

**LATINAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION DOCTORAL PROGRAMS**  
**AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN TEXAS:**  
**PERSISTENCE AND VALIDATION**

A Dissertation

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examined the experiences of Latina doctoral students in higher education administration programs at five public institutions in Texas. Extant literature has demonstrated that there is a limited number of Latinas represented in doctoral programs. Latinas are also underrepresented in higher education administration doctoral programs in Texas. To understand the needs and experiences of these students, 13 Latina students who had demonstrated success as doctoral candidates in the dissertation phase of their higher education administration programs or had recently graduated were participants in this study to examine their experiences as they persisted through their programs.

This study utilized basic qualitative inquiry. Data collection methods included two phases of interviews. Data transcriptions were carefully read and analyzed using constructivist grounded theory, as it provided a step-by-step method for interpreting the data. Nine broad categories emerged in the findings: pursuit of the doctorate, motivation, program choice, commitment to service, persistence to complete the doctorate, social support, factors of stress, coping skills, and milestones. Utilizing Strauss and Corbin's paradigmatic schema, a conceptual model was developed with the phenomenon that was determined to be the persistence to complete the doctorate. All participants described factors that contributed to or inhibited their abilities to persist.

## DEDICATION

To my parents for instilling in me the value of education and making sacrifices so that I have had the opportunities to pursue and complete this degree, and to all Latinas who are pursuing doctoral degrees: *seguir adelante porque sí se puede!*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, women have obtained more doctoral degrees. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), the percentage of doctorates earned by women in the United States rose from 43% in 1998-1999 to 52% in 2008-2009. From academic years 1998-1999 to 2008-2009, White women experienced gains from 47% to 57% of all doctorates awarded to White students, Black women were 59% to 67% of all doctorates earned by Black students, and Hispanic women were 52% to 57% of all doctorates awarded to Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Even with gains in women attaining doctorates overall, there is limited information on women graduates by disciplines. That is particularly true for Latinas completing Ph.D. degrees in higher education administration programs, the focus of this study.

Due to the recent increases in the number of women attaining doctorates in general, this dissertation study explores the educational persistence and experiences of Latina students who are successfully matriculating through their higher education administration programs as doctoral candidates or who have successfully completed their programs as recent graduates from public institutions in Texas. For the purposes of this study the term, *Latinas* refers to women who self-identify as having ancestries from Latin America, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or South or Central American (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). *Self-identification* refers to the idea of women viewing themselves as Latinas. Because the term *Latina/o* is an umbrella term

inclusive of the labels of Hispanic and Chicana/o, the term Latina/o will be used interchangeably with the terms *Hispanic* and *Chicana/o*.

According to *Hispanic Americans: Census Facts 2000-2007* (InfoPlease, 2009), 47% of the Hispanic-origin population resided in the states of Texas (9.1 million) and California (13.7 million). In the United States, doctorates conferred during the 2007-2008 school year included 62.1% earned by White women, 8.0% earned by African American women, and 4.0% earned by Hispanic women (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2012). More specific data about education doctorates among women indicate that the numbers are even smaller. One notable area that warrants focus is doctoral degree attainment by Latina women. It is important to focus on these programs because graduates typically take on educational leadership roles that foster students' development. Therefore, with Latinas/os as the majority racial/ethnic group in the United States, it is important to explore their doctoral experiences in preparation for these leadership roles in education administration to meet the need for diversity in education leadership. However, their presence as faculty and administrators remains nearly invisible.

In educational research, the pipeline metaphor describes how students move through the primary (K–5), secondary (6–12), and postsecondary levels of education. The educational pipeline works well for some students, allowing them to flow through the tiers of education with proportionate high school and postsecondary graduation rates (Pérez-Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solórzano, 2006; Villalpando, 2004). For Latina/os, the educational pipeline does not work as well. Miller (2004) reported that, at

every degree level in higher education, Latinas/os have achieved at lower rates than White students due to inadequate school systems, high dropout rates, access issues, and college preparation curriculum (Villalpando, 2004).

The pipeline to the doctorate starts for students even before kindergarten, and challenges remain within educational systems for all students, especially Latina/os (Contreras & Gándara, 2006).

Considering the increasing numbers of Latino and other underrepresented students attempting to gain access to colleges and universities, particularly state-supported ones, the answer to recruiting and coping with them once on the campus has been the employment of minority staff to assist in attracting, socializing, and helping these newcomers matriculate. (Haro & Lara, 2003, p. 157)

Especially in Texas, there is a need to employ qualified Latina faculty/staff at higher education institutions; however, attaining such qualifications has proved challenging for Latina students.

The Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators (TACUSPA; 2011) reported that Texas had five public institutions offering doctoral programs in higher education administration. Because data on the numbers of women represented in such programs are limited, the completion rates of doctorates earned by women are noted at the national and state levels. The U.S. Department of Education (2001, 2010) reported doctoral completion rates among women for the academic years 1999-2000 as 4,114 and 2008-2009 as 6,072. With nationwide

increases in women attaining doctorates in general, Table 1 summarizes completion rates among women of various races and ethnicities (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 2010). Although these increases appear significant, the number of Hispanic women attaining doctoral degrees remains dismally low in comparison to the numbers awarded to Black and White women in the United States.

Table 1

*Doctoral Degrees Awarded to Women in the Field of Education by U.S. Degree-Granting Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity*

Race/ethnicity	1999-2000	2008-2009
Hispanic	179	353
Black non-Hispanic	583	1,153
White non-Hispanic	3,159	3,858

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2004), providing the most recent data available, “In 2003, The University of Texas (UT) at Austin and Texas A&M University, both in Central Texas, accounted for more than one-half of the doctoral degrees awarded in the state” (p. ii). The NCES/IPEDS Data Center (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS] Data Center, 2000, 2009) reported the numbers of women by race/ethnicity who had completed doctoral degrees specific to the field of education administration in Texas (Table 1).

Further disaggregation of the data in Table 2 indicates that minority women have experienced increases in the number of achieved doctorates from 1999 to 2009.

Although the completion rates for White women decreased slightly during that time period and considering that there are more White women than minority women, women of color had less than half the number of completed doctorates than White women in 2008-2009. TACUSPA (2011) identified five institutions that offer higher education doctoral programs, including the University of Texas (UT) and Texas A&M University. It would follow that the combination of large Latina/o populations in Texas and the availability of five higher education administration doctoral programs should provide Latinas in Texas with the opportunities and pathways to pursue doctoral degrees.

Table 2

*Degrees Awarded to Women in the Field of Education by Texas Degree-Granting Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity*

Race/ethnicity	1999-2000	2008-2009
Hispanic	9	23
Black non-Hispanic	15	24
White non-Hispanic	68	50

### **Problem Statement**

Based on the data, women are making some gains in doctoral degree attainment, but there is little information about the experiences of certain groups, particularly Latina women, in their pursuit of the degree. Latinas are making some gains in doctoral degree

completion in the field of education administration in Texas. Therefore, it is important to study the phenomenon of successful navigation by Latinas persisting in higher education administration doctoral programs. There is a limited “voice” in the research literature from Latinas pursuing doctoral degrees. The limitation may be due to structural barriers that have been reported by researchers. According to Saenz (2002), women from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds face barriers in navigating pathways in higher education. Barrio-Sotillo, Miller, Nagasaka, and Arguelles (2009) reported that Latina students may face expectations to contribute to household responsibilities such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning. However, Mutter (1992) noted that, even though Latinas may face such responsibilities, persistence rates of women tend to be higher than those of men. Gloria and Castellanos (2006) reported that Latina doctoral students face challenges in balancing their personal and professional identities.

Latinas face cultural issues that may be different for women of other racial/ethnic groups. A prominent cultural trait and key value among Latina/o families is reflected in the meaning of *familism*. Saracho (2007) defined familism as a multidimensional construct that includes three dimensions: structural, behavioral, and attitudinal. The structural dimension refers to the relationships among extended family members and their proximity to a family’s home. Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) described the behavioral dimension as having various levels of attachment and kinship as family members interact with each other. According to Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994), The attitudinal dimension refers to common interests shared by family members, not always

centered on higher education. In other words, Latinas encounter many cultural and social issues that prove challenging to their higher education pursuits.

Latinas are underrepresented in all levels of postsecondary education, including faculty and administrator positions (González, J. C., 2006). Although the least formally educated (Ginorio & Huston, 2001), the percentage of Latinas obtaining graduate degrees in education has increased (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 2009). Latinas are also the fastest-growing female ethnic group in the United States (Bernal et al., 2000). However, despite the overall increase in female enrollment and attrition rates, some factors have been attributed to the limited numbers in overall doctoral degree attainment such as economic issues, dissonance in family and university cultures, types of support systems, and institutional climate and culture (González, J. C., 2006). Still, the major reasons for lower numbers of Latinas with doctoral degree attainment remain unclear.

Even though there are large populations of Latinas in Texas and five universities that offer doctoral programs in higher education, very few Latina students are represented in higher education administration doctoral degree programs. Latinas remain the most underrepresented group in doctorate attainment among female racial/ethnic groups (Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solórzano, 2006). Reasons for such disparities occur in doctoral programs through covert and overt forms of marginality, along with resistance from the margins. In other words, explanations for the underrepresentation of Latinas in doctoral programs are complex and reveal macro and micro inequities (Watford et al., 2006).



According to Haro and Lara (2003), White men dominate the positions of faculty at most colleges and universities where Hispanic students attend. Also, politics influence the appointments of White men to most university leadership roles (Haro & Lara, 2003). The reason for the underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs remains vague, despite research. Therefore, it is critical to examine experiences of Latina doctoral students in higher education administration doctoral programs—the pathways to faculty and leadership positions in the university context.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Latinas as they pursue doctoral degrees in higher education administration programs at TACUSPA institutions in Texas. This study is designed to understand the experiences related to Latinas' persistence and validation as they navigate higher education administration doctoral programs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study relied on the combination of persistence theory and validation theory. Because Latinas incur many challenges culturally and academically throughout their higher education pursuits, the conceptual framework for this study included (a) persistence theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993), and (b) validation theory (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011). Each part of the conceptual framework is equally important when exploring issues concerning persistence in Latina doctoral students. Tinto (1975, 1993) has reported much about the foundation of persistence theory, including that a multitude of factors contributes to a student's persistence in higher

education. Rendón (1994) introduced validation theory after conducting the study entitled “Transition to College Project” to explore how student learning was influenced by student involvement in both academic and social experiences in college. To understand factors relative to Latinas’ pursuit of doctorates, many factors should be examined, including how Latinas view themselves as successful and the levels to which Latinas are involved in academic culture.

### **Persistence Theory**

Factors that contribute to students’ persistence in college include interactions with the college environment, academic integration such as grades and intellectual development, types of social support, interaction with college faculty, institutional characteristics such as resources and facilities, type of institution, and family status (Tinto, 1975). Many factors in addition to the major cultural influence of Latinas’ families are important to consider when examining persistence theory. In Tinto’s (1975) synthesis of research related to the college dropout process, it was important to consider the individual characteristics related to persistence, interactions among students in the college environment, and qualities of higher education institutions. Each individual account given by a Latina doctoral student is important to provide perspectives on the complex topic of perseverance in doctoral pursuits. Tinto (1975, 1993) provided the foundation for research on integration models. Tinto reported that the college dropout process involved individual characteristics such as family background, socioeconomic status, parents’ educational attainment, and expectations for their children.

Haro, Rodriguez, and Gonzales (1994) stated that the two most widely applied theories for studies of the Latina/o community include Tinto's (1993) student integration model and Bean's (1982) student attrition model. Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) reported that the models share common factors of persistence as a result of complex interactions with Tinto's model having a wider application for researching Latina/o populations. Even though Tinto's (1993) model was not intended to frame studies regarding persistence factors in diverse students, the model provides organization to this study by considering the roles of family, gender, mentors, and financial situations.

Several researchers have challenged Tinto's model, claiming that it has limited applicability to diverse student populations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992). According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), Tinto's model fails to acknowledge culturally supportive substitutes for college integration. The researchers argued that Tinto's integration theory overemphasizes the mainstream culture and fails to recognize other cultural groups. Tinto's student integration model has been criticized by researchers for being culturally biased and inadequate in explaining nonpersistence decisions by students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Despite these criticisms, Tinto's model allows for exploration of factors contributing to persistence.

Tinto (1975, 1993) is the pioneer in persistence theory research. *Academic integration* refers to how involved a student is in the academic institution, whereas social integration describes students' involvement levels with others in the academic setting

(Tinto, 1975). Students' persistence decisions are dependent on a variety of factors, such as academic and social integration levels and how often students interact with faculty members. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) examined whether the two measures of Tinto's conceptual model (academic and social integration) would differentiate between freshman-year undergraduate persisters and voluntary dropouts, along with key characteristics that were held consistent between groups. The researchers reviewed literature regarding college dropout by Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975). Results indicated that "the quality and impact of student-faculty informal contacts may be as important to students' institutional integration, and thereby their likelihood of persisting in college as the frequency with which such actions occur" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 72). Just as student-faculty interactions influence students' decisions to continue in higher education programs, mentor relationships between undergraduate students and faculty members are important, along with college and university integration.

Contributing factors to persistence were noted as motivation, self-expectations, and self-esteem.

Many barriers thus account for the relatively low participation of Mexican American women in higher education. Support for women and strong identification with the positive aspects of one's culture seem particularly important for Mexican American women who must struggle with sex-role conflicts as well as inoculate themselves against the patterns of prejudice and discrimination that often otherwise result in negatively internalized messages about one's worth as a

woman, as a member of an ethnic minority group, and, in many cases, as a member of the low economic group in this country. (Vasquez, 1982, p. 161)

The issue of Mexican American women confronting barriers in higher education is the responsibility of individuals who can offer support and influence such educational environments.

Before high school students enroll in colleges and universities, they must have educational aspirations to pursue higher education. Latinas/os experience many influences, as do most college students, regarding their persistence decisions to continue in or withdraw from colleges and universities. Specifically, Nora and researchers (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Nora, 2004; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Nora & Lang, 2001) reported five factors that influence Latina/o college students educational goals: family responsibilities, working away from the higher education institution, long distance commutes, perceptions of discrimination, and academic performance. Such reasons were reported as having a direct impact on decisions to withdraw from college.

Nora and Cabrera (1996) noted that parental support had the greatest influence on Latina/o students in completing their educational goals. Latina/o students' journeys through higher education are wrought with many challenges and barriers, which impede their success, especially at the doctoral level. Yet, many elements also positively influence Latina/o students to remain in higher education. The current study extends literature on educational persistence factors by adding to the limited research literature on Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs while also examining

their experiences with validation. By including Tinto's (1993) model with validation theory, the two-part conceptual framework aims to recognize cultural aspects to fully explore the experiences of Latinas navigating doctoral pathways.

### **Validation Theory**

When students experience validation in academic settings, they are more likely to be successful in higher education. The foundation of validation theory comes from the study of women as learners in the book *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). These scholars examined women who felt powerless and who experienced transformation through affirmation provided by others, such as peers, therapists, mothers, sisters, grandmothers, and/or close friends (Belenky et al., 1986).

Rendón (1994) discussed validation theory in the qualitative study "Validating Culturally Diverse Students: Toward a New Model of Learning and Student Development." Findings indicated that (a) nontraditional students had doubts about their capabilities of doing well in school, (b) many nontraditional students needed intervention strategies from significant others to integrate into the institutional culture, (c) first-year college students' abilities to integrate into institutional life depended on external validating agents, (d) academic and/or interpersonal validation practices occurred both in and out of class, and (e) nontraditional students could be transformed into powerful learners. According to Rendón (1994), validation may be the missing link for nontraditional students to become involved in college. Not to assume that Latina/o students are nontraditional students, aspects of validation include how Latinas view themselves as achievers and successful individuals.

Nora, Urick, and Quijada Cerecer (2011) examined various perspectives of validation in order to provide a detailed account of the extant literature. The researchers provided overlapping viewpoints on the key findings of validation theory: (a) validation as involving relationships with peers and the issues of acceptance by groups (Martinez Aelman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), (b) mentoring as a form of validating students (Barnett, 2011; Crisp, 2009, 2010; Nora, 2001; Nora & Crisp, 2009; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009), (c) academic curriculum that values students' backgrounds and experiences (Jenhangir, 2009), and (d) supporting students' experiential knowledge in the classroom (Padilla, 1999). According to Osei-Kofi (2011), validation theory involves six elements: academic validation, interpersonal validation, beginning experiences of validation, the increase of self-confidence through validating experiences, student development through validation, and validation as a process to develop. Osei-Kofi provided a narrative of Rendón's experiences as a first-generation college student who was currently a senior higher education scholar. When asked by Osei-Kofi about her thoughts for the future, Rendón stated, "I made a difference in the lives of people who grew up like me having no hope, and I made a difference in folks thinking about the world in a much more connected, humanistic, holistic way" (p. 134).

Validation theory posits that instances of validation occur through encouraging support that determine students' successful progression to completion in higher education (Ekal, Hurley, & Padilla, 2011). According to Rendón (1994), positive experiences in classrooms and laboratories that involve studying and engaging in discussions encourage Latinas/os to continue higher education from their first to second

years of college. Barnett (2011) conducted a study utilizing Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure combined with Rendón's (1994) validation theory to explore student interactions with faculty/staff. Barnett created an instrument to analyze students' sense of academic integration and levels of persistence. Her findings indicated that four constructs were positive indicators of academic integration within Tinto's (1993) model: (a) students known and valued, (b) caring instruction, (c) appreciation for diversity, and (d) mentoring. These constructs confirmed Rendón's (1994) validation theory as an extension of Tinto's academic integration by increasing students' decisions to persist.

