditional hiring protocol to hire outstanding, “highly qualified” applicants. From Aztlan’s (Chicano, Working Class, Physical Sciences) perspective, the Target of Opportunity program was designed to reward departments that hired faculty of color by adding an additional faculty line for a White person. Therefore, in the event that the faculty of color failed and did not receive tenure, the department still had a new faculty line in their budgets. Regardless of the purpose of the program, faculty across the university knew that Rhonda was a Target of Opportunity hire and accused her of not having the “qualifications of what it takes to be a faculty member.” Her example

demonstrated that the affirmative action policies that were designed to increase the number of students of color and faculty of color on college campuses also created hostile environments filled with suspicion and accusations against Communities of Color.

Discussion

A majority of participants from different social classes and disciplines were beneficiaries of affirmative action policies and equal opportunity programs in college and/or graduate school. For the most part, the programs were designed to increase participants' social and cultural capital as they navigated through educational systems. Regardless of their involvement in these programs, participants were still required to succeed in classes and in their research, which counters the master narrative that Mexican Americans are only in college/graduate school because of affirmative action. Equal opportunity programs, racial/ethnic cultural centers on campus, and minority fellowships provide strong academic and social foundations for Mexican American students on hostile college campuses, but completing undergraduate and graduate degrees involves individual effort in combination with local and national support networks and funding mechanisms.

The "reverse discrimination" rhetoric plays into the fears of Mexican American student communities believing that they do not deserve an admissions space in their programs or campuses or try to keep distant from any connection to affirmative action programs, thus reproducing the master narrative. What seems forgotten are the tools developed by the dominant culture to forge White student spaces through alumni legacy admissions that traditionally assist White students who may not be qualified to

matriculate to a particular college, as well as college honors programs, which provide tutoring services and individual advisors and staff for honors students. The level of interrogation is high for Mexican Americans and students of color because their increasing presence on college campuses threatens traditionally White academic environments.

Obligations to Mexican/Mexican American Communities

Many participants believed that Mexican/Mexican American communities and research/professional careers were linked to service. In some cases, their desires to serve their communities through research were prohibited by faculty advisors. In other cases, participants believed they were steered into researching Mexican issues that they were not interested in studying. Because of the dearth of Mexican American Ph.D.s, I believe that any opportunity to increase the level of knowledge production specific to Mexican/Mexican American communities creates a pull from the communities to encourage Mexican Americans to research and teach about Mexican/Mexican American issues. I first present stories that reproduced the Mexican American master narrative “Obligation to Mexican/Mexican American Communities” and then participants’ counter-narratives that resisted service to Mexican/Mexican American communities within academic and research contexts.

Reproducing the Mexican American Master Narrative

Although some participants were involved in Mexican American activities and organizations prior to their doctoral programs, over half felt that they could make strong contributions to Mexican/Mexican American communities through their dissertation

research. In a continued effort to maintain participants' anonymity, I will not discuss specific dissertation topics; instead, I will uncover participants' interests in and experiences with studying issues for and about Mexican/Mexican American communities.

Participants' research interests were not only scholarly exercises. Participants wanted to connect their research with advocacy for students of color on college campuses. For example, as Teresa (Mexican American, Poor, Social & Behavioral Sciences) determined to which graduate programs she would apply, she stated that she would not compromise with faculty who "wanted me to do monolingual English research." The doctoral program she chose seemed interested in her work and funded research trips to South Texas every year and Central America one summer. Because of her extensive work experience prior to entering the program, faculty often invited her to present in their courses and co-author papers and, therefore, extended mentoring relationships to reflect greater collegiality between Teresa and her professors. The investment came at a price because, as the only Latina in the program, she was often required to advocate for students of color and faculty of color at university committees and faculty searches, which took time away from her research and made her feel frustrated that the university was using her as a minority spokesperson. Her frustrations continued after graduate school when her department chair advised her that, "If you ever hope to get tenured, you need to stop doing [this Latino] research." After a few years, Teresa left the department, moved back to Texas, and is now the chair of her academic department.

Now in their faculty and researcher/practitioner positions, some participants continue to advocate for equity in hiring practices and access to higher education for undocumented and underrepresented students. Some of the participants earned positions in upper administration in their departments and universities, which gave them a platform through which they enacted programs and educational opportunities for under-served communities:

[As a high level administrator], I made it so that we have a pocket of money...that can be allocated for undocumented students and because my [staff] knows what my interests are, they'll help me find opportunities to make things more accessible to under-represented groups (Nadia, Hispanic, Middle Class, Education).

Other participants became very involved on various university diversity committees and as advisors to student organizations, although, as Rhonda (Chicana, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) commented, "When there's few faculty of color, where do students turn to? They keep turning to you and you could say, 'Oh, I don't have time to deal with you.'" The pressure to help placed Rhonda in a difficult position as she sought tenure while advising five student organizations along with her various committee obligations. Some participants were very specific in their outreach. Mike (Mexican, Middle Class, Physical Sciences) served on multiple boards for national organizations dedicated to increasing the number of Mexican American scientists and engineers, which was supported at his work site. Finally, some participants chose to teach at teaching-intensive institutions rather than Research I universities because they wanted to focus on

serving the large percentages of students of color enrolled at these colleges. Cuahtemoc (Chicano, Working Class, Education) focused his research on improving the “Latino educational infrastructure...producing work that has policy recommendations...trying to prove how history has had an impact on the advancement of critical consciousness in the Chicano community.” Participants who blended their research with service were willing to take a longer process to obtaining tenure, leave their faculty positions if their departments were not supportive of their interests, and work at teaching-intensive institutions that connected them directly with students of color.

Themes in Reproducing the Mexican American Master Narrative

Participants dedicated to serving Mexican/Mexican American communities through research and practice represented all genders, social classes, and disciplines. Because of limited Mexican American faculty representation on most campuses, many of the participants advocated for their communities at the expense of receiving tenure, especially at institutions that did not regard service as highly as teaching or research. Some participants were able to negotiate their interests with their work sites, although the stories cited were from participants who were researchers at government agencies and practitioners, not faculty. As a note, all of the male participants cited a commitment to serving Mexican/Mexican American communities and more information is needed to understand how the men in faculty and research positions seemed to create a seamless relationship between their service and their research. Considering the findings in the Social Constructions of Gender and Education section, perhaps the male participants were able to leverage power using their male privilege within their disciplines and work

environments that helped them find support for serving and advocating for Mexican/Mexican American communities as well as increasing their local and national reputations and social networks.