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has demonstrated student success by adhering to aspects of validation theory. "The theoretical foundation for UTEP's student success plan is in validation theory: validation through encouragement and affirmation can be the factor that determines success or failure" (Ekal et al., 2011, p. 141). UTEP indicated four components of validation that are important in encouraging students: aspirational, academic, financial, and participatory access. Aspirational and academic access are related in that students must be introduced to academic culture in higher education in order to feel validated in their beliefs and to determine possibilities for them to obtain undergraduate degrees. Ekal et al. reported that financial assistance is imperative for students whose families have limited funding for higher education. When students feel that faculty, staff, and others believe in their academic abilities and provide encouragement, the students increase their self-efficacy and feel affirmed to be



successful in postsecondary education. Involvement in higher education and issues of validation are defined by various factors.

When Latina/o students encounter positive and validating experiences in classrooms, laboratories, and discussions, they are more likely to accomplish goals within their first year of college and return for their second year (Rendón, 1994). Rendón described *involvement* as referring to the amount of time and effort that students exert in higher education work and activities. According to Ekal et al. (2011), “Validation theory pushes scholars to think beyond mere involvement and to understand that validation is an enabling, confirming, and supportive process” (p. 141.) UTEP’s commitment to assisting low-income, diverse, and first-generation students to succeed in postsecondary education is due in part to the documentation of students’ extra- and cocurricular activities (Ekal et al., 2011).

The cited literature reported validation as it relates to undergraduate students who need to feel encouraged and affirmed with positive expectations to continue through higher education to degree completion. Such issues of validation are particularly relevant for diverse student populations, especially Latina doctoral students and those students who have demonstrated success at UTEP who were predominately from a Mexican American urban population (Ekal et al., 2011). Because Latina doctoral students have experienced educational disparities compared to those of other racial/ethnic groups of students, validation efforts provide encouragement and support for postsecondary persistence. Issues concerning mentorship and support throughout the doctoral process are forms of validating agents that speak to how Latinas continue through their

programs. This two-part conceptual framework aided in organizing the major research questions for this study.

### **Research Questions**

Research focusing on the academic persistence of Latina doctoral students has been limited. Recent research on college persistence of Latina/o undergraduate students has concentrated on deficit factors attributed to the nonpersistence decisions of undergraduate students (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005). A review of the literature identifies significant gaps in exploring factors contributing to the educational persistence of Latinas in doctoral programs. As a result, three questions were generated from the literature in an attempt to understand the factors contributing to academic persistence by doctoral Latina students.

1. How do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates describe their motivations for pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration?

2. What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be contributing factors to their persistence in higher education administration programs at public Texas universities?

3. What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be factors that contribute to their validation in higher education administration doctoral programs?

### **Significance of the Study**

While several studies (Fuerth, 2008; González, J. C., 2005; Howell, 2003) have looked at Latinas and their experiences in various doctoral programs, few have examined the persistence of Latinas specifically in higher education administration doctoral

programs in public universities in Texas. Because of the limited research in the field, the findings of this study will be useful to provide understanding about the perceptions of Latinas who are pursuing higher education administration doctorates. The findings are not intended to generalize the experiences of all Latina doctoral students/graduates, since the purpose of qualitative research is to understand and describe a phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for a selected group of students. The phenomenon that was studied in this research was the persistence of Latinas through higher education administration doctoral programs at public higher education institutions in Texas.

### **Researcher's Relationship to the Problem**

I am a Latina currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration, with a minor in Adult Education, at Texas A&M University, while simultaneously working full time as a school teacher. Thus, personal bias may have been a factor in this study. While I currently face challenges to meet the demands of completing the final year of the doctoral program, I am interested in understanding how Latinas in similar doctoral programs meet academic demands to navigate pathways to persist in graduate school.

Attaining a doctoral degree in higher education administration means that I am working to complete a goal for myself: being the first member of my immediate family to earn a philosophy doctorate. I feel a sense of responsibility to provide Latinas/os in higher education a “voice” through my present dissertation study and future studies. Upon completion of my program, I plan to continue research focused on Latinas/os as it relates to higher education positions, access, and social justice issues. I also aspire to

attain a faculty position to contribute further to higher education research and influence my future students.

### **Limitations**

A limitation to this study was that the principal investigator selected one state and one field that included five universities. Also, participants included only Latina female doctoral candidates/recent graduates.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitation of this study was that the method of study was confined to Latina women who had completed the terminal degree. This study did not take into account factors associated specifically with women of color, such as Asian, African American, or Native American women.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Chicana*: A term describing Mexican Americans and the dual heritages of two mixed cultures of a woman (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

*Diversity*: The acknowledgment of differences relative and unique to each group that is part of a multicultural community (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

*Hispanic*: A label denoting a variety of populations who share a specific ancestral language and cultural characteristics (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

*Latinas/os*: A term describing both men and women of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, or Central American descent (Rodriguez et al., 2000).

*Latinas*: The umbrella term referring to women of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, or Central American descent (Rodriguez et al., 2000). In this

study the *Latina* is used interchangeably with *Chicana* and *Hispanic* unless the cited research specifically refers to such groups of women as Chicana or Hispanic women.

*Motivation*: Initial factor(s) that a Latina would use to begin her doctoral studies.

*Persistence*: What motivates Latinas in the process of obtaining their doctoral degrees in higher education administration programs to continue.

*Retention*: The process of maintaining and supporting strategies to meet the academic and social needs of multicultural students to provide for the successful continuation to college completion (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

*Validation*: The term used to describe the affirmation process that occurs in and out of the classroom environment (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter I introduces the topic of study, presents the research problem and research questions, and outlines areas that were explored. Chapter II provides an overview of pertinent research literature relevant to the study. Chapter III describes the qualitative inquiry utilized for data collection and analysis methods. Chapter IV presents the determined findings. Chapter V discusses implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

“Because Latina/os are the nation’s largest minority group, unless they are able to achieve at the same levels as other groups, not only they, but the society as a whole, will suffer” (Contreras & Gándara, 2006, p. 106).

Latina student populations encounter unique circumstances with regard to their cultural and social issues that influence their decisions to persist in or drop out from higher education. According to Yosso (2002), Latinas comprise the largest female ethnic group who are least likely to complete a bachelor’s degree and enroll in graduate programs. This chapter illustrates what this population experiences as they progress to, enroll in, and persist in doctoral programs. Students’ levels of involvement in college life influence the likelihood that they will persist to degree completion (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). While much of the research on persistence issues concentrates on undergraduate students’ experiences, a limited amount of research has been conducted specifically concerning Latina doctoral students. Because educational literature tends to combine higher education student populations who are Latina (women) and Latino (men), research on both Latina/o students in higher education is referenced when information is not specific to Latinas.

This literature review first provides a general introduction about the context of Latinas in higher education. Then, descriptions of cultural and social capital and their influence on education, along with expectations that Latina/o students experience at home and school, are provided. Next, the discussion shifts to factors influencing

students' persistence in higher education, including relationships with faculty and resilience strategies. Subsequent is an examination of Latina doctoral students, followed by a discussion of factors contributing to doctoral degree success and barriers to their doctoral pursuits. A description of Latinas' perceptions of validation on university campuses is presented. Finally, the conceptual framework, based on persistence theory and validation theory, is described.

### **Introduction**

Of the 100 Latina/o students at the elementary level, 48 drop out of high school and 52 continue on to graduate. Of those 52 who graduate from high school, about 31, or 60%, continue on to some form of postsecondary education. Of those 31, about 20 or 65%, move on to community colleges and 11, or 35% will go to a 4-year institution. Of those 11 students who went to a 4-year college and 2 who transferred, 10 will graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree. Finally, 4 students will continue on and graduate from graduate or professional school and less than 1 will receive a doctorate. (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 277)

Disaggregation of the data reveals that Latina/o students experience challenges at each point within the doctoral education pipeline. In general, Latina/o students experience educational difficulties at young ages, even before they enroll in colleges and universities. G. N. Garcia (2000) reported three categories of reasons for Latina/o children failing in school: (a) child factors, such as language ability, learning difficulties, and migration history; (b) environmental factors, such as parents' levels of education,

household structures, and neighborhoods; and (c) learning conditions, such as unqualified teachers, inappropriate curriculum, and high teacher turnover rates. Research studies have reported that Latina/o parents have a critical role, despite their limited education, in fostering educational resiliency, especially through successful relationships with teachers (Duran, 2000; Ruiz, 2002). Latino/a students are often not able to seek information from their parents because many are first-generation college students (Torres & Hernandez). Latino/a parents of college students generally have low levels of education and are unfamiliar with the higher education system in the United States (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004). Despite Latina/o parents' attempts to aid in their students' educational success, Latina/o students at colleges and universities experience discrepancies in educational attainment compared to other groups of students.

Evidence of such discrepancies relies on the fact that Latinas/os lag behind other racial/ethnic groups in the rates of college degrees earned, achieving 4.2% of bachelors' degrees in 2000 (Perna, 2000; Vernez & Mizzell, 2001). Disparities in higher education completion rates may be attributed to low numbers of high school completion rates. Torres and Hernandez (2009) noted that Latina/o students are not typical college students. "For Latino students, the navigation of college life can possess additional challenges due to various factors that place them at a disadvantage compared to students of other cultural backgrounds" (p. 142). Latina/o students also lack social knowledge to seek information in the college environment. Misinformation regarding application, matriculation, and academic processes continues to challenge for Latinas'/os' pursuits of higher education (Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006).



In addition to the cited challenges for Latina/o college students (adult/parental guidance in educational choices and misinformation about the postsecondary application process), Zalaquett (2005) identified the barrier of limited information about obtaining financial aid. Inaccurate information may lead Latina/o students to make the decision to leave the university (Zalaquett, 2005). According to the *State of Hispanic America 2004* (National Council of La Raza, 2004), Latina/os are influenced by contextual factors such as insufficient funding, unchallenging coursework, and meager teacher quality. Garza (2006) also reported a plethora of barriers that impede successful degree attainment by Latinas/os: “Marginalization, lack of access, limited resources, and institutional and cultural factors that collide to limit Latinas/os’ matriculation and retention once they have enrolled in college all have the effect of severely limiting their graduation and degree completion rates” (p. xvi). Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2006) reported factors that have negative influences on Hispanic students: enrollment in developmental courses, completion of fewer credit hours during the academic semester, poor academic performance, and enrollment in college part time. The combination of negative influences and barriers may lead Latina/o college students to drop out of colleges and universities.

To explore the influence of inadequate knowledge and persistence decisions by Latina/o students, Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) examined factors related to nonpersistence decisions by Latina/o undergraduates. The purpose of their quantitative study was to examine the interrelationships of university comfort, social support, and self-beliefs in undergraduate Latina/o students and how the degree of each

of the three concepts predicted academic nonpersistence. Questionnaire packets were returned by 99 undergraduate students of Latina/o heritage. The packets included a demographic sheet and 11 standardized instruments. “Overall, the constructs of university comfort, social support, and self-belief were significantly interrelated and predicted academic nonpersistence decisions with social support and university comfort being the strongest predictors” (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, et al., 2005, p. 215). Results indicated that perceived support from friends and families had a direct influence on the recruitment and retention processes of Latina/o undergraduates.

Before addressing further strategies that Latinas employ to successfully navigate the higher education system, it is important to understand the condition of Latinas in education. According to J. C. González (2007), characteristics common to Hispanic women’s educational levels include the following:

Hispanic women are less educated than non-Hispanic women. Some 36% have less than a high school education, compared with 10% of non-Hispanic women. Nearly half (49%) of all Hispanic women immigrants have less than a high school education; a similar share (46%) of native-born Hispanic women has at least some college education. (González, J. C., 2007, p. 2)

Latina women accounted for low education levels among racial/ethnic groups of women (González, J. C., 2007). Rodriguez et al. (2000) noted that Latina students in higher education confront distinct challenges and they examined strategies to confront such challenges. “The major barriers to the participation of Latinas in higher education fall under two categories: those that exist prior to entering college and those that are

confronted upon matriculation” (p. 514). Pre-college factors included cultural and gender role stereotypes. Lopez (2001) reported that such stereotypes included expectations for Latinas to be young mothers, if they are not already, and the reputation that they are unintelligent. Issues related to matriculation include lack of academic preparation, financial stress, social and family obligations, and institutional marginalization (Rodriguez et al., 2000). “Unequal access, less financial support, and limited degree achievement, however, are systemic aspects that hinder the educational process for Latinas, in addition to familial, cultural, peer and media pressure” (Garcia, M., 2006, p. 244). Latinas’ decisions about which colleges and universities to attend are difficult, especially when considering that higher education pursuits pose many challenges for them.

Achievement in higher education by Latinas comes with personal sacrifices, described by K. P. González, Jovel, and Stoner (2004), who sought to understand the educational opportunities and issues of Latinas leaving home for college. González et al. reported that data collection consisted of life history research methods with two groups of Latinas. The first group was comprised of 12 Latina students who had completed K–12 and were attending two of the most selective American universities; the second group of 10 Latinas had begun their postsecondary education at a community college in California and had eventually transferred to the University of California. The findings indicated that the roles of older siblings who had already left for college, as well as churches, aided in participants’ decisions to move away from home to pursue undergraduate degrees. Moreover, Rodriguez et al. (2000) found that Latinas’ mothers

played large roles in their daughters' success in attaining educational goals. The studies by K. P. González et al. (2004) and Rodriguez et al. (2000) examined the factors that contribute to educational persistence by Latina undergraduate students. In addition to family structures, churches, and parents as influential to Latinas' persistence in higher education, forms of capital such as cultural and social also influenced educational decisions.

### **Cultural and Social Capital and Educational Influence**

It is important to understand the meaning of social capital before exploring the combination of social and cultural capital and their educational influence on Latina students. According to Coleman (1988), the most cited researcher on social capital in the field of education (Dika & Singh, 2002), social capital involves various entities that share two fundamentals: (a) They exhibit some form of social structures, and (b) they assist certain actions of individuals within the structure. Another leading proponent of social capital is Bourdieu (1986), who reported that one's membership in a group makes for support through the form of collectivity or "owned capital, a 'credential,' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (p. 51). The amount of social capital have depends on the size of relationship networks (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Lin (2001), *social capital* refers to the processes by which people find social networks as resources for investments with the premise that investing in social relationships anticipates expected benefits. Social capital works by allowing information to be facilitated between and among individuals' networks and relationships with four elements: information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement. An issue of

social capital, according to Lin, is whether the gained return or profit is beneficial to a group of people or to an individual. There are two perspectives of social capital: (a) how people use resources within their social networks to obtain a benefit, such as a better job; and (b) how groups maintain social capital collectively to benefit the group members' life likelihood (Lin, 2001). Social capital inherent in the lives of Latinas includes the extent to which they are involved in relationships with people who have knowledge of how to navigate the higher education pathway to the doctorate.

According to Bourdieu (1986), three forms of cultural capital are (a) the *embodied* state, or the actions and dispositions that one knows; (b) the *objectified* state, or cultural goods such as books and pictures; and (c) the *institutionalized* state, or acquired qualifications and levels of education. "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" (Espino, 2008, p. 55). Considering the low level of degree completion rates by Chicana/Chicanos and other students of color, Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) reported that some might argue that students of color possess cultural capital forms that allow them to reach the expectations and requirements of a rigorous higher education environment. Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) reported an assumption about students of color succeeding because of their ability to conform to the dominant cultural norms, which may exclude their present and past experiences in higher education. The researchers posited that students of

color who perform successfully at the college level and do not conform to the dominant culture may utilize valuable skills.

Both social and cultural capital forms are inherent in the Hispanic aspect of *familism*, which reflects the key value of the importance of the family in Hispanic culture (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Quijada, P. D., & Alvarez, 2006). In a qualitative study, Ceja (2004) utilized the theory of resiliency to explore Chicana students' views on the roles that their parents had taken in the development of their college goals. Individual semistructured interviews were conducted with 20 Chicana high school seniors to glean information about their perceptions of their parents' influences on their educational goals. Thematic analysis showed that parents were important influences in the Chicana students' educational aspirations, communicating direct messages about the importance of education based on their personal experience. Participants also stated that their parents had discussed the importance of going to college through decisions about the choice of institutions, although the type of institution was not consistently mentioned by parents so long as the students continued their education. Ceja concluded that these parents had influenced their daughters in both direct and indirect ways and spoke to the cultural capital influence of family in Latina women's professional development.

Similarly, Gloria (1997) conducted a study specific to Chicanas' academic persistence at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Social capital contributed by family, friends, and persons in the academic environment contributed to the overall positive experiences of Chicanas in higher education. The purpose of Gloria's study was to explore how the university environment and friends and family support influenced

nonpersistence decisions made by Chicana undergraduates. Three instruments were administered to 357 Chicana undergraduates: University Environment Scale, Perceived Social Support Inventory, and Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale. Results suggested that students who reported positive university environments had higher levels of support from family and friends. Participants noted that friendship support was more important than the extent to which they felt comfortable in their college environments.

In contrast, Sierra (1990) contended that Chicanas face a triple oppression of race, class, and gender in the collegiate environment. Low socioeconomic status and low levels of financial support for school were found to be barriers to Chicanas' academic performance. A reliance on student loans was shown to be a barrier to academic persistence by Chicanas. The type and size of high schools influenced the persistence levels of Chicana students, with some Chicana undergraduates experiencing "culture shock" at PWIs (Sierra, 1990, p. 157). Comfort in the academic environment among Latina/o college students is important when their home cultures drastically differ from campus cultures. Other factors that influence cultural and social capital for this population include the home culture, gender roles, and cultural congruity.