Counter-Narratives

Participants who chose different research interests not related to Mexican/Mexican American issues often felt pressured to research their communities, were thrust into office politics pertaining to race and gender, and feared being “pigeon-holed.” When Alicia (Mexican, Middle Class, Physical Sciences) started her researcher position after receiving her Ph.D., the administrative assistant in her office “immediately started pulling me into these [discussions] of how there were racial problems in the [work site] and the women aren’t treated [right] and I was like, ‘I just got here. I don’t know anything about this stuff.’” Alicia said that she wanted to help, but she did not want to get involved in office politics at the onset. Lynn (Mexican-American/Chicana, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) chose not to bridge her racial background with her research. She stated that she was interested in “my own history, but that never defined my work.” She preferred to “grapple with my ethnicity,” at a personal level, rather than through the academic discourse. Her decision to focus on other topics within her field affected her admission into several graduate programs. She believed she was rejected from one institution because she did not know that one of the professors in the program wanted to admit a graduate student who “play[ed] the race card.” Lynn was told that she was rejected because she did not include Mexican/Mexican American research topics in her personal statement. As a result of feeling judged by her divergent interests, Lynn

believed that “people should study what they want to study [and] not feel the burden...because I’ve had...really negative encounters with people of my ethnicity trying to push me in certain directions.” Reflective of fulfilling her parents’ advice to strategize and “hustle,” Yesenia (Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences) selected a dissertation topic that had wide-range appeal, particularly for White women, who became “power brokers for me.” She utilized these women to help her find funding for her research.

Themes in Counter-Narratives

Participants who chose not to focus on Mexican/Mexican American issues in their research and service were often chastised for taking different trajectories or felt forced to fulfill certain racialized roles as researchers and faculty. Some participants used their divergent interests to leverage funding from White middle and upper class communities. It is important to note that the counter-narratives that resisted the pull to serve Mexican/Mexican American communities in research and practice were shared by female participants, who may have felt guilty or frustrated about being subjected to typecasting in their research. In addition, considering the pressures many of the female participants faced in balancing work, family, and community, as discussed in the Social Constructions of Gender and Education section in this chapter, the female participants felt that their cultural work in their private lives was private and did not need to be a part of the public academic discourse, especially in male-dominated environments.

Discussion

A majority of participants, regardless of social class, shared narratives of serving Mexican/Mexican American communities either through research, teaching, and/or community work. Because of the limited number of Mexican American doctorates produced annually, there is a push from Mexican/Mexican American communities for the participants to serve as role models, even when their personal and research interests are divergent to discussions of race in secondary and postsecondary classrooms and laboratories. For some participants, sacrificing tenure or the potential of earning tenure was the price they were willing to pay to ensure that they were advocating for the needs of Mexican American students and communities. For others, obtaining tenure was a priority and strategizing the ways in which they could obtain tenure (e.g., researching issues pertaining to the White communities) helped them receive the funding to conduct their research and publish. Unfortunately, the decision to remain distant from social justice work is often construed as obsessing over individualistic successes such as tenure, but the findings suggest that the decisions to advocate for Mexican/Mexican American communities and students was far more complex than dreams about academe. Gender played a role in participants feeling supported to advocate for Mexican/Mexican American communities in their research, service, and community work. Male participants were able to leverage their male privilege within academic environments to advocate for Mexican/Mexican American communities, while some female participants may have felt that in order to survive within academe they needed to distance themselves from race and/or gender discussions and advocacy. Because most of the participants were assistant professors at the time of the interviews, it is difficult to know whether their

commitments to Mexican/Mexican American communities will wane as they traverse tenure processes. At this point, however, a majority of participants negotiated pathways that allowed for service to Mexican/Mexican American communities.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the study was to uncover and contextualize the *testimonios* [life narratives] of 33 individuals of Mexican descent who successfully journeyed along educational pathways to receive their doctorates. As the largest subgroup within the Latina/o population, Mexican Americans have the lowest completion rates in high school and college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006b). In terms of graduate degree attainment, out of every 100 Mexican American children, less than one will earn a doctorate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The disparities in Mexican American educational attainment are often analyzed from a deficit perspective focused on student failure rather than understanding how successful Mexican Americans managed to navigate through educational systems and complete their degrees. This study provided a different approach to understanding Mexican American educational attainment by analyzing factors that helped Mexican Americans succeed and created barriers that affected their journeys to the doctorate, particularly through the construction of master narratives and counter-narratives.

Overview of the Study

The findings addressed the study's three main research questions: (1) To what extent have racism, sexism, and/or classism surfaced in Mexican American Ph.D.s' journeys to the doctorate? (2) To what extent are the ways in which Mexican American Ph.D.s share their narratives reflective of the intersections of race, social class, and gender? (3) What structures or mechanisms (e.g., kinship and social networks, academic/professional socialization) are employed in Mexican American Ph.D.s' journeys to the doctorate? I also included sub-questions that reflected the concept of

master narratives and counter-narratives and the intersections of race, social class and gender: (1a) To what extent do Mexican American Ph.D.s reproduce master narratives that support racism, sexism, and/or classism? (1b) To what extent do Mexican American Ph.D.s craft counter-narratives against racism, sexism, and/or classism? (3a) To what extent are structures or mechanisms activated differently by gender? (3b) To what extent are structures or mechanisms activated differently by socio-economic status?