### **Home Culture as a Representation of Cultural and Social Capital**

The home culture of Latinas/os centers on families. This is important for Latinas pursuing doctorates because as they are expected to uphold family relationships and responsibilities and their academic tasks simultaneously. Latinas/os encounter issues surrounding cultural and social expectations in their higher education pursuits (Gándara, 1995; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Perna, 2000). In the social organization of

Latinas/os, family is the most important aspect (Macias-Wycoff, 1996). The home culture of Latinas/os involves strong relationships within the family unit, which are affirmed through cohesiveness, cooperation, and respect for parents (Quijada, P. D., & Alvarez, 2006). When compared to the U.S. population in general, Latinas/os place a special emphasis on the value of the family (Álvarez, 1994).

A common cultural value among Latinas/os is *familismo*, which conveys the idea that Latinas/os have strong and close relationships to family through cooperation and parental authority (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Quijada, P. D., & Alvarez, 2006). In Latina/o culture, individuals experience expectations to begin families instead of achieving personal goals such as higher education (Cantrell & Brown-Weltry, 2003). The cultural value of *familismo* refers to the family unit, with the Latina's responsibility to put her family before herself (Sue & Sue, 2003). Latina doctoral students experience conflict in postponing the start of a family until after completing a doctorate, or they may struggle in balancing the roles of wife and/or mother while fulfilling doctoral student tasks. Families greatly influence the educational goals of Latina/o students.

Family status also influences Latinas' pursuits in higher education. McWhirter, Torres, Salgado, and Valdez (2007) conducted a quantitative study to examine barriers to postsecondary plans, comparing the plans of 140 Mexican American and 296 White high school students. Two surveys were administered to participants. With regard to educational plans, the level of parental educational attainment influenced the higher education plans of student participants: The higher the mean parental educational attainment, the more likely the students were to attend 4-year postsecondary institutions



(McWhirter et al., 2007). While that study's strength was in critically examining the barriers that corresponded to students' parents' education levels, it did not identify barriers relative to Latinas/os enrolled in advanced degree programs.

### **Gender Roles as Representations of Cultural and Social Capital**

Another important aspect of Latina doctoral students is gender roles, as cultural expectations differ between men and women. Latinas are expected to marry and have a family at a younger age than are women in other racial/ethnic groups (East, 1998). The expectation to start families early may prove challenging to Latinas pursuing doctoral degrees. According to Niemann (2000), Latinas experience socialization for marriage and childrearing through *marianismo*, which refers to the cultural value that Latinas should be nurturing, passive, and submissive, with special emphasis on the family roles of wife and mother. Castillo and Cano (2008) reported another part of *marianismo* to be spiritual strength, described as resilience in the face of adversity.

Conversely, Latinos' roles may be described as *machismo* and patriarchal authority (Galanti, 2003). *Machismo* describes how Latino men take on patriarchal roles of having a strong work ethic to be good providers to their families (Galanti, 2003). Also related to this term is the description that Latinos are the heads of their families, making decisions for the family, while women do household jobs such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. Latinas' role expectations are instilled by their parents and families from a young age and differ from the treatment of Latinos, who experience more freedom than Latinas, who are encouraged to stay closer to home and behave in stereotypical feminine manners (Raley, Durden, & Wildsmith, 2004). Such role

expectations may prove challenging to Latinas who pursue doctoral degrees, as academic responsibilities may conflict with familial expectations and roles.

Barajas and Pierce (2001) considered race and gender in the persistence experiences of Latina/o undergraduate paths, which are the academic beginnings to doctorate journeys. The researchers conducted a qualitative study in which data were collected via interviews, fieldwork, and school records. Differences were found between Latina and Latino undergraduate students. Latinos were found to have more accepting attitudes to the dominant culture, although with a psychological price. Latinas were described as pursuing college successfully with negative stereotypes about themselves and by focusing on group membership as a Latina.

Once Latina students complete their undergraduate degrees, they are faced with decisions on whether to return home or move away from their families and hometowns. K. P. González et al. (2004) reported that participants stated that leaving home to attend college was much easier for them than remaining away from home post college. Parental expectations of the Latina students were for them to return home after completing college degrees. Latina interviewees reported tension related to their decisions on whether to return to their hometowns after college, which González et al. noted further influenced their emotional conditions about their decisions to remain away from home to pursue graduate school. Latinas have to negotiate home and school cultures in order to achieve educational success.

## **Cultural Congruity**

According to Torres (2006), the majority of graduate programs are located in PWIs, and Latina/o doctoral students may experience dissonance if they come from places where their culture is represented and respected. Rendón (1992) noted that Latina/o students experience culture shock and feelings of doubt about their academic abilities as a result of cultural dissonance (the clash of home and school cultures). K. P. González, Marín, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2002) conducted a qualitative study to explore dissonance, cultural conflict, and limited support for ethnic research in a group of doctoral students. Participants described their school environments as negative, with racism and restrictions. Despite differences between home and school cultures, similarities in the environments aid in Latina/o students' academic adjustments, whereas major differences may lead to difficulties.

Latina doctoral students may experience challenges in the congruity between their home and school cultures (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Cultural identification is important for Latina students' negotiations of their home and school environments. Challenges occur for Latina/o students whose home culture may differ from the academic culture. Torres, Winston, and Cooper (2003) found that Latina/o students had some form of ethnic identity even when it was identifiable with the majority culture. "The achievement of a doctoral degree brings social and intellectual status, but the journey is wrought with difficult cultural choices that can affect an individual's identity" (Torres, 2006, p. 135). Biculturalism results from an individual's choices in navigating two distinct cultures (Torres, 2006). While some literature has focused on cultural issues

inherent in Latina/o students in undergraduate higher education (e.g., Torres et al., 2003), few studies have discussed cultural factors in the perceptions of Latina doctoral students, as the current study does. It is important to be mindful that Latina/o culture is centered on familial interactions and relationships.

Because the literature is limited with regard to Latina doctoral students and cultural negotiation, research on Chicana college students was explored to provide insight about this dynamic. Delgado-Bernal (2001) investigated how Chicana college students navigated their educational obstacles in college using a *mestiza* consciousness. “A *mestiza* is literally a woman of mixed ancestry, especially of Native American, European, and African backgrounds” (p. 626). The study concentrated on strategies that Chicana students employed to confront challenges that could impede their academic success and college participation. Qualitative data were collected via 32 individual interviews with Chicana students who provided accounts of their life histories and three focus group interviews with 12 participants. Chicana students used their ethnic identity as a cultural resource for navigating their higher education paths because they negotiated a *mestiza* identity with regard to their language, culture, communities, and spiritualities. Educational policies and practices that embrace such a *mestiza* consciousness contribute to the persistence of Chicana undergraduate students, as opposed to viewing such a consciousness as a deficit. Similarly, Latina doctoral students operating with *mestiza* identities appear to persist.

Latinas’ perceptions of how culturally fit they are for academia as university students are also a factor in higher education persistence. Gloria, Castellanos, and

Orozco (2005) investigated Latinas' perceptions of educational barriers, along with the cultural fit of their coping mechanisms as they related to the psychological well-being as undergraduate students in the college environment. The researchers administered 102 demographic sheets and five standardized instrument surveys (Perception of Barriers Scale, University Environment Scale, Cultural Congruity Scale, List of Coping Responses, and Psychological Well-Being-Short Scale) to Latina undergraduate students. Findings indicated that the participants had advanced degree aspirations, anticipated more educational barriers than did males, and utilized coping responses to confront barriers that were not passive, such as obtaining information about situations and taking planned, positive actions in some cases. Latina/o students' adjustment to the academic environment at colleges and universities depends on a variety of factors. Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) conducted a study examining Latinas'/os' adjustment and attachment to college. Findings indicated that college enrollment size, as well as the type of college, had a direct influence on Latina/o students' social adjustment to their campuses.

Even with strategies to aid in Latina/o students' home cultural fit to their school culture, adjustment issues still arise. While Latinas enrolled in doctoral programs have demonstrated cultural adjustment success after having completed two degrees, adjustment to doctoral academia will increase knowledge about this dynamic. College students experience a multitude of factors that contribute to their persistence in higher education.

## **Factors Influencing Persistence in Higher Education**

Literature on the topic of student persistence over the past 30 years has focused on variables such as academic and social integration of college students (Bean, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Variables influencing student engagement, academic experiences, persistence from the first to second year in college, and degree completion have been reported to be support systems (Nora, 2004; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), students' financial situations (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2001), and experienced discriminatory actions (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Various personal, social, cultural, or environmental elements may positively or negatively influence students' persistence decisions. Another factor to consider is the actual learning atmosphere.

Tinto (1997) conducted a mixed-methods study at one community college concerning the classroom experiences of learning communities and collaborative learning strategies. Findings indicated that contributing factors to persistence included a support network that was established when students were engaged in a collaborative learning environment. This overview of the persistence literature provides a general list of factors linked to the academic success of college students. While extensive research has been conducted on the topic of persistence in college students, additional constituents may be considered when exploring the persistence qualities of diverse student populations. Studies conducted by Rendón (1994), Hurtado and Carter (1997), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1990) have examined factors related to persistence decisions by both minority and nonminority college students and whether they decided

to remain or withdraw, temporarily or permanently, from higher education. Peltier, Laden, and Matranga (1999) reviewed major studies in the area of student persistence that focused on behavioral constructs, as indicated by Astin's theory of student involvement (1993) and Tinto's theory of departure (1993), with regard to students' involvement in the college experience, individual characteristics, and institutional qualities. According to Peltier et al. (1999), persistence research becomes complex when considering different ethnic groups, success rates, and gender. Key findings indicated that African American, Native American, and Hispanic students left universities at greater rates than White students; women had higher degree completion rates than men; older students had more barriers than traditional undergraduate-age students; and students living on campus had more positive collegiate experiences than those living off campus (Peltier et al., 1999). Diversity and background factors among college students strongly influence their persistence decisions.

The extent to which learning environments are diverse makes for academic atmospheres in which different perspectives provide for heterogeneous learning experiences. Students have been influenced by learning that incorporated a variety of diverse perspectives (Tinto, 1997), since learning communities shared knowledge and knowing (Tinto, 1998). Learning supported by diverse perspectives is important for students to be successful in navigating their pathways in higher education. According to Huerta and Brittain (2010),

*Knowledgeable about the students' culture* refers to the need for teachers to learn about and seek to understand the lives and cultures of their students in order to

support them in building bridges between their existing knowledge and experiences and the new material to be taught. (p. 388)

When college teachers make academic material culturally and experientially meaningful, students connect to the learning environment; therefore, they feel more involved and relate to learned academic material. The current study adds to this literature by reporting Latinas' perceptions of their connections to their doctoral academic environments. Many elements have been demonstrated to be influential in college students' successful completion of degree programs. Factors that have positive impacts on student retention include a demonstrated record of academic success in high school, a successful first semester in college, tuition exemption, and successful completion of core courses during the first year of college (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006).

Hernandez (2000) explored the retention of 10 Latina/o college students and identified 11 themes, as well as the emerging conceptual model shown in Figure 1, that explained elements that influenced Latina/o college students' retention. The qualitative study included data collection in the form of interviews with 10 students (5 men, 5 women) ages 21 to 25 years. Subsequent to data analysis, Hernandez (2000) reported the following 11 themes as factors that influenced student retention:

1. *I want to do it* refers to the central idea that students expressed beliefs to succeed in college.

2. *The family* played significant roles as support systems in the student participants' lives.



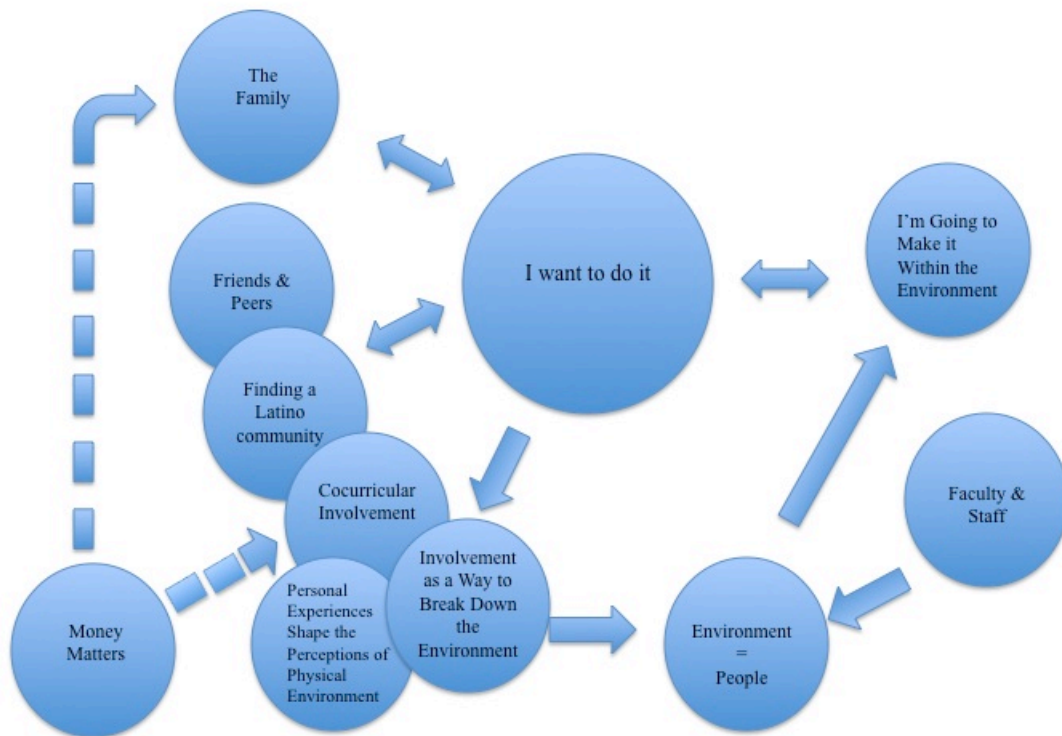


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationship among elements of Latino student retention. Source: “Understanding the Retention of Latino College Students,” by J. C. Hernandez, 2000, *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, p. 582.

3. *Friends and peers* were described as sources of motivation to succeed, which resulted in the participants’ wanting to be successful.
4. *Faculty and staff* played an important role in students’ retention.
5. *Cocurricular involvement*: by being involved in both on and off campus activities, students mentioned how this impacted their persistence in college.
6. *Finding a Latino community*: Location of other Latinas/os, especially at a predominantly White campus had a positive influence on students’ persistence.

7. *Money matters*: The role of finances had either a positive or negative influence on students' abilities to remain in college.

8. *I'm going to make it within the environment*: Students described their responsibility for making the collegiate environment work for their educational success.

9. *Environment equals people*: The people in the academic environment were the ones who participants credited with influencing their retention.

10. *Personal experiences shape the perceptions of the physical environment* describes how students' personal experiences impacted their perceptions of their collegiate environment.

11. *Involvement as a way to break down the environment*: Participants' descriptions of on-campus involvement in organizations and activities as a way of making the campus environment feel smaller. (Hernandez, 2000, p. 582)

Figure 1 displays Hernandez's (2000) conceptual model of the 11 categories, along with their relationships relative to influences on Latina/o student retention.

Hernandez reported that this conceptual model is not meant to be an emerging theory, since it would require additional research. Each circle represents one of the 11 themes that emerged from data analysis. Because all Latina/o students mentioned that they had a desire to undergo higher education, the large center circle is represented as the core retention element. The 10 circles represent the themes, each with a unidirectional arrow representing a category's influence on another category, a bidirectional arrow depicting a relationship in which two themes impacted one another, and a broken line representing

an indirect relationship. Latina/o students' families and home environments are critical to student retention. Hernandez recommended that colleges and universities make bilingual and culturally sensitive materials available to Latina/o students. Because Latina/o students have a variety of family, friendship, and institutional factors that influence their persistence levels, it is important to consider Latinas holistically in terms of student retention. The findings of the current study were parallel to some of the identified themes of Hernandez's model. One theme in Hernandez's model of environment and people indicates that faculty members influence Latina college students with regard to their persistence in higher education. Student and faculty relationships are imperative and impact levels of students' persistence in higher education.

### **Relationships With Faculty as a Factor of Persistency**

Latinas' enrollment in doctoral programs is an accomplishment in itself and one that may be due in part to the quality of faculty-student interactions. It is important to understand the meaning of *mentorship* before exploring the interactions of faculty who are mentors to students. According to Johnson and Ridley (2008), "Mentoring relationships (mentorships) are dynamic, reciprocal, personal relationships in which a more experienced person (mentor) acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced person (protégé)" (p. xi). Mentorships occur at colleges and universities between faculty members and students. An effective mentorship requires the faculty mentor to engage with students outside of the classroom in order to have pragmatic experiences that provide students with experiences that they otherwise would not have had (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). Interactions between faculty and

undergraduate students must be comprehensive to meet the various academic, social, intellectual, and developmental needs of students (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1993). Mentorship interactions build self-efficacy and support for students to persevere to meet educational goals.