The study uncovered master narratives well-documented in educational research and master narratives deeply woven into the social fabric until the study exposed them. Master narratives are stories told at a societal level that “legitimate [the dominant culture’s] power and position” (Tate, 1998, p. 216), while subjugating marginalized communities by perpetuating stereotypes about these communities. These stories are shared through various institutions such as the media, education, and government and seep into the subconscious of marginalized communities to the extent that they are reproduced by marginalized communities themselves. Master narratives share a dialectic relationship with counter-narratives. Similar to slave narratives (Burns, 2006; Cassuto, 1996), counter-narratives are crafted first to expose forms of oppression and individuals/communities who perpetuate that oppression. Then, counter-narratives are shared within marginalized communities as a form of empowerment and resistance against oppressive systems in society. From a Chicana feminist perspective, the latter utility of the counter-narratives is found in the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999), which is a psychological space between opposing ideologies that challenges Mexican/Mexican American communities to make meaning from the tensions between the dominant culture

and their communities. By developing counter-narratives, Mexican/Mexican American communities can maintain their cultural integrity; successfully navigate through institutional structures that are racist, sexist, and classist by learning from the experiences of others; and resist master narratives that portray Mexican/Mexican American communities from a deficit perspective. This analysis led to uncovering *testimonios* [life narratives] that resisted and reproduced master narratives constructed by the dominant culture to subjugate Mexican/Mexican American communities and justify low rates of Mexican American educational attainment. In addition, I found master narratives constructed within Mexican/Mexican American communities that created an image of struggle to access and complete higher education, which did not account for the experiences of Mexican Americans from privileged backgrounds; and maintained traditional gender roles within family structures and academic environments.

This study incorporated narrative inquiry, a type of qualitative inquiry that utilizes interdisciplinary approaches and methods to (re)present and (re)interpret participants' *testimonios* [life narratives]. I blended narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993), which analyzes how participants shared their *testimonios* [life narratives], with critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a), which is a process for challenging dominant ideologies. *Testimonios* expose intersections of race, social class, and gender in an effort to empower and validate the lived experiences of Mexican American Ph.D.s as truths. The purpose of these *testimonios* was not only to (re)present the lived experiences of individuals, but to express the collective consciousness among a community of Mexican American administrators, faculty, and researchers who successfully navigated educational

systems with degrees in hand. The intersections of race, social class, and gender were (re)interpreted throughout the study in order to analyze the “interlocking systems of oppression” that located participants’ positions in society (Cuádriz & Uttal, 1999, p. 158). Intersectionality was a tool for analyzing participants’ lived experiences holistically, rather than focusing on one social identity such as race. By understanding how multiple social identities intersected, I uncovered participants’ privileges garnered through membership in a dominant group such as gender (male participants) and social class (participants from middle class backgrounds). I found that race/racism, gender/sexism, and class/classism surfaced at multiple points in participants’ experiences along the journeys to the doctorate and were (re)presented and (re)interpreted within master narrative and counter-narrative structures.

The Intersection of Race and Social Class

Participants from working class backgrounds, in particular, shared stories about parents who demonstrated the value of education by showing their children that education would lead to “indoor” rather than labor-intensive work. However, parents were not consistently able to provide tangible resources to guide their children through educational systems and were perceived by participants as disengaged or unsupportive. The pull of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973) was prevalent for working class families who were portrayed by participants as not believing that college was a viable option for their children and that their children should maintain their social class positions. These portrayals can fuel the deficit discourse about Mexican Americans and the devaluing of education. What does the term *value* mean in Mexican American and White contexts? I

argue that parents from working class backgrounds value education, but the way in which they demonstrate that to their children and school officials may not be recognized or respected. Rather than determining parental involvement by one's attendance at school functions or conferences with teachers and administrators during school hours, administrators and researchers should consider how families shape their children's educational aspirations by the accumulation of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) and various forms of capital at home (i.e., aspirational, linguistic, navigational, social, familial, and resistance capital).

Participants from middle class backgrounds cited some struggles in accessing higher education, but felt supported by parents who could afford to pay for college and/or transmit their college knowledge to their children, especially those who were second- and third-generation college students. Middle class participants were recipients of affirmative action policies and programs which helped them access higher education and research opportunities. Although they were privileged in terms of social class, middle class participants still contended with racism in secondary school and college and referenced particular instances involving anti-affirmative action rhetoric on their campuses and within their graduate programs.

In sharing stories about their journeys to obtaining the doctorate, participants from both working class and middle class backgrounds focused on overcoming obstacles through persistence and individual determination. Although my study focused on forming a collective consciousness through *testimonios* [life narratives], participants' stories seemed focused on individual processes, individual hard work, and individual

“hustle” in navigating educational systems. Participants from working class backgrounds in particular incorporated survival strategies in graduate school by applying for multiple fellowships, utilizing the knowledge of their middle class peers, and gaining the support from White allies. In many respects, their stories may have fueled the master narrative discourse of the American Dream and the notion of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. However, a significant consideration was the support received from campus, community, and family networks to navigate obstacles at an individual level. Sifting through the contradictions in participants’ *testimonios* [life narratives] was challenging because participants cited numerous sources of support from others but still made an individual journey that may or may not have implications for Mexican/Mexican American communities. In addition, both working and middle class *testimonios* were problematic because the focus remained with individuals and their resiliency rather than the role of institutional actors and educational institutions in potentially creating obstacles or supportive environments for students of color on college campuses.

The Intersection of Race and Gender

Female participants were encouraged to attend college early in their educational formation. The *consejos* [advice] the women received focused on education as liberation from financial constraints and from depending on men to financially support them. However, after college, the *consejos* changed to reflect more traditional, hetero-normative female gender roles through marriage and childrearing, regardless of social class or parental educational attainment. Female participants negotiated between familial expectations and their personal goals of obtaining their doctorates and were often

portrayed by their mothers as selfish and overly ambitious if they postponed marriage and children. In addition, some female participants distanced themselves from issues pertaining to race and gender in their research and at their work sites as a way to survive in academe. They were concerned with balancing work, family, and community and attempted to separate their personal interests from their professional work, despite the pressures from their communities to research Mexican/Mexican American issues.

Male participants' educational aspirations were based on asserting power and control over their knowledge production in their research, as well as fighting against the racism their fathers experienced. As faculty and researchers, all of the male participants were able to successfully integrate their service to Mexican/Mexican American communities into their professional careers.

Performing masculinity was discussed in male and female participants' *testimonios* [life narratives]. Gaining respect as a scholar meant that some women downplayed their attractiveness and femininity by wearing pants, wearing little make-up, shaking hands firmly, and ignoring unsolicited male attention by focusing their conversations on their research. The findings suggested that some of the female participants took on a more feminine performance in order to receive higher teaching evaluations, compete for resources against White women and survive hostile department cultures. The findings indicated that masculinity may be contextual and manifested in academic environments.

The Intersection of Race and Sexuality

Sexual identities were not explicitly analyzed in the study and participants' *testimonios* [life narrative] were analyzed under hetero-normative assumptions, which center "heterosexuality as the norm for understanding gender and sexuality" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 621). As the researcher-interpreter, I did not include sexual orientation as an additional layer in my research, which contributed to a discourse that heterosexuality was the standard and, therefore, not questioned. This was evidenced in the interviews with participants, particularly in discussions of gender (heterosexual masculinity and femininity) and support systems that included romantic relationships. I did not ask how participants made meaning of their educational experiences based on their sexual orientations, which is a limitation of the study. Within higher education literature, hetero-normative assumptions are an inherent aspect of the research unless the researchers are focused specifically on the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgendered students. In order to gather a deeper understanding of the intersections of identities within educational contexts, it is valuable to also interrogate heterosexuality and heterosexism as the standard in the research.

Mechanisms of Support

At an early age, participants accumulated various forms of capital (aspirational, resistant, navigational, social, and familial) through their interactions with their parents' labor-intensive work, hearing stories about segregation and discrimination, and serving as linguistic brokers for their families. Participants activated their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) at various points along the journey to gain access into higher education, negotiate hostile climates on college campuses, persevere despite obstacles,

and apply for fellowships and jobs. The mechanisms employed were psychological and physical in nature. Having a high level of self-efficacy was a mechanism for advocacy and taking advantage of academic opportunities. Extended family and kinship networks, as well as peer groups in secondary, college and graduate school were mechanisms employed to decipher the hidden curriculum or the unwritten rules. Race-based programs in college and graduate school and fellowships were also a mechanism for expanding social networks, deciphering the hidden curriculum, and protecting participants from institutional politics and hostile department cultures.

Contributions to the Literature

The study introduced a new approach to addressing critical race theory and the tenet of challenging the dominant ideology by (re)presenting the ways Mexican/Mexican American communities reproduced and resisted master narratives, as well as constructed their own master narratives. The findings provided a deeper, more contextualized understanding of oppression in U.S. society and the complexities within Mexican/Mexican American communities such as gender, social class, immigrant status, and parental education. This study challenged master narratives in educational research that perpetuate a deficit perspective regarding Mexican American educational attainment and portray Mexican/ Mexican American communities as a monolithic entity. The study also illustrated how counter-narratives could transform belief systems and assumptions about Mexican/Mexican American communities and educational attainment.

Does this transformation lead to resistance? I believe that if Mexican/Mexican American communities do not take action to resist the dominant culture and dispel

dominant culture master narratives, they become participants in their own colonization by reproducing power structures in U.S. society. How is resistance manifested in the experiences of Mexican American Ph.D.s who are now part of the very systems that fuel a deficit discourse about Mexican/Mexican American communities and Communities of Color? Although half came from working class backgrounds, all participants were now middle class due to their educational attainment and occupations. What can we determine about resistance against the dominant culture (of whom they are now a part in terms of social class) within these contexts?

Participants' *testimonios* [life narratives] did not seem to reflect traditional forms of resistance such as engaging in protests or participating in revolutionary acts that often occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, although some participated in those activities as undergraduates. Perhaps with forms of racism, sexism, and classism taking more nuanced turns, resistance is also occurring in a more covert manner. I believe that the collective consciousness of this community of scholars, researchers, and administrators carries a new form of resistance. Successfully navigating through a system that is inherently oppressive is resistance. Understanding how to strategize, enact diplomacy, and develop a small group of allies is resistance. Finding a way to work from within systems to change them is resistance. As illustrated in many of the participants' *testimonios*, action was taking place in board meetings, academic conferences/journals, through undergraduate/graduate mentoring, teaching, and in their respective communities. In this way, resistance may be occurring, but in less overt ways. Additional studies could analyze how resistance is perceived and enacted by middle class

Communities of Color and whether complacency or social reproduction occurs within these communities. Although systems of oppression may not be dismantled, empowering Communities of Color to continue in their resistance is necessary to increase the levels of educational attainment, develop a competitive workforce in U.S. markets, and challenge the status quo.

As a constructionist, I contend that a dominant culture exists, that the realities in which all members of U.S. society live are constructed by the dominant culture as a means for maintaining power, and that institutions such as education and the legal system utilize sorting mechanisms to keep certain communities in lower, labor-intensive social positions and occupations. In a capitalist society, these mechanisms ensure that marginalized communities reproduce social structures that keep them at the lower levels of U.S. socio-economic hierarchies, while supporting the dominant culture's power and position. U.S. society is built upon a hierarchical structure that privileges particular knowledge over other forms of knowledge. In this case, Mexican/Mexican American communities are (mis)led to believe that cultural capital can be obtained through education, but it is a tool utilized by White middle and upper class communities to access higher education and decipher complexities within educational structures. Rather than attempting to access and utilize a tool that is not designed for Mexican American first-generation college students and Mexican Americans from working class backgrounds, I contend that a different approach should be enacted to uncover and accumulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities from within families and communities that can bolster Mexican American educational attainment while retaining Mexican/Mexican American

communities' cultural integrity and not succumbing to the pressures of assimilation and social reproduction. The successes participants experienced were, in large part, based on community cultural wealth, which are the assets or capital found within Mexican/Mexican American communities seldom recognized or valued by the dominant culture and within education institutions. Although the American Dream depicts the individual as the sole responsible party for advancing within society, the study demonstrated that the relationships among individuals, families, and communities were essential to understanding how participants were able to advance along educational pathways, accumulate community cultural wealth from families, communities, and social networks, and expand traditional notions of cultural capital in which only White, middle and upper class values and experiences were considered valuable.