Consistently, students benefit when they have more in common with their faculty mentors. When mentors and protégés share background qualities, such as ethnicity, culture, religion, and occupational goals, such homogeneity may increase levels of support (Thompson, 1995). Students of color, such as Latinas, often have White male mentors because women and minorities are underrepresented in faculty positions (Harris-Schenz, 1990). Even though the number of minority faculty members may be limited, any faculty member who devotes time to students both inside and outside the classroom may prove to be effective in mentoring, regardless of race or gender. Santos and Reigadas (2002) stated that mentors inform students of available resources that are helpful in meeting academic demands and increasing students' personal self-efficacy and competence. The current study reports perceptions held by Latina doctoral students regarding their faculty-mentor experiences.

A mentor's responsibility is to be available to students in efforts to assist in their attainment of educational goals. Research shows that faculty mentors' influence on students is critical to the students' persistence in college (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Mayo, Murguía, & Padilla, 1995; Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Latinas encounter many challenges in collegiate environments and therefore must employ many aspects of resilience in efforts to persist through higher education programs. Torres and Hernandez

(2009) explored factors that contributed to persistence by Latina/o college students in a quantitative study utilizing *t* tests to compare scale means of two groups of students, one of which had an identified mentor and one of which did not have a mentor. Longitudinal data were collected over 3 years. Results showed that Latina/o students with a mentor reported “higher levels of institutional commitment, satisfaction with faculty, academic integration, cultural affinity, and encouragement” (p. 141). Results specified that an advisor/mentor aids Latina/o students in navigating the collegiate environment, which makes a difference in their ability to persist (Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Research supports that students with faculty mentors tend to continue to completion of their college and university programs.

Similarly, Anaya and Cole (2001) conducted a study on the influence of student-faculty interactions on Latina/o college students. “Latina/o college students tend to have favorable perceptions of their interactions with faculty. However the frequency of interactions is low. The role of faculty is critical” (p. 12). Students need faculty or staff contact in efforts to identify with role models, which is of the utmost importance to several racial groups, including Mexican American, African American, Native American, and White students (Mayo et al., 1995). Anaya and Cole (2001) reported that, because a majority of professors are White, student-faculty interactions for Latinos in college are mostly interracial communications. Recommendations for postsecondary institutions were to increase the number of student-faculty interactions, to focus on interactions that complement academic learning, and to work toward affirming interactions between students and faculty/staff. With quality student-faculty/staff

interactions, Latina/o students are more likely to persist to completion of higher education programs. Harris-Schenz (1990) noted that minority women, such as Latinas, do not achieve educational success on their own; rather, a series of mentors is responsible in aiding students to professional excellence. Mentors are especially helpful when Latina students experience issues in adjusting to university environments, especially during the autonomous process of the dissertation. Latinas/os utilize constructs of resilience when they experience challenges in higher education.

### **Resilience as a Factor of Persistency**

Much of the research about resilience has focused on children who have experienced adverse risks and have overcome them (Bernard, 2004). Masten (2001) reported that resilience is a process of human adaptation in which individuals use resilience “from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities” (p. 9). Masten and Coatsworth (1998) noted that the process of resilience includes two judgments to be made: (a) a threat to the individual or the experience of confronting some type of adversity, and (b) the quality of adaptation in responding to such a threatening experience. Bernard (2004) outlined four categories of fostering resiliency in children: social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose. Figure 2 lists characteristics of each category.

The four categories refer to domains of personal strengths that an individual exhibits when resiliently confronting various adversities. Bernard (2004) elaborated that the category of social competence involves the skills needed to form positive

Social Competence	Problem Solving	Autonomy	Sense of Purpose
Responsiveness	Planning	Positive Identity	Goal Direction
Communication	Flexibility	Internal Locus of Control	Achievement
Empathy	Resourcefulness	Initiative	Motivation
Caring	Critical Thinking	Self-Efficacy	Educational Aspirations
Compassion	Insight	Mastery	Special Interest
Altruism		Adaptive Distancing	Creativity
Forgiveness		Resistance	Imagination
		Self-Awareness	Optimism
		Mindfulness	Hope
		Humor	Faith
			Spirituality
			Sense of Meaning

Figure 2. Personal strengths: What resilience looks like. Source: *Resiliency: What We Have Learned* (p. 14), by B. Bernard, 2004, San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

relationships. Problem solving is a category that refers to the mental process of being resourceful in figuring something out. Autonomy, another category of resilience, involves what Bernard reported as being independent in having a sense of control over one’s environment. According to Bernard, a sense of purpose involves having a direction of achieving personal goals.

While resilience research has focused on resiliency in children, the process could be applied to diverse student populations who confront challenges in postsecondary education. Bernard (1995) stated that resilience research has focused on the life stories of individuals within particularly high-risk groups, such as Latinas/os. “Fostering resilience means changing our belief systems to see youth, their families, and their cultures instead of problems” (p. 275). Latinas’/os’ peer relationships, as well as their

culture, may be resources for persistence and resiliency when persevering in postsecondary education.

### **Peer Relationships as Factors Contributing to Persistency**

In academic settings, it is common for more experienced students to be critical sources of information to novice students. Peer mentoring occurs when more qualified students assist in guiding and supporting vulnerable students in efforts to intervene to ensure educational outcomes (Johnson, 2002; McLean, 2004; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002). According to Angelique, Kyle, and Taylor (2002), peer mentoring occurs when mentors and mentees who are near the same age and experience pair to engage in mentorship. Tinto (1993) reported that supportive relationships in higher education are important to reduce stress levels. Peer mentorships aid students to seek help and advice comfortably, when the students may be reluctant to approach faculty, administrators, and staff for information.

Peer mentors can be described as having many shared traits. Terrion and Leonard (2007) conducted a literature review on the characteristics of student peer mentors, resulting in a preliminary taxonomy of peer mentor characteristics classified under the two functions of the mentor meeting the career-related or the psychosocial needs of the mentee. According to Kram and Isabella (1985), a career-related function describes a task-related job in which the mentor seeks to provide advice or information related to task accomplishment or professional development and a psychosocial function that describes how mentors provide emotional or psychological support to mentees. In peer mentorships, career-related functions refer to information sharing and career planning,



and psychosocial functions describe friendship, personal feedback, and emotional support (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The two functions of a peer mentorship are important to consider because the determined characteristics of a peer mentor remain particular to the function being served.

It is significant to mention the qualities that lead a student to be credible to be a peer-mentor. Terrion and Leonard (2007) conducted a literature review of 54 articles that focused on the topic of mentoring. The researchers determined the following description of prerequisites for a student peer mentor: availability to commit time, gender and race matches in mentorships, experience in and knowledge of the university, academic achievement and knowledge, and prior mentoring experience. Such qualities are imperative for peer mentors to meet the needs of their mentees.

Peer mentors meet both the career-related and psychosocial needs of their mentees. Characteristics that were determined as relevant to student peer mentors meeting included the demands of the career-related function: the mentor and mentee sharing the same program of academic study and sources of motivation, especially for persistence reasons (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Terrion and Leonard noted characteristics of the student peer mentor fulfilling the psychosocial function as communication skills, supportiveness, trustworthiness, attitudes toward mentoring, empathy, similarities in personalities between mentor and mentee, enthusiasm, and flexibility. Peer mentorship is important for students' support, persistence, and success in higher education. Of special interest in the current study was the experience of Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs. Before considering the topic of

persistence among Latina students, it is important to understand generally Latinas in higher education doctoral programs.

### **Latina Doctoral Students in Higher Education**

Latinas deal with the highest levels of stress of all groups of students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Stress factors for Latina doctoral students are associated with aspects of the mainstream Anglo culture, such as (a) adjusting to rigorous academic schedules; (b) when working with others in academia, an emphasis on competition rather than cooperation; and (c) adjusting to issues of autonomy (Ponterotto, 1990). With regard to doctoral production, Calasanti and Smith (2002) noted that Latinas are the most underrepresented racial/ethnic group. The low numbers of Latinas achieving doctorates explains the limited numbers of Latinas represented in faculty positions, which leads to fewer mentors for Latina undergraduate and graduate students in higher education (Solórzano, 1995). Researchers have noted the need for increasing the number of diverse women, specifically Latinas, in higher education (Blackwell, 1996; Cross, 1996; Delgado-Romero, Flores, Gloria, Arredondo, & Castellano, 2003; Nakanishi, 1996). However difficult it proves to increase the numbers of Latina doctorates, Latina students' experiences in graduate studies are wrought with barriers and challenges.

Reyes and Ríos (2005) discussed the processes of professional development in Latina academics. Utilizing a dialogic method, the researchers reconstructed dialogues from moments and episodes that had affected Latinas/os in higher education environments. Dialogues were organized into the themes of family upbringing, graduate school, peer experiences, participation in higher education, and interactions and

situations with other students. Narratives from participants acknowledged opportunities of higher education and strategies needed for students to support one another. The demands of graduate students are considered generally before addressing specifically the issues inherent in the lives of doctoral students, specifically Latina doctoral students. According to Ulku-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, and Kinlaw (2000), graduate students must meet the demands of academic life while managing their own personal, cultural, and social lives. Similarly, Gloria and Castellanos (2006) commented, “Doctoral students often change residence, shift work hours, return to school after having worked in different or respective fields, feel pressure for outstanding personal achievement, and experience a decrease in finances and subsequent living conditions” (p. 170). Balancing personal and professional dimensions is a common process for doctoral students.

Between 40% and 60% of students who begin doctoral programs at higher education institutions in the United States do not persist to graduation (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Nerad & Cerny, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Many students choose to withdraw from doctoral programs or complete only a master’s degree, so student retention during the first year of graduate school accounts for about one third of all doctoral student attrition (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1996).

According to Bair and Hayworth (2004), comprehensive studies on the persistence and attrition of doctoral students remains limited. Many studies on doctoral student retention are devoted to single institutions and single programs (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Nerad & Cerny, 1991). In efforts to synthesize research findings to understand doctoral student persistence issues, Bair and Hayworth (2004) conducted a

qualitative meta-synthesis that examined results of studies conducted between 1970 and 1998 that identified factors contributing to doctoral student attrition, persistence, and retention.. Doctoral student persistence rates depend on the field and program of study, with the lowest attritions rates found in laboratory sciences and the highest rates in the fields of social science and humanities (Bair & Haworth, 2004). Figure 3 lists elements that influence Latina doctoral students to persist to completion of doctoral programs. It is important to mention that the key findings among studies relative to doctoral student persistence indicate that (a) persistence and attrition rates differ depending on doctoral programs and fields of study; (b) departmental culture affects students' abilities to persist; and (c) demographic variables such as students' gender, race, and ethnicity do not distinguish students as being persisters or withdrawing from their academic programs.

According to Dorn and Papalewis (1997), 50% of all doctoral students fail to complete their programs. The researchers examined persistence by doctoral students in an educational leadership program, conducting a case study at the University of California and California State University. The studied program emphasized peer mentoring. Questionnaires were administered to department chairs at 11 universities, with 8 universities responding, resulting in a sample size of 108 doctoral students. The results concurred with the literature pertaining to peer mentoring, group cohesiveness, persistence, and higher education, which suggested that goals and social aspects of group work are highly interdependent. Groups who feel committed to each other and to the group whose members share common goals are more likely to meet group goals, such as

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1. Attrition and persistence rates vary by field of study and program of study.
  2. Departmental culture affects doctoral student persistence:
    - The degree and quality of the relationship between doctoral student and advisor or faculty has a strong, positive relationship to successful completion of the doctorate.
    - Student involvement in various programmatic, departmental, institutional, and professional activities and opportunities contributes favorably to doctoral student retention and completion.
    - Peer interaction is related to persistence, insofar as degree completers are more likely to be involved with their academic peers than non-persisters.
    - The financial support offered to doctoral students is related to attrition and persistence; students who hold research assistantships, teaching assistantships, fellowships or graduate assistantships, are more likely to complete their degrees than students who rely on other types of funding.
    - Difficulty with various aspects of the dissertation relates to attrition.
  3. Academic achievement indicators are generally not effective predictors of doctoral degree completion, with the exception of GRE advanced scores.
  4. Findings are mixed with respect to employment and financial factors.
  5. Personal and psychological variables represent a relatively new direction in the study of doctoral student attrition and persistence; a number of these variables have been shown to relate to persistence.
  6. Demographic variables do not conclusively distinguish persisters from those who drop out.
  7. Retention and attrition rates vary widely among institutions.
  8. ABD is not the stage where the greatest proportion of doctoral students necessarily departs.
  9. Time to degree is related to attrition.
  10. Doctoral programs that have smaller entering cohorts have consistently lower TTD and consistently higher completion rates than programs with large entering cohorts.
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*Figure 3. Ten key findings regarding doctoral students' attrition and persistence.*  
Source: "Doctoral Student Attrition and Persistence: A Meta-Synthesis of Research, by C. R. Bair & J. G. Hayworth, 2004 (p. 491), in J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (pp. 481-534), The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

earning a doctorate (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997). Before examining the persistence qualities of Latinas in doctoral programs, it is important to understand the reasons for Latinas beginning the doctorate journey.

### **Latinas and Doctoral Degree Success**

Literature on the experiences of both high school and college Latina students may indicate relative motivators for Latinas to choose to pursue such advanced degrees. According to Barajas and Pierce (2001), “Successful young Latinas found ways to carve out safe spaces through their relationships with other Latinas and to successfully construct paths through the predominantly White, middle-class space of high school and college” (p. 864). Such relationships were found to be sources of support and motivation that allowed young Latinas to persist in undergraduate education. Thus, for Latinas, support systems are worth seeking as they proceed through their doctoral programs. Family and school experiences for Latina/o students may be difficult to balance, especially with cultural expectations.

According to Adams (1993), Latinas’/os’ educational experiences have cultural contexts that are distinctly different and provide for differentiated experiences among doctoral students. Latina/o students tend to place the needs of family above their own needs and may question their academic endeavors due to required sacrifices, such as being away from family or missing participation in family life events (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Such cultural influences are important in studying Latina doctoral students’ persistence in higher education administration programs.

While several researchers have focused specifically on Latinas obtaining doctoral degrees (Fuerth, 2008; González, J. C., 2005), their studies broadly examined any Latina obtaining a doctorate in the field of the social sciences. A limited number of studies have focused specifically on Latinas in graduate education (Gándara, 1982, 1995, 1996) and even fewer studies concern Latinas in doctoral programs (Achor & Morales, 1990; Flores, 1988; Fuerth, 2008; Howell, 2003). Additional factors that influenced the persistence and success of Latinas in higher education were educational support, such as the type of parenting; background in previous educational experiences, such as attending an integrated versus a segregated school; relationship status; whether the Latinas had children; and gender roles (del Castillo, Frederickson, McKenna, & Ortiz, 1988; Gándara, 1994). Latinas foster resiliency in efforts to persist in their doctoral programs.

Fuerth (2008) conducted a case study on elements that fostered resiliency in Latinas pursuing doctorates in a wide variety of fields, using resiliency theory as a framework. Fuerth collected data through semistructured interviews with six Latinas involved in doctoral programs at one large metropolitan university in Florida, including education, psychology, nursing, and anthropology. She described her first impressions of the participants, educational backgrounds, educational experiences, and personal characteristics relative to each of the participants' resiliency concepts. Fuerth noted that Latinas might exhibit resiliency skills such as problem solving in a different manner from that described by Bernard's (2004) resiliency theory. To further explore persistence issues among Latinas pursuing doctorates, research on academic and home cultures is critical.

J. C. González (2005) conducted a study on the opportunities and challenges involved in mixing the “academic culture” and “Latina culture” when Latinas pursue doctoral degrees. He conducted 25 semistructured interviews, including 13 with doctoral students and 12 with faculty members, who reflected on their doctoral schooling experiences. Utilizing critical theory as the framework, González considered the power of institutions as they influence Latinas. “The findings emphasize the support systems, challenges, socialization, and finding and losing voice within an “oppressive” academic culture—from before the doctorate (the master’s, through the doctorate) to after the doctorate (the initiation of their faculty careers)” (p. iv). Inherent in the academic successes among Latinas in doctoral programs is overcoming barriers to completing doctoral degrees.

Cuádriz (2006) drew on the life histories of students enrolled in doctoral programs at the University of California, Berkley. The purpose of her study was to explore myths about the academic achievements of American students of Mexican descent, along with how these myths influenced their parents’ relationship to their achievements. Cuádriz argued that the issue of educational achievement by minority groups is subject to a “politics of exceptionality” (p. 83). The researcher collected data from three narrators of their life histories about their experiences of entering doctoral programs in the late 1960s and early 1970s. High academic achievement by the three Latina/o participants was not considered the normative of the group but rather an exception to the racial/ethnic group. Despite such a generalization, Cuádriz found that individual characteristics of each of the participants, such as family socialization



practices and characteristics, were most influential in their educational achievement, rather than institutional processes or structural opportunities.

Moreover, Lango (1995) identified characteristics that contributed to persistence by Mexican American women in continuing their education through graduate studies. Fixed-alternative questionnaires were administered and telephone interviews were conducted with 240 Mexican American female senior students and 151 Mexican American female graduate students. Results were divided into three categories: social characteristics, parental and familial characteristics, and educational experience. Most of the participants reported having come from a middle-income family. Key distinguishing factors were noted between the senior and graduate respondents. The two groups responded differently about their parents' teaching and support, with more than 70% of the graduates mentioning that education was very important to their respective families. The graduate students reported that the dominant language in the home was English. The two groups described different ethnic and racial compositions of their high schools, with 63% of the graduates noting that their high school had Caucasians as the majority group and 53% of the college senior respondents mentioned attending a high school that was mostly Mexican American. Lango reported the significant factors as the two groups of students' descriptions about their secondary curriculum, with 65% of the college senior respondents and 92% of the graduate respondents reporting a college preparatory curriculum.

The data appear to indicate that a Mexican American female graduate tends to be broadly characterized as an older, more mature student who is committed to an

education, comes from a traditional family, and has been integrated into mainstream, dominant society. (Lango, p. 45)

Latinas in doctoral programs often have to find a balance between their home and school environments.

Latina doctoral students frequently have to compromise on how to negotiate their home and school cultures effectively. In a qualitative study, Espinoza (2010) identified strategies that Latina doctoral students used in efforts to balance their demands with family relationships and school to retain their standing of good daughter in the family unit. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 Latina doctoral students attending universities in northern California. Questions asked participants about their childhood, upbringing, and their relationships with family members while taking on the role of graduate student. Findings suggested that the participants described two categories of being academically persistent. *Integrators*, described by seven participants, communicated to their families explicitly about their school demands and responsibilities, while *separators*, described by six participants, actively kept their daily lives of family demands and school responsibilities separate to minimize tension and role conflict. The current study was conducted to determine whether Latinas describe themselves as integrators, separators, or something different in their doctoral pursuits.

Gándara (1982) studied the background factors of high-achieving Chicanas who had completed a juris doctorate (J.D.), medical degree (M.D.), or academic degree (Ph.D.). The purpose of that qualitative study was to document experiences of Latinas with doctorates. A total of 17 Mexican American women (4 J.D., 4 M.D., 9 Ph.D.) were

interviewed. Findings included the following: (a) The mother's role was crucial in fostering educational persistence, (b) the participants described themselves as having a hard work ethic, and (c) the women tended to rely on support more from their parents than from outside members of the family with regard to their educational goals. The participants reported not having married early, and several had yet to marry at the time of the interview. None of the participants planned to have children until their education was nearly complete. The interviewees reported that they came from traditional families with a continued sense of responsibility.

The current study adds to the findings of the cited research by determining similarities, differences, and more information relative to the following findings: (a) Latinas having resiliency skills such as problem solving (Fuerth, 2008); (b) Latinas succeeding in doctoral programs due to innate support systems and academic socialization practices when facing challenges (González, J. C., 2005); (c) Latinas reporting family socialization practices as most influential to educational achievements (Cuádriz, 2006); and (d) Latinas tending to be older students, with the English language as dominant in the home environment and with reliance on family for support (Lango, 1995). Negotiating relationships with family members, faculty, and peers is challenging for Latina doctoral students.

According to Gloria and Castellanos (2006), balancing professional and personal experiences is a common process for doctoral students. The researchers reported that finding a balance between personal and professional identities is a critical issue for persistence in Latina doctoral students. Latina doctoral students may not have families

that can assist them effectively in navigating the graduate school process, as they are normally the first in their families to achieve a college degree. The current study increases research knowledge by providing detailed descriptions of how Latinas find balance in their personal and professional doctoral lives. In a study by Achor and Morales (1990), 100 Chicanas who had completed academic doctorates at American higher education institutions were studied. “As minority women from predominantly low-income, traditionally oriented families, their successful negotiation of the educational system fails to support the inexorability of intergenerational transmission of gender, class, and ethnic stratification” (p. 269). Questionnaires were mailed to 100 eligible participants. Results showed that the participants came from supportive families, were strongly influenced by their educational experiences, commonly experienced interruptions to doctoral studies, and considered friendship support to be important for their graduate school persistence. Even with Latinas having strategies to successfully progress through their doctoral programs, barriers continue to be challenging in their educational pursuits.

### **Barriers to Latinas’ Doctorate Pursuits**

Latinas have experienced barriers as they progress through doctoral programs. Vasquez (1982) examined the barriers that led to Mexican American women’s low participation rates in higher education. The researcher also explored the strategies by which these women confronted such barriers. Vasquez noted that Mexican American women experience role conflict with regard to balancing the roles of student, wife, mother, and career woman. Latinas confront challenges relative to overt discrimination,

imposter syndrome, cultural conflicts, and campus adjustment issues (González, J. C., 2006; Hurtado et al., 1996; Padilla, 1995; Priest & McPhee, 2000; Rendón, 1992).

Additional barriers include the triple threat of race, class, and gender.

An additional factor that hinders Latina doctoral students is the limited number of Latina faculty role models, which leads to isolating experiences for Latina doctoral students (Yosso, 2002). Gloria and Castellanos (2006) reported that Latina/o doctoral students experience *imposter syndrome* or self-doubt and uncertainty with regard to their academic endeavors and external questioning by others, which results in isolating and demoralizing feelings. Latinas “have been largely ignored by higher education researchers, a slight that has led to a lack of knowledge and understanding of Latina students’ needs and concerns” (Rodriguez et al., 2000, p. 512). The current study contributes to the research literature by providing descriptions about the perceived challenges of Latinas in doctoral programs.

According to Gándara (1982), most families with high-achieving Latinas who had completed a doctoral degree were in the middle class. Gándara remarked that those Latina doctors who did not report coming from a middle class family were often first-generation students or immigrants of the lowest socioeconomic statuses. Chapa and De La Rosa (2004) stated, “Latinos were dubbed the majority minority because their numbers have out-paced the number of African Americans in the country” (p. 142). Conversely, many factors were found to impede Latinas’ progress in doctoral programs.

Latina doctoral students must negotiate home and school identities as they navigate their higher education paths. Latinas live in “dualized worlds: private/public,

Catholic/secular, poverty/privilege, Latina/Anglo” (Montoya, 1994, p. 515). Montoya described masks that Latina students choose to wear to function in dual worlds.

“Presenting an acceptable face, speaking without a Spanish accent, hiding what we really felt—masking our inner selves—were defenses against racism passed on to us by our parents to help us get along in school and in society” (p. 516). The roles that Latinas take in communicating messages about appropriate masks to wear in the dual worlds are pivotal in the lives of Latina doctoral students. Latinas’ experiences with validation during their doctoral programs influences the likelihood that they will complete their doctoral programs.

### **Latinas’ Perceptions of Validation on University Campuses**

A review of the foundations of higher education reveals that the goal of colleges and universities in the United States has been for young men to serve as leaders in colonial government, with students mostly consisting of Anglo men (Thelin, 2003). The current higher education system was not designed for students from low-income backgrounds, women, and minorities; for this reason, the academic culture is marked by elitism and marginalization. Literature on the history of Latinas in higher education supports this assertion.

Cuádriz (2005) conducted a literature review concerning key studies about Chicanas in higher education from the 1970s to the 1990s. Chicanas were largely underrepresented at all levels of higher education: undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral. The decade of the 1970s involved changing opportunity structures whereby Chicanas and any challenges and issues of schooling in the Mexican American community were

considered a “Mexican problem” (Carter, 1970; Valencia, 2002). Cuádriz (2005) described the decade of the 1980s as marking the beginnings of the Chicana professoriate. The 1990s encompassed the time period of scholarly writing that involved resistance theorists. “The theme of competing tensions, of having to choose one aspect of one’s identity over another, is central to the educational narratives written by Chicanas” (Cuádriz, 2005, p. 227). Yet, this central theme warrants further attention, specifically concerning Latinas in the new millennium. Latina college students encounter many additional obstacles, such as feeling like imposters, tokenism, alienation, and isolation, all of which may be confronted by strategies of resistance and validation.

Clarence and Imes (1978) defined the *imposter phenomenon* as a conflicting experience that is prevalent among high-achieving women who experience self-doubt about their beliefs in certain achievements, such as being enrolled in doctoral programs, and as a result have lower self-concepts. D. A. Quijada (2006) provided a narrative accounting for the experiences of a Latino doctoral student. “I was still in coursework, without a qualifying exam committee and nowhere near being “All But Dissertation.” Once again I felt alone, confused, and now an imposter to my own learning” (p. 260). Herrera (2003) identified distinct challenges of being a Latino student in a doctoral program at a PWI.

Exacerbating this self-doubt and pressure to represent my entire ethnic group were rumblings among some White students in the program that I was admitted into the program primarily because I was Latino and not for my intellectual

capabilities, nor my potential to be an effective counseling psychologist.

(Herrera, 2003, p. 117)

Attributes in overcoming feelings of the imposter phenomenon such as lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration (Clarence & Imes, 1978) included support systems, taking on a mentor role to novice students, and being proactive in the Latina/o campus community (Herrera, 2003).

Tokenism, feelings of alienation and isolation, and expectations to provide service to ethnic minority groups are issues that people from underrepresented racial, ethnic and gender groups experience in academia (American Psychological Association [APA], 2000). Another issue that Latina/o doctoral students must confront is related to tokenism, which occurs when a Latina/o student is asked to speak as a representative of the entire Latina/o culture (Torres, 2006). In classroom settings, Latinas may be asked by faculty to discuss issues and research about race and ethnicity; however, when academic discourse is not centered on such topics, Latina students are not prompted for input (González, K. P., et al., 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

The term *marginalization* refers to Latinas' feelings of being unimportant when compared to other groups of doctoral students. "For Latina doctoral students, experiences of marginality arise as they confront multiple, intersecting, and ever-shifting power dynamics, including (but not limited to) race, gender, and class, on college campuses" (Watford et al., 2006, p. 125). Because Latina/o students have to negotiate relationships with family and academia faculty and students, they experience awkward communication and discomfort in faculty-student interactions (Ibarra, 2001). "The



doctoral experience in most disciplines repeatedly requires the individual to leave behind his or her previous identity and assume the characteristics of a scholar in the chosen field or risk being marginalized within the department” (Torres, 2006, p. 135).

Rosales (2006) wrote a narrative about her experiences as a Latina doctoral student and described feelings of isolation and alienation from other students and the program in general. Rosales elaborated that the feelings of isolation occurred at several levels: at the university level, with no minority student representation or support programs, at the department level, with no diversity issues relevant to underrepresented communities; and on a personal level, as she felt that her research interests on multicultural issues were not supported. Such feelings of isolation and marginalization influenced feelings of self-doubt about her place as a Latina doctoral student.

Latinas experience both overt and covert marginality in doctoral programs. Overt forms of marginality occur when Latinas hear jokes that are racial, ethnic, or sexist in nature, have their academic abilities and merit achievements questioned, or are told that they do not fit in academia (Cuádriz & Pierce, 1994; González et al., 2001; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Covert forms of marginalization occur when Latinas encounter stereotypes in classrooms, academic materials, and program policies that are manifested in discreet manners (Watford et al., 2006).

Conversely, strategies to resist the margins included what Achor and Morales (1990) described as “resistance with accommodation,” in which Latinas rejected dominant discourses while accepting institutional culture by working hard and finishing quality scholarly work. K. P. González et al. (2002) discussed how Latina/o scholars’

contributions connect cultural issues to their communities of origin, which is another resistance strategy. Many Latina/o doctoral students' scholarly works involving their cultures of origin maintained their commitment and persistence to academia (González, K. P., et al., 2002; López, 2001). Cultural aspects among Latinas were considered when determining the conceptual framework for this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

A review of current and pertinent literature reveals a cause for concern about the limited numbers of Latinas represented in doctoral programs. Using persistence theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) as the two-part conceptual framework, this study examined the experiences of Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates in/from higher education programs at Texas public institutions. As noted earlier, the purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the existing literature related to persistence and validation factors in the Latina/o population. The context of Latinas in higher education is alarming, as this population is the least likely to attain an undergraduate degree and the least represented in doctoral degree attainment rates of any racial/ethnic group of women. Challenges to the persistence and validation among Latina students exacerbate the problem.

Extant literature demonstrates issues between home and school cultures and roles for Latinas. Also, a multitude of factors contributes to the educational persistence of Latinas including higher education access institutions such as community colleges and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), family support systems, faculty-student mentorship and validation, and peer relationships. Although qualitative studies have been conducted

on Latina doctoral students, the research tends to look generally at any Latina with a doctoral degree. Studies on the persistence and barriers of Latina/o students tend to combine both men and women and have a propensity to focus on undergraduate student populations. This chapter presents the argument that Latinas confront many challenges and barriers to their doctoral degree pursuits that begin even before they enroll in college. Therefore, this study was an attempt to fill the gap in the research literature concerning persistence and validation among Latina doctoral students in higher education administration doctoral programs.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

This study was designed to examine the experiences of Latinas as they pursue doctoral degrees in higher education administration programs at TACUSPA institutions in Texas. This chapter begins with a description of the methodological framework and the rationale for using qualitative inquiry as the method for this study. Next, the researcher's role is discussed. Subsequently, a description of the research design used in the collection and analysis of the data is presented. Finally, techniques used to ensure trustworthiness are described.

The methodological approach selected for this study was qualitative design, with the use of the constructivist grounded theory approach. Qualitative inquiry relies on the social constructions of meaning created by individuals through their interactions with the world (Merriam, 2002). This approach allowed for the educational experiences of Latinas to be understood, which can lead to change and improve policy (Merriam, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that qualitative research seeks answers to questions concerning how meaning and social experiences are created through participants' words. The authors suggested interviewing as a way of studying the interpretive practices of participants. They defined qualitative research as follows:

The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate

relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. (p. 10)

Qualitative inquiry provided an in-depth understanding of Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates' experiences and allowed participants to reflect on their thoughts and attitudes about persisting in their doctoral programs.

This study used grounded theory; this theory was deemed to be most suitable because it relies on the investigator as the primary instrument for data collection and utilizes an inductive approach (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). "Glaser and Strauss stated from the outset that their method is based on induction; and they clearly used the term in the sense of building from the specific to the generic" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 46). This approach has been utilized in studies on similar topics about diverse student populations and factors that contribute to their persistence.

In a similar study about persistence conducted by Hendricks, Smith, Caplow, and Donaldson (1996), factors that attracted minority students in professional programs, along with factors that contributed to or impeded their progress in academic professional programs, were examined. The researchers used a grounded theory method. Five categories of interview questions were constructed to identify factors that influenced minority students' persistence in their professional education pursuits: "(1) program choice, (2) professional goals, (3) personal support, (4) impediments to success, and (5) reflections on the ideal program" (p. 117). Similarly, I asked interview questions concerning the three major areas of motivation, persistence, and validation that Latina participants reported about their doctoral pursuits.

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities and that researcher and participants co-create understandings in the natural world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Terms such as “trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24).

I was most interested in interpreting and making meaning about the experiences of Latina doctoral candidates persisting in higher education administration programs. As a constructivist, I believe that multiple realities exist and that the relationship between myself, as the researcher, and participants is one of shared interest and knowledge in the field of higher education.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007); therefore, it is imperative that my personal values, assumptions, and biases be examined. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), *dynamic interplay* refers to the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied. Qualitative researchers recognize that bias cannot be fully eliminated. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested that the researcher consider past experiences and knowledge that may influence the individual’s perspectives in the process, as the researcher/investigator is the means by which the study is conducted. I gained understanding of the ways by which individuals construct meaning from their multiple realities through interviews. According to Creswell (2007), “Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study” (p. 39). Researchers are reporting multiple

perspectives in efforts to discuss the “complex interactions of factors in any situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39).

It is important to be mindful of my own positionality as a qualitative researcher as it related to taking care regarding ethics in this study. I am a Latina, currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration at Texas A&M University, while simultaneously working full time as an elementary school art teacher. While I currently face challenges to meet the demands of completing the final year of the doctoral program, I am interested in understanding how Latinas in similar doctoral programs successfully meet academic demands to navigate their pathways to persist in graduate school. My parents always told my siblings and me that we were going to college. College was mandatory, and we knew from an early age that we were going to achieve college degrees. My father has a Bachelor’s degree but my mother does not. I have three siblings: an older sister, an older brother, and a twin sister. My older sister attended college and decided that it was not for her, which led her to obtain a real estate license; she is currently a broker in San Antonio. My older brother obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Marketing from the University of Texas in San Antonio. My twin sister and I attended Baylor University. She obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Family and Consumer Sciences with a minor in Business Administration; I obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in English—Professional Writing, with a minor in Studio Art. As an undergraduate student of color at a PWI, my views on persistence and validation in my own experiences started forming. Having an innate support system and my twin sister with me at Baylor worked for us to support each other to attain our Bachelor’s degrees.

After I graduated from Baylor, I obtained a position in an elementary school in Corpus Christi, Texas, teaching art. The position was granted on the condition that I obtain educator certification while teaching. This is when I started working full time and taking on the role of a graduate student after my former principal informed me about a combined master's and teacher certification program at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. I obtained both a Master of Science degree in Secondary Education and an Art All Level (Early Childhood to 12th grade) state teaching certificate.

When I reflect on my master's student experience, I realize that I relied on my family for support in my hometown of Corpus Christi to persist through the program. I also identified with most of my peers in the program, who were also working as full-time teachers while attending classes. My interest in engaging in a study about Latina doctoral students arose from my former experience as a master's student and my current pursuit of a doctoral degree. While I often feel overwhelmed in my dual roles as teacher and doctoral student, I am curious about factors that contribute to the persistence of Latina doctoral students in higher education administration programs, as most doctoral programs are at PWIs. As a Latina doctoral student, I have my own conceptions of how doctoral students navigate their educational pathways; however, I have been mindful of my own biases and have relied on techniques that are suggested for trustworthiness.