In my attempt to envision how the sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1996); master and counter-narratives; the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999); and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) fit together, the metaphor of a map came to mind, particularly because I conceptualized educational attainment as a set of pathways that individuals, with their families and communities, must successfully navigate, rather than the pipeline or production line metaphors that are presented in educational research. These metaphors do not recognize human agency and decision-making processes, nor the families and communities that support individuals during their educational journeys. The maps that students receive vary; some maps reflect the numerous generations of college students in the family who have used the map in the past and some maps are new. On the map is the student's educational destination. Cultural

capital is the legend on the map. It deciphers symbols along the journey that mark shortcuts, potential obstacles, and safe spaces to rest. Although Communities of Color and communities with first-generation college students may not have the legend on their maps, I believe that it is still possible to navigate and gather tools along the journey utilizing their accumulated forms of capital or community cultural wealth. In that sense, cultural capital is a helpful aspect in educational attainment, but not having cultural capital should not be viewed as a deficiency or a detriment to successfully completing college and graduate degrees.

Finally, I pose this theoretical implication to fellow Mexican American, Chicana/o, and Latina/o writers and researchers who write about Mexican/Mexican American educational attainment. Pérez (1999) explained that Chicana/o historians framed Chicana/o historical consciousness as a way to (re)claim identities and voices that had been silenced in historical texts. I believe that this is a goal that should be incorporated into educational research. In taking that pathway, however, we must confront our actions in portraying a monolithic set of Mexican American educational experiences, namely, working class, first-generation Chicana/o students. I challenge my colleagues to examine how we continue to unfold educational discourses that disregard Mexican Americans who are middle class, do not identify as *Chicana/o*, are monolingual in English, live in areas of the country that are not traditionally known as Mexican cultural centers, are not the first in their families to graduate from college, and/or can trace their family lineage in the United States for generations. Perhaps we are also in a master narrative framework in education and cannot transcend until we come to terms

with the ways in which we perpetrate these images of our community and neglect the diversity within Mexican/Mexican American communities, particularly as it pertains to educational attainment. The challenge in doing so is balancing our advocacy for educational equity with (re)presenting the vast diversity of Mexican/Mexican American communities and experiences.

Implications for Research and Practice

With education comes a (re)claiming of identities, histories, and a collective consciousness. This study provided a space within educational research for Mexican American voices silenced in the research, which articulated struggle and survival, privilege and merit, as well as overcoming obstacles and not finding any barriers along the way. However, the study was not solely focused on providing space, but demanding action to address the ways in which educational researchers and those we educate reproduce master narratives that justify low rates of Mexican American educational attainment. To share *testimonios* [life narratives] is to participate in confronting issues of oppression that were addressed in this study and find ways to take action to resolve these issues as researchers, practitioners, and community members. These narratives have the power to reshape, reframe, and transform discourses of deficiency to those of empowerment and resiliency in K-12 education, postsecondary education, and graduate school. In that effort, I present implications for research, practice, and for future Mexican American doctoral students.

Implications for Research

Few studies focus on the transmission of cultural capital from one generation to the next, much less how families incorporate their community cultural wealth with increased educational attainment. In addition, participants' limited cultural capital did not deter them from activating social networks and learning parts of the hidden curriculum. Research should focus more on understanding the accumulation of assets within Communities of Color using community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006), funds of knowledge, (Moll & González, 2004; Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992), or new concepts that focus on families and communities and do not reproduce deficit models. The findings suggested that some of the participants who were starting to have children will know how to transmit the limited cultural capital they have attained through their journeys to the doctorate as they take children to work sites on school/college campuses and research laboratories. Studies could focus on the transmission of community cultural wealth from one generation to the next. What do community cultural wealth and cultural capital look like for the participants of this study who are now college-educated and middle class? What will this mean for their families? How will the Mexican American narrative of "the struggle" change as more Mexican Americans complete their undergraduate and graduate degrees?

Most of the participants participated in undergraduate programs that encouraged graduate school aspirations. Future research should follow undergraduates who participate in these programs to learn more about their characteristics, graduate school aspirations before, during and after these interventions, and whether they attend graduate school after college. Although the study did not focus on college access, participants

were asked about their college and graduate choice processes. Future research is needed to understand how Communities of Color make decisions about college and graduate school. The findings also uncovered performance of masculinity in academic environments. Continued research should call attention to deconstructing masculinity with Mexican/Mexican American communities and in school environments.

Implications for Practice

Participants' experiences as they navigated through educational systems were marked by various pathways that guided them to the doctorate. Participants were tracked in the lowest and highest academic programs in secondary school; attended community college and four-year institutions; and participated in undergraduate research opportunities that facilitated graduate school aspirations and journeyed with limited guidance. In graduate school, participants received support from colleagues and faculty or survived hostile, isolating environments, which illustrated the multiple avenues to access and complete postsecondary education. These findings challenged the pipeline metaphor that K-12 teachers, college administrators, and faculty members employ to discuss educational trajectories for students of color.

By focusing on a community of scholars, researchers, and administrators who completed their doctoral degrees, the issue of retention is inevitably manifested. Are there strategies for retaining Mexican American students and students of color? What can we learn from this collective? First, there is not an ideal retention formula that will guarantee a decrease in attrition rates for students of color. Institutions should conduct access, retention, and completion studies in high schools, colleges, and graduate schools

that incorporate students as co-investigators and contextualize the study within school environments, rather than contrasting access, retention, and completion rates and programs with other schools and institutions.

Secondly, I interviewed 22 faculty members who have the opportunity to serve as role models on their campuses and their communities as publically engaged intellectuals. Ideally, it is beneficial to have Mexican American and Latina/o faculty mentors; however, we cannot rely on Mexican American and Latina/o faculty to take the sole burden of having to serve Mexican/Mexican American communities while also navigating through their own tenure processes. We also must hold non-Latina/o faculty responsible for supporting and empowering Mexican American students and students of color in obtaining Ph.D.s. and empower Mexican American students to develop their own social networks across campus. In addition, we must be cognizant of the pressures Mexican American faculty experience when they choose not to serve their communities within the context of their professional work.

Consejos [Advice] for Future Mexican American Ph.D.s

As a way to conclude this chapter, I present the advice that participants shared for future generations of Mexican American doctorates, although this set of advice is applicable to other Communities of Color and marginalized groups. The *consejos* [advice] are based on participants' narratives as they navigated through educational systems and are told from an individualistic perspective, which, in some respects, is antithetical to my goals of developing a collective consciousness among a group of scholars. However, I believe that the *consejos* are a powerful collection of insights that

bridge individuals who were often the only Mexican Americans or people of color in their classrooms, graduate programs, and work sites. The similarities in their empowering *consejos* can assure future Mexican American Ph.D.s that the journey is possible and that some pathways have been paved by previous generations. I positioned the *consejos* along particular themes, although there are some *consejos* that overlapped multiple themes.