### **Site**

Although the trend of Latinas acquiring doctoral degrees is increasing, there are challenges specific to certain doctoral students of color. In addition, there is limited understanding of the challenges to Latinas at public institutions in one of the most



densely Hispanic-populated states in the nation, namely Texas. For this reason, Texas was selected as the location from which to determine sites for recruiting participants. According to TACUSPA (2011), five universities in Texas have higher education doctoral programs. For this study, pseudonyms are used to designate selected sites: University A, University B, University C, University D, and University E.

Patton (2002) described research entry in the field as involving two parts: “(1) negotiation with gatekeepers, whoever they may be, about the nature of the fieldwork to be done and (2) actual physical entry into the field setting to begin collecting data” (p. 310). I acquired a list of five professors, one at each of the five sites, as points of contact. Each professor recommended some potential participants who met the study criteria or a staff member or administrator who would assist in identifying potential participants. (In efforts to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the sites, the names of the gatekeepers are not furnished herein). In this manner, I identified eligible participants.

Data about the graduation completion rates of Hispanic females in higher education administration doctoral programs at the five study sites were not readily available. First, I contacted several research librarians and searched through academic online statistical databases, but to no avail. Therefore, I acquired data about the completion rates of Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs from the five sites by contacting a faculty member, administrator, or staff member at each site via email and/or telephone.

I emailed professors at Universities A, B, C, D, and E. The first university to respond was University E, after I had sent a brief description of the study and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval upon her request. Next, I had been in touch with a staff member as well as professors at University B. I obtained information about completion rates there only after speaking with a specific staff member. I had previously sent several emails to a professor at University C, and I finally received a response containing the data. After much contact with several staff members at University A, I emailed a professor there, who provided the requested data. A similar situation occurred when I emailed a professor at University D; I experienced many difficulties and delays in obtaining the data. I emailed and called several professors and even administrators. It was not until I attended a professional conference in the field of higher education that I met with a staff member who worked at University D. With her assistance, I obtained the data for completion rates. The collected data on completion rates are summarized in Table 3.

Further disaggregation of the data regarding completion rates of Hispanic/Latina women in higher education administration doctoral programs at five institutions in Texas provides evidence of low numbers of completion by Hispanic/Latina women. At University A, only in recent years have Hispanic women completed doctorates in higher education administration. University B has had four graduates since 2007. It is not surprising that University C proved to be the most difficult in locating participants for this study, as the university had not had any Latinas complete the doctoral program at the time of this study. Universities D and E each have had four Hispanic women

Table 3

*Completion Rates of Higher Education Doctoral Programs by Hispanic/Latina Women*

Year	A	B	C	D	E
2007	0	1	0	0	0
2008	0	0	1	0	0
2009	0	0	0	0	0
2010	0	1	1	0	0
2011	0	0	2	0	2
2012	4	0	0	0	2
Total	4	2	4	0	4

complete the doctoral program since 2007. Because only five universities in Texas were reported as having a doctoral program in higher education administration (TACUSPA, 2011), participants from each of these universities were selected for this study.

**Participants**

Participants for this study were Latina doctoral candidates and/or recent graduates from a higher education administration doctoral program at one of five universities in Texas. Criteria for eligible participants were (a) women who self-identify as Latina, Hispanic, or Chicana; (b) students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of higher education administration doctoral programs at one of the five universities; and (c) being at the doctoral candidacy stage or having completed their programs within the past 2 years (at the time of this study).

The reason for selecting participants who were further along in their doctoral programs was to seek an understanding of how they had persisted and managed to get closer to completing or had already completed their degree programs. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select the initial participants. This sampling process allowed me to locate participants at each of the five Texas higher education institutions. Once I had determined one potential participant at each university by utilizing a gatekeeper (a faculty, staff, administrator, or student member of the program who aided in identifying the initial participant), I used the snowball technique to identify additional eligible participants (Merriam, 2002). A total of 13 participants were included in the sample: four at University A, three at University B, two at University C, one at University D, and three at University E.

### **Procedures**

I employed specific techniques regarding ethics and research entry. First, this dissertation study required approval from the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board. Merriam (2002) noted,

While qualitative researchers have general guidelines for ethical conduct, it is still the responsibility of each researcher to be continually aware of specific ethical problems that arise in each project and to respond not simply in ethical ways but in ethically situated ways. (p. 313)

Creswell (2007) added that the guidelines for such review boards are based on the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence (considering the risks versus the benefits of the research), and justice. The degree of risk in this study was minimal and

described as some participants might experience feelings of discomfort in answering interview questions. None of the participants was from a high-risk group. Before the interviews, participants were assured confidentiality and signed a consent form (Appendix A) that described the purpose of the study and included assurance of confidentiality for the participants.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, each interview was conducted at a private residence, conference room, office, or classroom, in which case each location was isolated to ensure privacy and guarantee high-quality sound recordings. Participants were asked whether they would be willing to meet at their home or office setting in an effort not to meet in a public location that could compromise collected data. Prior to data collection, considerations regarding ethics were addressed.

Participants and sites were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Also, during the data collection process and analysis phases of the study, interviews and data were not shared with anyone but the participant, dissertation committee chairs, peer debriefers, and the data transcriptionist. I then began to select the sample as described above.

### **Data Collection**

The primary method of data collection was interviews conducted face to face for 60 to 90 minutes each. Patton (2002) described three approaches to interviewing: the informal conversational interview, the interview guide, and the open-ended interview. In this study, the interview guide approach (Appendix B) was used, which is somewhere between informal and standardized interviews. Participants were asked questions

concerning three major areas of their doctoral experiences: motivation, persistence, and validation. The interviews were conducted in English, tape recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. Relative to the participants' program choice, I also asked questions concerning their goals, educational experiences, and factors that contributed to their persistence, such as support systems, and motivational reasons for academic matriculation.

Adrianna was a recent graduate of University A. I had met Adrianna at a research conference. I was aware that she met the study criteria. When asked whether she was willing to meet me at her home or office, she welcomed me to her home. Her interview was conducted at her private residence in the kitchen. At the time of the interview, her husband was present in the home; however, he was respectful of the meeting and remained in the backyard during the interview.

Cristina was also from University A. After contacting a professor from University A, I had received Cristina's name as another recent graduate who was eligible for the study. She invited me to her home for the meeting. The interview was conducted in her dining room. No one else was in her home at the time of the interview.

Jennifer was a recent graduate participant from University A. I had received her name from the same professor in the department at University A. Because she worked at an institution in another city, she offered to have the interview take place at her apartment in the same city as University A. We sat at her dining table during the interview.

Another participant from University A was Andrea, a doctoral candidate. I had a previous relationship with her; we were both in attendance at a research conference and we arranged for the interview to take place at the conference hotel. We sat at a table in one of the session meeting rooms after the session had ended; we were the only two persons in the room at the time of the interview.

I became aware that Marisol was eligible to participate through a colleague at University B. She works at a higher education institution in another city, and I met Marisol at her workplace. The interview took place in a conference room in which we were the only two people.

I had a previous relationship with Keyla, a doctoral candidate at University B. She agreed to meet me in a classroom on the University B campus. We sat at a table as the only two people in the room at the time of the interview.

Priscilla, another doctoral candidate at University B, and I had a previous relationship. She works at a postsecondary institution in a different city than the location of University B. I met Priscilla at her workplace campus. The interview took place in a conference room in the library at the institution where she works. We were the only two people in the conference room at the time of the interview.

After contacting a professor in the department of University C, I became aware of both Miranda and Diana. I met Miranda, a doctoral candidate, at her office on the campus of the university where she works. The interview took place in her office. We were the only two people in her office at the time of the interview. Like Miranda, Diana

worked at a different postsecondary institution than the location of University C. I met her at her office and we were the only two people present during the interview.

I contacted a professor in the department at University D and learned that Evelyn was the only person eligible to participate. Evelyn is a doctoral candidate; she invited me to her home. We sat on separate couches in her living room during the interview. We were the only two people in her house during the interview.

University E was the last site selected for inclusion in this study. After contacting a professor in the department at University E, I became aware of Norma. After arranging the interview with Norma, I learned that Claudia was also eligible for the study. Then, after scheduling the interview with Claudia, I was informed that Isabella was a recent graduate eligible for participation. Each interview was conducted in a conference room in the library at University E that I had reserved for the interviews. The only two people in the room at the time of each interview were the interviewee and myself.

Once data analysis was completed via the face-to-face interviews, questions emerged with regard to identified themes. To seek clarification on emerging themes, follow-up questions were posed to each of the participants individually. Informal telephone interviews were conducted with each participant subsequent to the initial interview, with the number and type of questions asked depending on the information obtained during the face-to-face interview. The telephone interviews were less than 30 minutes in length; they were conducted in my office via speakerphone and were tape recorded.



An interview guide was not developed for the telephone interviews because the purpose of the telephone interviews was to allow participants to elaborate on emerging themes from their individual transcripts. Therefore, the telephone interviews were informal conversations. Patton (2002) stated that data collected from informal interviews can be different for each interviewee. Also, “Interview questions will change over time, and each new interview builds on those already done, expanding information that was picked up previously, moving in new directions and seeking elucidations and elaborations from various participants” (p. 342).

All interviews were recorded digitally by the researcher and transcribed verbatim by a professional data transcriptionist. The files of the digital recordings were saved electronically for clarification. The study was conducted during one academic year, including one face-to-face and one telephone interview with each of participant.

### **Data Analysis**

I used a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis, as opposed to a traditional grounded theory research study, because I found this approach to be systematic, with a clear step-by-step process. Traditional grounded theory merges the traditions of positivism with pragmatism and field research (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss (1967) reported that grounded theory involves coding methods with an emphasis on emergent discoveries to yield the development of theory. Grounded theory involves the following constructs of researcher practices: simultaneous data collection and analysis; developing codes and categories from data analysis; using the constant comparative method, where comparisons are made between and among data; and

developing theory with each progression of data collection and analysis (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). According to Charmaz (2005), “A grounded theory approach encourages researchers to remain close to their studied worlds and to develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them but also show processual relationships” (p. 508). Charmaz (2006) reported that every researcher who utilizes the grounded theory method has variations in the way the technique is used.

Since it was not my intent to develop theory, I used a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory involves researchers constructing theories and concepts from the viewpoint of the participants without necessarily resulting in the outcome of a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2009). According to Charmaz (2006), a “constructivist would emphasize eliciting the participant’s definitions of terms, situations, and events and try to tap his or her assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules.” (p. 32). Charmaz (2005) described such an approach as emphasis on the studied phenomenon rather than the methods of studying it.

Constructivist grounded theorists take reflexive stances on modes of knowing and representing studied life. That means “giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them—and locating oneself in these realities” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). Corbin and Strauss (2009) reported, “It is important to understand that description is the basis for more abstract interpretations of data and theory development, though it may not necessarily lead to theory if that is not the researcher’s goal. Descriptions already embody concepts, at least implicitly” (p. 54). My intent in using

constructivist grounded theory for data analysis was to provide interpretations of the participants' experiences with persistence and validation.

In a similar study concerning minority students' factors of persistence in professional programs at a research university, Hendricks et al. (1996) used a purposive sample of 18 participants with data collected in the form of interviews and a grounded theory approach to analysis. Data analysis involved the constant comparative technique after participants' responses to interviews were transcribed from audiotapes. The individual participant responses were coded and compared with units of information on separate index cards. The coded and indexed responses were then reviewed in efforts to determine categories and relationships of categories along with key themes from collected data.

The use of an emergent design allows the researcher to be flexible in changing the study design. According to Patton (2002), emergent design flexibility refers to "openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge" (p. 40). Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) described the process of emergent design as the researcher functioning in the social context through sharing and developing a common understanding by which the study is reported as gradually emerging. Flexibility allows for continued participants' inquiry as it developed throughout the research process. Such flexibility was required for continued inquiry, especially from Phase 1 of data collection (face-to-face interviews) to Phase 2 of data collection (informal telephone interviews). I used emergent design with

regard to determining questions for the follow-up interviews. Creswell (2007) described emergent design as the phases of the qualitative process being altered upon the researcher's entry into the field in the beginning stages of data collection.

The process for analyzing data using a grounded theory approach was described by Charmaz (2006),

Grounded theory coding consists of at least two main phases: 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. (p. 46)

The grounded theory process involves nine steps that allow for construction of meaning, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) reported the need for researchers to immerse themselves in the data to have the participants' narratives present in the final research outcome. In efforts to immerse myself in my data, I adhered closely to the first seven steps outlined above.

According to Charmaz (2006) the grounded theory process involves the following steps, to which I adhered in this study:

1. Research problem and opening research questions: The study focused on the problem of low representation of Latinas completing doctorates in higher education administration programs in Texas as compared to women of other ethnic groups. The three core research questions for this study included the central topics of motivation, persistence, and validation.

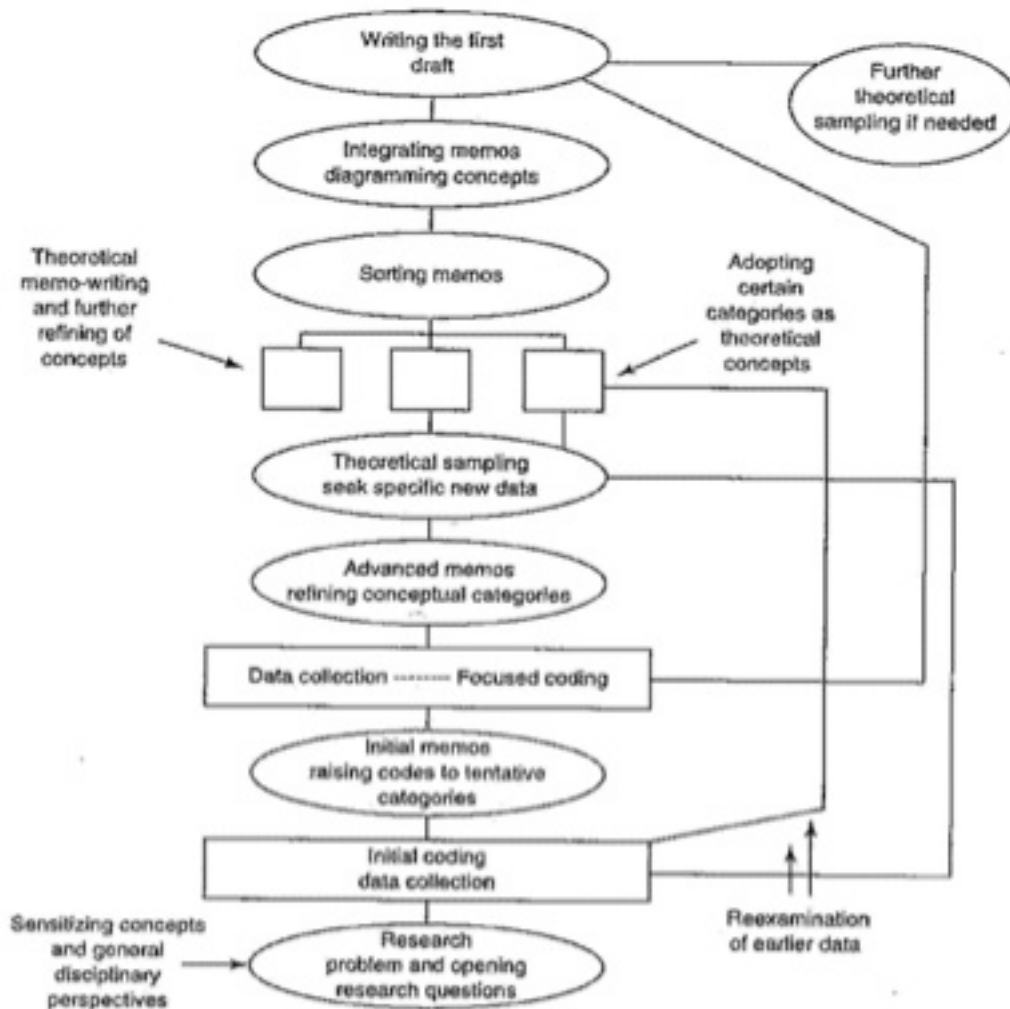


Figure 4. The grounded theory process. From *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (p. 11), by K. Charmaz, 2006, Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

2. Initial coding data collection: Data were collected and analyzed simultaneously. This step required me to stay close to the data by comparing data with data. Initial codes were temporary, as they were changed and compared. Creswell (2007) stated, “In the open coding phase, the researcher examines the text (e.g., transcripts, field notes, documents) for salient categories of information supported by the text” (p. 160).

Open coding consisted of segmenting information, which led to the formation of initial categories of “units” (Creswell, 2007).

Open codes were made to transcripts. Once all transcripts were available, I listened to the audio recording of each of the 13 face-to face interviews and began initial coding (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). Each individual open code was noted in a chart format. For each of the interview questions and probes included in the interview guide, a chart was created with open codes relative to each of the 13 participants’ responses. A total of 38 large construction paper charts were created, consisting of open codes for each of the interview guide questions, along with the questioning probes. The charts were created after cutting and pasting three individual charts that included four to five participants’ responses to large colored construction papers. The large charts consisted of numerous open codes. An example of one of the large charts (Appendix C) consisted of up to 40 open codes per participant. The charts aided in determining emergent themes, as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed. This method “requires constantly comparing and contrasting successive segments of the data and subsequently categorizing them” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 32). I reviewed all of the open codes and collapsed any open codes that appeared to be redundant. I wrote memos after analyzing each of the charts specific to emergent categories during the initial coding phase of data analysis.

3. Initial memos: Memos served several purposes: generate ideas, analyze data, define codes or categories, compare data, support defining categories, identify gaps in analysis; also, questions about the data were asked continuously. I wrote memos soon

after my first interview and simultaneously to each subsequent interview. Initial memos were written after each face-to-face interview and simultaneous to data analysis and data collection in the telephone interviews. As full transcriptions of the interviews became available, I began to analyze the data by reading through the transcripts, looking for major topics and ideas. Early analyses of the transcripts worked to induce development of initial emerging themes.

4. Focused coding: After data were collected, I engaged in focused coding, whereby data were separated, sorted, and synthesized for analytical purposes. By creating the first group of charts that consisted of open codes of each of the interview questions, or data analysis charts and then developing revised charts with collapsed open codes, I conducted focused coding. Corbin and Strauss (2009) described coding as “taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level” (p. 66). The “units” (Creswell, 2007) were then sorted based on coherent ideas corresponding to the research question; for example, for each unit, I asked whether this unit identified a perception of persistence or validation.

The charts were then used to collapse open codes and categories further in the focused coding phase of data analysis, which Charmaz (2006) described as “using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (p. 57). Once I had first collapsed the open codes on each of the large construction paper charts, I created new charts with the collapsed open codes. An example of a focused coded chart (Appendix D) included dashes as indicators that participants’ responses had already been mentioned, hence saturated by replicating prior participants’ responses.

Memos were written subsequent to the focused coding phase of data analysis and during the initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding phases of data analysis. “Writing successive memos throughout the research process keeps you involved in the analysis and helps you to increase the level of abstraction of your ideas” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72).

“Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherences to the emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). As I reviewed the categories several times, it became apparent that the categories were directly related to the interview questions, matching the categories of the models in the conceptual framework. By reviewing the data analysis charts, I determined the relationships among categories, referred to as axial coding (Charmaz, 2006).

5. Advanced memos refining conceptual categories: Memos provided a method to compare data and explore data about the codes. I wrote successive memos throughout the research process, including after each individual face-to-face interview as well as during coding and analyzing data. As I progressively wrote memos and became more analytic of the data, developing conceptual categories were identified.

6. Theoretical sampling sought specific new data: This strategy employed seeking and collecting more selective data in order to refine and develop major categories of a study. Follow-up telephone interviews served as data collection and were analyzed to obtain more information with regard to emerging themes. Questions asked during the telephone interviews varied by participant with regard to emerging themes.



7. Sorting memos: After more data were collected, I wrote more memos, adopting certain categories as theoretical concepts. Units were sorted into categories based on the main topics or themes. Within each category, subcategories were formed and data were analyzed for dimensionality to show the extreme possibilities on a continuum (Creswell, 2007); this is to say, the large theme or category had smaller subcategories within it. After the open coding process was complete, axial (or crossover) coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2009; Rabinovich & Kacen, 2010) was applied to the data.

8. Integrating memos/diagramming concepts: This process involved examining the relationships between and among certain categories and creating a diagram to view their interactions to one another. Axial (or crossover) coding attempts to frame the story in terms of its explanatory logic by connecting concepts and categories. Thus, once the categories and subcategories were identified, I looked at them holistically to identify how they might be related. Diagrams were used to show the relationships between and among categories as they related to one another, along with properties that are discussed in Chapter IV.

9. Writing the first draft: I utilized Steps 1 through 8 to construct an understanding of the data along with identified themes and categories. It was not my intent to generate an original theory. After writing a series of memos at each phase of data analysis, I determined the relationships between the categories. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the relationships between categories can be either causal conditions, the context of the phenomenon, action/interaction or strategies to affect the

phenomenon, intervening conditions that affect the strategies, or the consequences of those strategies.

In sum, these methods for data analysis allowed me to compare perceptions across participants. In the face-to-face and telephone interviews, the participants described their perceptions of their persistence as a doctoral candidate, contributing and hindering factors to their persistence, and matters relative to validation. The study was not designed to provide conclusive answers to the issue of Latinas' underrepresentation in higher education administration doctoral programs; rather, it was designed to understand the perceptions and experiences and the elements that contributed to their doctoral matriculation.

### **Trustworthiness**

Patton (2002) described the need for trustworthiness to be balanced in accounting for the multiple realities that exist. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided foundational descriptions of trustworthiness and techniques that researchers may employ to assess the quality and extent to which research study findings are believable to readers. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) identified four questions that researchers may use to assess trustworthiness:

1. Truth value: How can one establish confidence in the “truth” of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?

2. Applicability: How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?

3. Consistency: How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?

4. Neutrality: How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

### **Truth Value**

In efforts to address the first question, regarding “truth value,” member checks were used. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined a “member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Through the member checking process, participants were asked whether the collected data adequately represented their constructions of their own realities. I sent each participant a copy of the face-to-face interview transcript via email to ensure that her responses were recorded accurately. In cases in which participants desired to make changes to the transcript, track changes were created in the document and returned via email within 10 days. In cases in which the participant desired to make no changes, I noted that, if I did not receive a response within 10 days, I would assume that the transcription was accurate. I encouraged

participants to make any changes to clarify responses that appeared to be vague.

Subsequent to each telephone interview, the transcript was sent to the participant via email. Each participant was given 7 days to conduct the member checking process, make changes, and return the transcript to me via email. In cases in which I did not receive a response in 7 days, as I had noted in the original email, I assumed that the transcription was accurate.

### **Applicability**

The second question, concerning “applicability,” was addressed by the technique of transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that a technique for assuring transferability of a study is to provide a thick description about the studied phenomenon. *Thick description* refers to a description that specifies all factors that a reader may need to know to understand the research study’s findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Geertz (1973) contended that “thick description” of specific events, practices, and customs consists of interpretations of interpretations. I asked semistructured and open-ended questions in the interview protocol to allow research participants to provide thick descriptions of their experiences. I also provided opportunities for participants to elaborate on emerging themes during the follow-up telephone interviews.

### **Consistency**

The third question, regarding “consistency,” was addressed by use of an audit trail, which includes “raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 319-320). In this

study, the audit trail was examined during data collection and analysis in an effort to manage data and generate trustworthiness. The audit trail consisted of the transcripts, codes, charts, and memos.

### **Neutrality**

The fourth question, regarding “neutrality,” was addressed through the peer debriefing process. Christians (2005) noted that “findings ought not to express any judgments of a moral or political character” (p. 142). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing “is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). Peer debriefing involves having another researcher, experienced in qualitative research, check on the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, I underwent the debriefing process with a colleague who was a recent Ph.D. graduate with qualitative inquiry experience and with a dissertation committee member who was an experienced qualitative researcher. We held meetings to address any questions about the inquiry process of the study. The peer debriefing sessions were contingent on the schedules of the peer debriefers, with the goal to make sure that determined themes were logical to contribute to trustworthiness of the study. Another technique to ensure trustworthiness was reciprocity.

### **Reciprocity**

Patton (2002) defined the reciprocity model as a means of receiving some kind of mutual benefit by being a participant in a study. According to Gallucci and Perugini

(2000), the researcher or observer collecting data recognizes that participants may find something in the study that makes their willingness to cooperate worthwhile, such as a feeling of importance or useful feedback. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described reciprocity and ethics as occurring when research participants have to adjust their daily schedules and priorities to assist the researcher or permit the researcher to be present to collect data. The researcher must acknowledge the sacrifices of time or convenience by being mindful of participants' needs and being accommodating and available (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Scheduling each interview at the convenience of the participant at the location chosen by the participant addressed concerns of reciprocity and allowed mutual exchange of information. Providing participants with interview transcripts also served as a form of reciprocity and ensured that participants could give feedback about collected data. This process is described as member checks in inquiry, which assures the truth value of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the rationale for using qualitative methods as this study's methodological approach. The researcher's role was discussed. A description of the research design for the collection and analysis of the data was provided. The study utilized qualitative techniques, including member checks, peer debriefing, and an audit trail to ensure trustworthiness of the research findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Latinas as they pursued doctoral degrees in higher education administration programs at TACUSPA institutions in Texas. The research questions were (a) *How do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates describe their motivations for pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration?* (b) *What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be contributing factors to their persistence in higher education administration programs at public Texas universities?* and (c) *What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be factors that contribute to their validation in higher education administration doctoral programs?"* In this chapter the findings of the study are presented.

After utilizing Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigmatic schema, categories, which are defined as concepts that represent the phenomenon, were determined. The findings are discussed, along with the corresponding parts of the grounded theory paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The overarching categories described in Table 4 are used to organize the results section. In the discussion of overarching categories and subcategories that follows, the overarching categories are used as an organizing structure for the narrative.

First, a brief description of the five sites is presented, followed by a profile of each of the 13 participants. Second, the definition of the context, as well as the identified

Table 4

*Overarching Categories*

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Overarching category
1. The Pursuit of the Doctorate
2. Motivation
3. Program Choice
4. Commitment to Service
5. Persistence to Complete the Doctorate
6. Social Support
7. Factors of Stress
8. Coping Skills
9. Milestones

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category of the pursuit of the doctorate, is described. Third, the term *causal conditions* is explained, along with the categories of motivation, program choice, and commitment to service. Fourth, the definition of intervening conditions is discussed, along with the identified categories of social support and factors of stress. Fifth, action strategies are explained, along with the category of coping skills. Sixth, the term *consequence* is defined and the category of milestones is described. Seventh and finally, the developed conceptual model is visually depicted, along with the story line explaining the relationships among the categories through the participants' experiences.



## **Description of the Five Sites**

The sites for this study were five public universities in Texas (TACUSPA, 2011), all PWIs with a higher education administration doctoral program, designated herein as University A through University E. There were 13 participants: four at University A, three at University B, two at University C, one at University D, and three at University E. Each site is described in terms of the number of participants, followed by the student enrollment numbers and the number of available doctoral programs offered.

### **University A**

University A, located in a major city in Texas, had the largest number of participants in this study: four women. It is important to note that University A has more than 38,000 undergraduate students and 12,000 graduate students; it offers more than 50 doctoral degree programs. Each participant from University A (Adrianna, Andrea, Cristina, and Jennifer) lived in City A. No participants from University A were commuter students while they were enrolled in their doctoral programs.

### **University B**

University B, located in a small city with a large university population, had three participants (Keyla, Marisol, and Priscilla). University B serves more than 39,000 undergraduate students and 9,000 graduate students; it offers more than 80 doctoral programs. Keyla lived in City B when she attended University B. Both Marisol and Priscilla were commuter students while they were enrolled in the doctoral programs, living in a city other than City B.

### **University C**

University C, located in a metropolitan city in Texas, had two participants (Diana and Miranda). This university has nearly 29,000 undergraduate students and 7,000 graduate students enrolled; it offers 35 doctoral programs. Both Diana and Miranda resided in City C, where each of them worked full time in addition to being enrolled in a doctoral program.

### **University D**

University D, located in a rural city about a 1-hour drive from a major city, provided one participant (Evelyn), a commuter student living in City C. She traveled to attend her doctoral courses at University D, which offers six doctoral programs to an estimated undergraduate student enrollment of 6,900 and a graduate student enrollment of 4,500.

### **University E**

University E, a major research university located in a small city with a high university student population, serves more than 26,000 undergraduate students and 6,000 graduate students; it offers 50 doctoral degree programs. Three women (Claudia, Isabella, and Norma) enrolled at University E and participated in this study. Two (Claudia and Isabella) lived in City E while attending courses in the doctoral program; Norma lived in a city located 45 miles from City E.

### **General Participant Profiles**

The participants in this study were (a) women who self-identified as Latina, Hispanic, or Chicana; (b) students who were currently enrolled in or recent graduates

(within 1 or 2 years at the time of this study) from higher education administration doctoral programs at one of the five universities; and (c) students who were at the doctoral candidacy stage or had completed their programs within the past 2 years (at the time of this study). Table 5 lists the pseudonym, site, age range, and doctoral candidate/graduate status at the time of the initial face-to-face interview.

Table 5

*Demographic Profile of Participants at Time of Face-to-Face (First) Interviews*

Pseudonym	Site	Age range	Doctoral status
Adrianna	University A	36-40	Doctoral graduate
Andrea	University A	31-35	Doctoral candidate
Claudia	University E	36-40	Doctoral candidate
Cristina	University A	41-45	Doctoral graduate
Diana	University C	46-50	Doctoral candidate
Evelyn	University D	36-40	Doctoral candidate
Isabella	University E	31-35	Doctoral graduate
Jennifer	University A	31-35	Doctoral graduate
Keyla	University B	31-35	Doctoral candidate
Marisol	University B	41-45	Doctoral candidate
Miranda	University C	36-40	Doctoral candidate
Norma	University E	51-55	Doctoral candidate
Priscilla	University E	41-45	Doctoral candidate

Nine of the 13 participants were doctoral candidates, working to make progress on their dissertation studies, and four participants had graduated from their doctoral programs at the time of the first interviews. The doctoral graduates reflected on their experiences as doctoral candidates, as they had just completed their programs within 1 to 2 years at the time of this study. Each participant is described below, including the status of recent graduate or doctoral candidate, status of full- or part-time enrollment, age range, residence, marital status, program progress at the time of the interviews, and whether she resided in the same location as the respective university or commuted to attend the doctoral program.

### **Adrianna**

A participant from University A, Adrianna was a recent graduate of her program at the time of this study; she had taken 6 years to complete her program. Prior to being a doctoral student, she had gained her undergraduate degree at a private PWI located in another state in the northeastern region of the United States. Adrianna then obtained a master's degree at a public PWI located in a state in the Midwestern region of the United States. Adrianna had previously worked as a school teacher, then as an academic advisor to undergraduate business students for 2 years. When she was a doctoral student, she secured a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA) that enabled her to enroll as a full-time student. She married shortly after completing her program. Her age range is 36–40 years, and she currently works for a major politician. She had recently purchased her own house. Adrianna grew up in another state and had currently lived in City A for 13 years.

**Andrea**

At the time of the first interview, as a doctoral candidate at University A, Andrea was in the 5th year of her program. She had previously worked full time at which was a private PWI in Texas, where she had obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree as a Program Coordinator. Andrea was in the 31–35 years age range. She had accepted a postdoctoral fellowship position at an institution other than University A, which drove her to finish all of her remaining dissertation edits to schedule her defense. During her years as a doctoral student, she attended classes full time and worked as a GRA. She was not yet married but was in a relationship with her boyfriend, who attended law school while she took on her role as a graduate student. She did not have any children. To date, Andrea had defended her dissertation and had graduated. She had relocated to the institution where she currently works as a postdoctoral fellow, living with her significant other.

**Claudia**

As a doctoral candidate in the 11th year of her doctoral program at University E, Claudia had earned undergraduate and master's degrees from University E. She worked full time as a director of student traditional programs at University E. At the time of the first interview, she was working to complete her dissertation, with a defense date scheduled for the following month. Claudia had completed her coursework as a part-time student with 1 school year, including both fall and spring semesters, as a full-time student in order to meet the institutional residency requirement. She was in the 36–40 years age range. While Claudia was completing her coursework for the doctorate, she

was single without any children. For most of her stage as a doctoral candidate, she had a fiancé who was very supportive of her completing her dissertation. As of the writing of the findings, Claudia had defended her dissertation in the same month that she married her fiancé. She was expecting the arrival of her first baby within the same year.

### **Cristina**

A participant from University A, Cristina had graduated from her program in 2010 after being enrolled for 7 years. Her age range was 41–45 years. Prior to being a doctoral student, Cristina had completed an undergraduate degree at a public HSI in Texas, then a master's degree from University A. Prior to becoming a doctoral candidate, she was a Program Officer to an Assistant Director at an Early Academic Outreach Program at a public PWI in a western state. She was also co-instructing a class at the same university. Cristina later moved to City A. She then obtained a position as a GRA. She had received over \$50,000 in research fellowships, which funded her doctorate. She is married, with two young children, and grew up in a city in Texas other than City A. Presently, Cristina is Executive Director of a program that provides services to nearly one thousand students who are enrolling at universities, with the goal of increasing the number of students, specifically Latinos and Latinas, enrolled in higher education.

### **Diana**

Pursuing a doctorate at University C, Diana was a 6th-year doctoral candidate in the 46–50 years age range. She completed an undergraduate degree at an HSI in Texas and then a master's degree at University C. Diana worked full-time as an Associate Dean

at a higher education institution. Originally from a Texas city other than City C, Diana had been living in City C for 23 years. She is married and, although she did not have any children of her own, she is a guardian of three disable siblings. She took classes part time during the fall and spring and was planning to take courses full time in the summer. At the conclusion of this study, she had recently completed Chapters 4 and 5 and sent them to her editor, with anticipation to schedule her defense date soon.

### **Evelyn**

The only participant from University D was Evelyn, a second-year doctoral student who attended classes full time. She attended a private PWI in Texas for her undergraduate degree, then a public PWI in Texas for her master's degree. Evelyn owns her own Human Resources Consulting business that focuses on employee recruitment and selection. She also teaches undergraduates as an adjunct instructor at a higher education institution. Her age range was 36–40 years; she grew up in a city in Texas other than City C, where she has resided for 19 years. Evelyn is not married; she lives with her significant other, also a Master of Business Administration graduate student who is very supportive. She does not have any children. At the time of the second interview, Evelyn was beginning the dissertation phase of her program, as she had just completed comprehensive exams and coursework.