You are Significant.

No one knows what's right for your life but you and you need to be who you are. Just because these people give you money, you don't owe them anything (Rita, Mexican, Working Class, Education).

No matter what [you] study...understand that [you] are different and that's positive.

[You] need to embrace those differences. White people don't have to think about who they are and what their identity looks like in terms of going into faculty life because they are the majority...and that's not gonna change. [T]here really is identity work that you need to do. [H]ave...at least 3 mentors to talk to about different things: somebody who's gonna push you, somebody's who gonna be your cheerleader, and somebody who might be one or the other (Monique, Chicana, Working Class, Education).

You will Struggle.

[T]he means are there. It may be a hard road and you may not take the traditional route, but if you really want something, you can have it (Nadia, Hispanic, Middle Class, Education).

You can get discouraged, but if you make it all the way through, it's worth it. I'm working in a beautiful place, doing really great science, and getting paid lots of money. It doesn't get any better than that (Darcy, Hispanic, Middle Class, Physical Sciences). [O]nce you make the commitment to graduate school, stick with it no matter how long it takes. Never give up on that kind of a dream...no matter what anybody tells you. If you want that degree, go get it. If you want to get into a graduate program, go do it. If there's an obstacle, it's not going to be a big one. Rise above it. Do more. You can always do better and just keep trying (Christine, Mexican American/Chicana, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

Si se puede [Yes you can]. It's gonna be very difficult. [You're] gonna encounter many challenges but find those networks of support (Fernanda, Mexican, Middle Class, Education).

Stay Determined.

Don't be embarrassed about not knowing things. Ask for help when you need it...and try not to cover things up like you know what you're doing (Natalia, Mexican-American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

You can never stop giving up. Things are gonna be tough and you just have to realize that you're gonna have to be crazy. That craziness is going to carry you through. [D]are to survive, dare to face that despair...dare to face that pain...and that's gonna enrich your life (Rhonda, Chicana, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

[I]f you don't get in the first time, don't give up and work harder. [D]on't get discouraged....Find a good mentor. If you don't have the right mentor or you're unhappy

with what you're experiencing...make sure to go about and change it. [O]nce you get somewhere turn around and help the next person behind you...so create the ladder where we're always helping others get to where you're at (Valeria, Mexican-American, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

It's not about being the most brilliant person in your class; it's just about endurance.

Nobody is as smart as they seem. A lot of it is performance and you have to realize that a lot of it is just really good sophisticated BS'ing. [The Ph.D.] is not something to enter into lightly. It's not like you wake up one morning and say, "I think I'll get a Ph.D."

You have to be committed to the project. Once you're committed to it just know that you can do it. It's about continuing to push your way through it and to ignore all the negative voices around you... (Rachel, Mexican American/Chicana, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

Strategize.

Be proactive in finding sources of funding. Develop coalitions along and across race lines. Explore areas that impact change. Look back and help those in need (Victoria, Mexican American, Middle Class, Physical Sciences).

You can't take yourself out of the game. Apply a second time. Don't take rejection as a failure. Make adjustments for the next time. The person sitting across from you in your cohort that you can't stand is gonna be your best friend when you end up [as faculty] at the [same institution] (Nieves, Chicano, Poor, Humanities).

Be cautious of the conservative, traditionalist scholars. Question political environments and underlying ideologies (Araceli, Mexican-American, Working Class, Humanities).

Take control of [your] education and be fully informed and aware of its culture and of its process. Otherwise, if there's not an awareness of that from the onset, then [you will] fall victim to its machinations, bureaucratically, politically, intellectually, and socially. You have to stop being a [doctoral] student. The moment you stop being a [graduate] student, and start taking control of your education is the moment you start claiming intellectual authority, which is in fact what you're expected to do in the academy (Manuel, Mexican American/Chicano, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Studies).

Whatever you write, make sure it's marketable. Have a good command of the literature and find someone to support you (Jesús, Chicano, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Studies).

The process starts as an undergraduate when you're doing your research and you're looking at the dynamics of who interacts with who, and what you hear about professors. [I]f you want to go do graduate studies be aware of the environment that you're going to be in. Be aware that when you go in there and there's no record of them ever producing a minority student, that is already telling you a lot. Be aware of how they really see you. [As a faculty member,] you have to learn to cultivate a really deep friend, who will tell you, "Hey, watch out. They're gonna try to get you because you're not publishing." That was part of the intrigue of tenure because you know it involves human emotions, personality, and egos (Aztlán, Chicano, Working Class, Life Sciences).

Think of your education as a process. Find ways to leverage opportunities; it how you respond to the struggles that is important. Do not leave anything to chance. Maintain a balanced perspective (Carlos, Mexican, Working Class, Education).

Build Social Networks.

Try to be supportive of one another. Don't push other [Latinas/os] down (Sara, Hispanic, Working Class, Physical Sciences).

You need to surround yourself with people who are gonna help you. You're gonna change [with education] but the important thing is that you don't forget your family (Yesenia, Chicana/Mexican American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

Network and be resourceful, and start with the easy places. Start with the places where people are gonna have affinity and be interested in you. Find another Mexican American faculty or Latino faculty because more often than not, those are the people who are gonna be gunning for you to begin with. They're gonna be advocating for you and will often be more honest about who will be open or hostile or agnostic about racial things (Maritza, Mexican American, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

Establish a niche and network with peers. Don't do graduate school alone (Charlotte, Mexican American, Poor, Education).

Find a mentor and be a mentor. Never let anyone tell you, "No" (Velia, Hispanic, Middle Class, Education).

You [should] have somebody, when you're entering a graduate program, who will literally hold your hand and help you get through it, because without the commitment of a scholar who will help you get through the program, there's no way you will succeed (Isabel, Mexican/Chicana, Humanities).

Learn New Things.

Expose yourself to as many different viewpoints as possible. There's so much institutional racism that you have to deal with, you need to set your own terms. Always do the work because in the end, that's our reputation (Lynn, Mexican-American/Chicana, Middle Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

Get as much education as [you] need because of the credibility that it builds. Put a title in front of your name and people assume that you know what you're talking about (Rosa, Hispanic, Working Class, Education).

Find a Passion.

The more successful you want to be, the more effort you should [put] to create networks for yourself. Find out what you're passionate about because that is going to be where your success is going to be. The devotion within you says [that] you're devoted to the craft. You love it for what it is (Mike, Mexican, Middle Class, Physical Sciences).

Find a way that sustains you. How are you making a contribution outside of yourself? (Cuahtemoc, Chicano, Working Class, Education)

Have a Plan B.

I hope [this] pisses you off to the point where it motivates you and it drives you, because you're gonna come across many people that don't believe in you. And I don't wanna...say, "If you have a dream, go pursue it." [T]his takes a lot of work...[and] I want you to have a back-up plan [if the dream doesn't happen]. Now when I'm wrong and you become what you said you were gonna be, please come back and let me know to my face that I was wrong (Dr. O, Mexican-American, Working Class, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

Keep in mind where you came from because if you know where you came from, you know where you don't want to be (Alicia, Mexican, Middle Class, Physical Sciences). Stop looking out just for yourself. We always want it to be better for those coming after us. You should just fight a battle because it's going to improve your circumstances. [A]nything that any one of us does at any given moment in time will impact how the next generation will be treated (Teresa, Mexican-American, Poor, Social & Behavioral Sciences).

My Consejos [Advice]

Investing in your education is an investment in yourself, your family, your communities, and future generations of Mexican American children who will, hopefully, no longer have to worry about being the only person of color or Mexican American in their academic tracks in high school, classrooms in college, or departments in graduate school. I was fortunate to have met, albeit via telephone, 33 individuals whose personal experiences were similar and/or different to my experiences, but who encouraged me, challenged me, and inspired me to persevere and obtain the doctorate. They are individuals I now consider colleagues from across the country. Although many of them were more savvy and strategic than I was along our educational pathways, I know that it is important to "hustle;" to apply for funding and fellowships, even when others do not think you should apply; and to not only consider the prestige of the department, but the character of the faculty within the department. Although your family may not fully understand your experiences in college or graduate school, incorporate them into the various processes involved along the journey. I made a checklist of all major deadlines

and projects that were due before I advanced to candidacy and my family was able to check each deadline and project as it was completed. Your family and friends will be proud of you regardless, but understanding aspects of the doctoral process will help them find ways to support you. Build social networks with people you actually like and enjoy spending time with. People know when you are disingenuous. Establish a small group of doctoral students (3-5 members at the most) you trust and who will invest time in your success. Depending on the department culture and faculty relationships, you may not have opportunities to interact with the entire faculty. However, offer to serve on research projects, co-author papers, and T.A. a course for the faculty. What you may learn may help you uncover your research interests, build on your skills as a researcher/instructor, or help you know what you do not want to do.

As a final note, conducting this study helped me to uncover truths about myself and my journey to obtaining the Ph.D. I now understand the ways I reproduce master narratives, such as the American Dream, in the stories I share. I also understand how I resist oppression in my daily practice and confront oppression, even when it is uncomfortable. Throughout my graduate study, I gained greater insight into my identity as a Mexican American/Chicana feminist and look forward to exploring this somewhat new identity in the future, as well as negotiating this identity with individuals, groups, and/or communities that may be resistant to this terminology. Finally, as a first-generation college student, I believed. I believed it was possible to earn a college degree, a master's degree, and a Ph.D., even when I did not know exactly where I was going. I attribute this to the individuals who believed in me and supported me along the way.

Although our paths may never cross, I know the Ph.D. is possible and I know you can do this. ¡*Adelante!*

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Pathways to the Doctorate:
A Narrative Analysis of Chicana and Chicano Experiences

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. Study personnel will be available to answer your questions and provide additional information. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to you.

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is to inform and provide new strategies for developing Chicana/o scholars and retaining Chicanas/os through the pathways to the doctorate.

Understanding the ways in which Chicana/o scholars navigate through the various levels of education can help researchers, practitioners, and policymakers initiate programs and policies that increase Chicana/o participation in doctoral programs and scholarship.

By analyzing the intersections of race, gender, and class within Chicana/o communities, this study will challenge traditional definitions of Chicana and Chicano identity and culture and validate the experiences of Chicana/o scholars who do not fit into traditional paradigms.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being invited because you have identified as a scholar of Mexican descent, who graduated [or is close to completion], within the past 5-10 years, with a doctorate from one of the following institutions:

Arizona State University	The University of Arizona
The University of California-Berkeley	The University of Florida
The University of California-Los Angeles	The University of Miami
The University of Michigan	The University of Texas
The University of New Mexico	Or comparable institution
The University of Southern California	

Your name and contact information was provided by the alumni association at your institution, or an academic association affiliated with your discipline.

How many people will be asked to participate in this study?

Approximately 22 persons will be asked to participate in this study.

What will happen during this study?

Depending on your availability, you will participate in a face-to-face interview, through telephone conference, or through a combination of these methods. You will determine an interview date, time, location, and appropriate telephone extension, if applicable. You will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences prior to college, during college, and during graduate school. Questions will be asked regarding issues of race, socio-economic status, and gender.

How long will I be in this study?

About 3 hours of your time will be needed to complete this study, which can be separated into one-hour segments per your availability.

Are there any risks to me?

The interview will have *no* risk. Although I have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions I ask are stressful or upsetting. If this occurs you can stop participating immediately or choose not to answer the question.

Are there any benefits to me?

You will not receive any benefit from taking part in this study.

Potential societal benefits include:

- 1) researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who are interested in initiating programs and policies that increase Chicana/o participation in doctoral programs and scholarship;
- 2) researchers interested in expanding the discourse on Chicana/o educational attainment to include Chicanas/os from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and genders; and
- 3) Chicanas/os who aspire to obtain doctorates may feel validated by learning about the experiences of Chicana/o scholars who have already obtained their doctorates.

Will there be any costs to me?

Three hours of your time, that can be separated into one-hour segments, per your availability.

Will I be paid to participate in the study?

You will not be paid for your participation.

Will video or audio recordings be made of me during the study?

I will make an audio recording during the study so that I can be certain that your responses are recorded accurately only if you check the box below:

I give my permission for audio/video recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Will the information that is obtained from me be kept confidential?

The only persons who will know that you participated in this study will be the Principal Investigator: Michelle M. Espino. Your records will be confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study. It is possible that representatives of the Federal Government or the Human Subjects Protection Program that supports the research study will want to come to the University of Arizona to review your information. If that occurs, a copy of the information may be provided to them but your name will be removed before the information is released.

What if I am harmed by the study procedures?

There is no potential harm in the study procedures.

May I change my mind about participating?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not begin or to stop the study at any time. Your refusing to participate will have no affect on your employment. You can discontinue your participation with no affect on your employment. Also any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could have an affect on your willingness to continue your participation.

Who can I contact for additional information?

You can obtain further information about the research or voice concerns or complaints about the research by calling the Principal Investigator Michelle M. Espino, Ph.D. Candidate at (520) [REDACTED]. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or would like to give input about the research and can't reach the research team, or want to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. (If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.) If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program by email, please use the following email address <http://www.irb.arizona.edu/suggestions.php>.

Your Signature

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I agree to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

Name (Printed)

Participant's Signature

Date signed

Statement by person obtaining consent

I certify that I have explained the research study to the person who has agreed to participate, and that he or she has been informed of the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks and potential benefits associated with participation in this study. Any questions raised have been answered to the participant's satisfaction.

Name of study personnel

Study Personnel Signature

Date Signed

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name:	Alias:
Immigrant Status:	Phone:
Date:	Degree:

1. Could you tell me a brief family history, particularly as you were growing up?
 In what ways did your family shape your educational aspirations?
 In what ways did your racial/ethnic identity(ies) affect your educational aspirations?
 In what ways did your gender affect your educational aspirations?
 In what ways did your socio-economic background affect your educational aspirations?

2. Did you feel there were any obstacles or barriers to **believing that college** was possible for you?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your family?
 What role(s) did your family play as you dealt with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your gender?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your socio-economic background?
 How did you deal with these barriers?

If participant says that he/she had no obstacles, ask: Why do you believe you did not experience any obstacles? Could you provide examples of individuals you knew who may have experienced barriers to believing college was possible?

3. As you were **deciding to attend college**, could you describe any individuals who helped you in the process?
 Could you describe any groups (peers, informal, and formal) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?
 Could you describe any social networks (neighbors, extended family, religious, employers) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?
 Could you describe any community or school organizations that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?

Could you describe any programs (school, local, summer bridge, regional, national) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?

4. Could you describe how you navigated through college?
 Did you experience any obstacles or barriers in completing your college degree?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 Could you describe the ways in which particular individuals or family members served as barriers to completing your degree?
 What role(s) did your family play as you dealt with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your gender?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your socio-economic background?
 How did you deal with these barriers?

5. Please describe any individuals who helped you **complete your degree**.
 Please describe any groups (peers, informal, and formal) that helped you complete your degree.
 Please describe any social networks (neighbors, extended family, religious, employers) that helped you complete your degree.
 Please describe any community or university organizations that helped you complete your degree.
 Please describe any programs (university, local, regional, national) that helped you complete your degree.
 Please describe any university departments or resource centers that helped you complete your degree.

6. Did you experience any obstacles or barriers in **deciding to attend graduate school**?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your gender?
 How did you deal with these barriers?
 In what ways were these barriers connected to your socio-economic background?
 How did you deal with these barriers?

7. Please describe any individuals who helped you in **deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend graduate school**.
 Please describe any groups (peers, informal, and formal) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend graduate school.

Please describe any social networks (neighbors, extended family, religious, employers) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend graduate school.

Please describe any community or school organizations that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend graduate school.

Please describe any programs (school, local, regional, national) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend graduate school.

8. How did you **navigate through graduate school**?

Did you experience any obstacles or barriers in completing your Ph.D.?

How did you deal with these barriers?

Could you describe the ways in which particular individuals or family members served as barriers to completing your degree?

What role(s) did your family play as you dealt with/handled/cope with these barriers?

In what ways were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background?

How did you deal with/handle/cope with these barriers?

In what ways were these barriers connected to your gender?

How did you deal with/handle/cope with these barriers?

In what ways were these barriers connected to your socio-economic background?

How did you deal with/handle/cope with these barriers?

9. In what ways did your racial/ethnic background affect your **interactions with faculty** within your department?

In what ways did your gender affect your interactions with faculty within your department?

In what ways did your socio-economic status affect your interactions with faculty within your department?

If your race, gender, or class did not affect your interactions with faculty, why do you believe this was the case?

Do you know of anyone in your department whose race, gender, or social class affected his/her interactions with faculty?

10. In what ways did your racial/ethnic background affect your **interactions with fellow students** within your department?

In what ways did your gender affect your interactions with fellow students within your department?

In what ways did your socio-economic status affect your interactions with fellow students within your department?

If your race, gender, or class did not affect your interactions with fellow students, why do you believe this was the case?

Do you know of anyone in your department whose race, gender, or social class affected his/her interactions with fellow students within your department?

11. In what ways did your racial/ethnic background *relate to the department culture*?
 In what ways did your gender *relate to the* department culture?
 In what ways did your socio-economic status *relate to the* department culture?
 Do you know of anyone in your department whose race, gender, or social class did not relate to the department culture?
12. Please describe any individuals who helped you **complete your Ph.D.**
 Please describe any groups (peers, informal, and formal) that helped you complete your Ph.D.
 Please describe any social networks (neighbors, extended family, religious, employers) that helped you complete your Ph.D.
 Please describe any community, university organizations, and/or professional associations that helped you complete your Ph.D.
 Please describe any programs/fellowships/research opportunities (university, local, regional, national) that helped you complete your Ph.D.
 Please describe any university departments or resource centers that helped you complete your Ph.D.
13. In my own experience, I have found that there are several different worlds in which I live and work, particularly my family, community, and academic worlds.

 How would you describe the various worlds/dimensions in which you live as a scholar? How do you handle these various worlds?
14. You listed “racial/ethnic identity(ies)” as your racial/ethnic background. Why did you choose to use this term(s)?
15. Based on your experiences, what advice would you provide to the next generation of (Mexican American, Chicana/o, Latina/o) scholars?

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