### **Isabella**

In our first interview Isabella, recently graduated, reflected on her experiences as a doctoral candidate at University E. She had completed both her undergraduate and master's degrees at a smaller liberal arts private PWI in Texas. She enrolled in courses

as a full-time student and did not work while she was in her program. Isabella was in the 31–35 years age range. She completed her program after 5 years. Isabella was married and had her first child during the first year of her doctoral program. At the time that Isabella graduated, her son was 5 years old. Her husband began his doctoral program 2 years after she had started, and he works in the medical field. Currently, Isabella is an administrator at University E. As of the writing of the findings, Isabella was in the same position, where she was serving on her first dissertation committee.

### **Jennifer**

Also from University A, Jennifer completed her program in 4 years. Her age range was 31–35 years. She had worked previously as a school counselor in City A after completing her undergraduate degree. While Jennifer began her undergraduate degree at University A, she finished at a public HSI in Texas. She obtained a master's degree from University A. Jennifer grew up in a town located about 350 miles or a 5-hour drive from City A. When she began her program, she was a full-time student and part-time counselor. During Jennifer's second year she earned a GRA position that allowed her to be a full-time student for the remainder of her program. She currently teaches as an Assistant Professor at a Texas postsecondary institution. Jennifer was single and did not have any children.

### **Keyla**

A doctoral candidate at University B, Keyla had previously lived in City B as a doctoral student, but during the candidacy phase of her program she moved to another city located more than 150 miles (3-hour drive) from City B. She was a 6th-year doctoral



candidate who attended classes full time and worked as a GRA after receiving a research fellowship that funded her education. Keyla had earned both undergraduate and master's degrees from the same public HSI in Texas. At the time of the first interview Keyla was in the age range 31–35 years and in the 6th year of her program. At the conclusion of this study Keyla had her defense date scheduled and had obtained a position as Executive Director of a program at the university in the city where she presently lives and where she had earned her undergraduate and master's degrees.

### **Marisol**

A doctoral candidate at the time of the first interview, Marisol was in her 12th year of her doctoral program after gaining two program extensions. She also worked full time throughout the duration of her coursework as a commuter student living in another city, where she had resided for a total of 13 years. Her age range was 41–45 years. Prior to beginning her doctoral program, she had earned undergraduate and master's degrees from two separate public PWIs in Texas. Marisol was one of seven students in her entering doctoral program cohort; she was located nearly 150 miles (2.5-hour drive) from City B. During her time as a doctoral student, she had six distinct jobs at three universities. She had run three political campaigns, even serving on a City Council. Marisol is married with a 2.5-year-old son. Marisol quit her job to pursue completion of the doctorate and had successfully written all chapters, with a scheduled defense date and expected graduation at the next commencement ceremony.

## **Miranda**

A doctoral candidate at University C, Miranda was in her 10th year as a doctoral candidate; her age range was 36–40 years. She completed an undergraduate degree at a public PWI in Texas, then earned a master's degree from a private liberal arts HSI in Texas. Miranda lived in City C for 12 years and previously had lived in a Texas city other than City C. Miranda was married and had two young daughters. Miranda currently worked full time as a Program Coordinator for a department at a different postsecondary institution. She oversees eight advisors and collaborates with department chairs to accomplish scheduling of classes. Upon completion of this study, Miranda had taken a new job teaching full time and had written a good draft of the final two chapters of her dissertation. She was on track to finish writing and establish a defense date.

## **Norma**

The oldest participant in this study, Norma was in the age range 51–55 years. At the time of the first interview she was a doctoral candidate at University E, which was the same institution from which she had received undergraduate and master's degrees. She was in the 9th year of her program, where she was a part-time student except for one semester in which she had to fulfill residency requirements to complete courses full time. Norma lived in a city located 45 miles (1-hour drive) from City E. Norma was married, with two grown children: a son and a daughter in the 25–30 years age range. Both had completed higher education, one having a master's degree and working in the library field and the other having a bachelor's degree and currently pursuing work in the field of theater. Norma worked for a college at University E as a doctoral student for the

majority of her coursework. She stopped working in the last year of her program as a doctoral candidate to focus on the dissertation. Norma grew up in a different city in Texas prior to moving to City E, where she had lived for more than 40 years. As this study was completed, she had completed her dissertation writing and defense and was currently working at a different postsecondary institution as a director.

### **Priscilla**

As a doctoral candidate at University B, Priscilla was in the 4th year of her doctoral program at the time of the first interview, working on her dissertation with the first three chapters completed. She was in the 41–45 years age range. Priscilla had earned an undergraduate degree at a public HSI in Texas and a master's degree at University B. At the time of the interview she was a Dean at the same higher education institution where she had previously worked as a faculty member. Her workplace institution was located about 100 miles (1.5-hour drive) from City B. Priscilla was a commuter student in that she maintained her current work position to attend classes as a full-time student. She was married, with two daughters of elementary school age. At the completion of this study she had experienced some delays in getting the IRB application approved. Priscilla had begun data collection, as some of the delays that she experienced were due in part to her recent job promotion from faculty to administrator. She indicated that she wanted to be further along in her dissertation than she could report.

### **Work Profile of Participants**

Most of the participants had worked to meet educational expenses of the doctoral programs. Seven (Adrianna, Claudia, Diana, Jennifer, Marisol, Miranda, and Priscilla)

worked full time in higher education, one (Evelyn) owned a human resources business and taught part time as an adjunct instructor, and three (Andrea, Cristina, and Keyla) were part-time GRAs; two (Isabella and Norma) did not work while they were doctoral candidates (Table 6).

Table 6

*Work Profile of Participants*

Pseudonym	Work status <sup>a</sup>	Work position as a doctoral candidate
Adrianna	PT for 2 years, then FT until completion	Academic Advisor 2 years, then GRA <sup>b</sup>
Andrea	FT	GRA
Claudia	PT or FT for a year	Director of student traditional programs
Cristina	FT	GRA
Diana	PT in fall and spring FT in summer	Associate Dean, community college
Evelyn	FT	Owner, human resources consulting business
Isabella	FT	Did not work
Jennifer	FT	Part-time counselor first year, then GRA
Keyla	FT	GRA
Marisol	PT	Associate Director, Student Center
Miranda	PT	Program Coordinator, Advising Office
Norma	PT; one semester FT	Did not work
Priscilla	Mix of FT and PT	Instructional Dean, community college

<sup>a</sup>PT = part time, FT = full time. <sup>b</sup>GRA = graduate research assistant.

The five institutions that these participants attended had aided in providing varied accounts of the doctoral candidacy phase in higher education administration doctoral programs at PWIs in Texas. The participants provided diverse perspectives in discussing their personal experiences as doctoral candidates, as they were of various ages, had different work and life experiences, and had individual reasons for pursuing doctoral degrees.

### **Overview of Presentation of the Findings**

The findings are presented according to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigm, which is an organizational scheme that gives order to data in a way that merges the structure and process. According to Strauss and Corbin, the paradigm includes conditions that are the circumstances in which the phenomena occur, actions/interactions that are the strategies that individuals use in response to the phenomena, and consequences that are the outcomes of those strategies. Labels within the paradigm are important to note, as each label definition is used in the presentation of the findings. The labels within the paradigm are defined and explained as they relate to the emergent findings. After identification of the context of the study, specific labels are addressed: context, causal conditions, phenomenon, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. Categories associated with each label are discussed.

### **Context**

According to Corbin and Strauss (2009), *context* includes the situation to which individuals respond through actions. The context for this study involved participants' abilities to continue through their doctoral programs as degree candidates. The category

of pursuing the doctorate emerged as the situation in which participants experienced causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences as doctoral candidates.

The context for this study is the pursuit of the doctorate, which involves first the coursework and then the doctoral candidacy phase—the dissertation phase of the doctorate program. The actual pursuit of a doctorate shared by participants served as the context or the common factor by which they experienced each part of the Strauss and Corbin (1990) schema, including the determined categories of persistence, motivation, commitment to service, social support, factors of stress, coping skills, and levels of achievement. A few categories emerged as causal conditions, since it does take quite a few initial factors for one to pursue a doctorate.

### **Causal Conditions**

Causal conditions are the events that lead to the development of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), herein the persistence to complete the doctorate. The starting conditions to begin a doctoral program involved the categories of motivation, program choice, and commitment to service. The participants were motivated to begin their doctoral programs due to the specific programs at their respective universities and the flexibility of program offerings that were presented to participants. Furthermore, participants discussed their commitment to be of service to others who are pursuing higher education in the near future as they committed to continue working in the field of higher education.

**Motivation.** *Motivation* was previously defined in this study as the starting factor to begin a doctoral program. Within the category of motivation were two forms: internal and external. All participants described internal motivation to begin a doctoral program. Adrianna, Isabella, and Keyla stated that they “had always known” that they wanted a doctoral degree. Norma, the oldest participant, described how her life experiences of being a mother and her various professional positions had provided the drive to continue. She reported,

I’m the only one pushing myself this time. I’m the one. I have finished all of my coursework. I’m working on this Ph.D. on my own. I’m doing my own research. I’m doing my own writing. I have to be the one that has to keep pushing myself.

Similarly, when Diana was asked how she stayed motivated to fulfill her role as a doctoral candidate when she encountered challenges, she responded, “It’s just talking internally, saying, ‘You can do it. You can do it. You can do it.’” Priscilla’s response to that question mirrored Diana’s reply: “My internal drive that it has to be done. It’s going to be done.” Internal motivation can be viewed as the self-talk that occurs when participants such as Diana had thoughts or talks with herself. Motivation to begin and continue through a doctoral program was internal for participants, but some participants also mentioned the importance of being motivated to begin the program for others.

External motivation emerged when participants spoke about wanting to complete a doctorate in order to achieve an advanced position in higher education for their families. This type of motivation involved beginning a doctorate for others, such as family members. When Miranda was asked why she had decided to start the program,

she explained that she had had a mentor while she was a master's degree student who had inspired her to begin her doctorate. She thought, "If I want to continue to move up within higher education, I need that degree behind me. That would help me."

Sometimes, external motivation stems from family members. To complete a doctoral degree for specific family members, as Isabella had desired for her son, was a motivator for several participants. She stated,

I think without question, it was for my son. I didn't ever want him to have an excuse. So I didn't ever want him to look at me and say, "You didn't follow through. You didn't finish what you started." So now I have the capacity to say, "I was exhausted and broken and frustrated and poor and hungry, and I did it." I would go home and I would look into his little bitty face. I heard, somewhere, someone said one time that there always is a price to be paid for reminding someone of what they could have been, if they only worked harder. So I felt like going down this path, maybe somehow paid a portion of that price for my son. He truly was what got me through.

Isabella stated that her motivation was to be a role model for her son.

Marisol told an interesting story about her father pursuing a doctorate in two programs in the field of education, only to result in being All But Dissertation (ABD) two times and not finishing. She reflected about her external motivation. "So he ended up with his 10 years being gone and not even getting the extension." Marisol had that she had already been granted two extensions to complete her dissertation.



**Program choice.** Family members were of the utmost importance to participants such as Isabella and Marisol and served as external motivators to begin their doctoral programs. Additional motivating factors were qualities of the doctoral program that attracted participants in selecting their respective programs.

The category of program choice emerged as each of the participants discussed reasons for selecting their respective programs. The geographic location of the program emerged in the category of program choice, as participants reported this in their reasons to select their doctoral programs.

First, the *location* of the participants' respective doctoral programs was a key reason for choosing a program. The convenience of the geographic location of their universities emerged as a reason for enrolling in their chosen programs for Claudia, Diana, Evelyn, Marisol, Miranda, and Norma, as each of these participants worked full time either in the same location as the city of their programs or in a city nearby their universities in order to afford the costs of a doctoral degree.

Marisol, a doctoral candidate in the higher education administration program at University B, discussed her reasons for joining a cohort of students who commuted from the same city to City B for coursework. Marisol stated,

I think that's probably been one of the pieces about my experience, not having been in [B City]. So a cohort in another city, we all knew that we would take part-time classes, and all of us were employed full time. That was one of the pieces in the fall of '99, when I knew I was accepted. I had a long discussion

with my husband and said, “Okay, for the next few years, this is going to be the priority.”

Marisol mentioned that her entering cohort was important in her choice of a program.

The program’s flexibility in terms of how it offered courses was another factor in selecting a program. Participants’ responses revealed that opportunities that their doctoral programs offered in terms of courses, career mobility, and available funding were important in their program choice decisions.

Evelyn, a doctoral candidate at University D, described her program:

The geographic location and the convenience of the program—I live in [C city]. But [D City] has their program set up, several of the courses can be taken online, or they have a satellite campus here in [D City], that I’ve been able to take classes at. They do hybrid classes, where you meet twice a month and the rest is done online. So the flexibility of their program, for me, at my point in life, I’m a working adult. I own a business. I teach school part time at college. The flexibility of that program was very attractive to me.

A completed doctorate offered participants future career choices, which was another factor for participants in their selection of their respective programs.

Program opportunities, including those available once a doctorate was completed and funding for the doctorate, were factors in selecting a program. The consensus (Claudia, Cristina, Diana, Evelyn, Isabella, Jennifer, Keyla, Marisol, Miranda, Norma, and Priscilla) was that a doctorate would provide opportunities for career advancement.

Diana simply noted that a doctorate would allow her to “have the credentials to climb the educational ladder.”

Marisol described her reasons for choosing the Ph.D. program at University B: I think it just really fit with what I wanted to do. Wanting to aspire to some sort of senior level position, within the university. I thought this would have some credibility. It would also help enhance discussions and understanding. I knew that Ph.D. over Ed.D. within academia was definitely going to be a big difference.

While Marisol currently worked at a university, she strove to gain a higher-ranking position within higher education.

Likewise, Jennifer and Andrea echoed that the program was “a good fit for me.” Cristina added, “I knew the network of professors and administrators associated with the program would be instrumental to me securing a job in City A and possibly, at University A.”

In addition to the future possibilities that a completed doctoral degree offered participants, funding opportunities was another influence on program selection. Choosing doctoral programs with available funding was reported when several participants expressed that certain experiences were opportunities for them to begin and persist in their doctoral programs. Andrea, Cristina, Jennifer, and Keyla had worked as GRAs at their institutions to receive funding to pursue their doctorates. Keyla noted that her GRA position and funding opportunities paved the way for her to begin and continue her doctoral program. When asked about her reasons for selecting the Ph.D. program at

University B, she discussed having her mentor from her master's program at her doctoral program, and she explained, "I was awarded a Diversity Fellowship, which basically paid for all of my schooling."

Two participants chose to persist in programs when funding became available after a period of stopping. Adrianna and Cristina noted that they had a period of time as doctoral students when they took a break from their doctoral programs at University A, only to return when funding opportunities became available. Adrianna had stopped her program after one school year. She explained,

I started on a part-time basis and that went on for a couple of years and then I stopped out for two semesters. I had already been in the program for quite a long time and just really wanted to be done. So once I got the candidacy, I knew what I had to do. My Advisor was very supportive and pushed me quite a bit. I just cruised at that point.

The funding that she received as a GRA allowed her to complete her coursework as a full-time student. Once doctoral candidates reach that phase of the program, it motivates them to know that they are approaching completion of their doctoral program.

Similar to Adrianna's situation, Cristina discussed how she took a personal leave from her doctoral program due to discontent with the program and a desire to begin working full time in a professional position. She described her reasons for returning to her doctoral program after having a conversation with a worker in the financial aid department:

This was the starting line. Because the lady on the other end, which never happens, said—She asked me where I was from; what university I graduated from; my GPA; and GRE scores. And she said, “You qualify for the South Texas Graduate Fellowship.” And I said, “Okay. What does that mean?” She said, “Well I can give you \$19,000, but you have to go full time.” I remember calling my husband, going, “I have this money, this scholarship, and I don’t want to go, but I should.” I was crying because I was torn.

She recalled discussing with her husband her desire to return to her program after becoming aware that she qualified for a South Texas Graduate Scholarship. Cristina was excited by the opportunity of having funding to continue her doctoral program. However, she experienced conflicting emotions with such an opportunity because her daughter was 9 months old at the time.

The tension that participants experience with pursuing their doctorates as candidates while simultaneously taking on the roles of mother and wife was evident. Cristina expressed that she wanted to spend time with her daughter. Ultimately, the funding for her doctorate became the opportunity that she needed to make the decision to persist in her doctoral pursuit. The participants who were both candidates and mothers (Cristina, Isabella, Marisol, Miranda, Norma, and Priscilla) shared their tensions to take on the dual roles. The participants who were also mothers were determined to accomplish their doctorates due to the opportunities that became available during the program, such as funding. Once they had completed their programs, career mobility was important, as was the case in Cristina’s and Isabella’s experiences.

**Commitment to service.** Making progress during the doctoral candidacy process is critical to maintaining momentum to complete the dissertation. It is important for participants to reach their goals during the autonomous dissertation writing stage of their doctoral programs. One goal for the majority of participants was inherent in their desire to help others.

The category *commitment to service* emerged when participants reported that they wanted to “give back” or be of service to groups of students. All participants reported feelings of responsibility to be of service to others, which led them to begin and continue to completion of their doctoral programs. Adrianna and Claudia mentioned that they were going to continue their educational pursuits for either a law degree or a doctoral degree. Both participants noted that they felt that they could do more with a doctorate in terms of helping others in higher education.

The desire to be a role model was identified in the category of commitment to service. Jennifer stated, “I think a big reason was I felt like I could be in a position to help others, to a greater degree, particularly Latinos actually.” A desire to help others to pursue advanced degrees was expressed by all participants. For instance, Miranda reported, “I feel like I can be a role model for other Latinas.” However, not all participants talked about being a mentor to Latina/o students only.

For example, when Keyla was asked to describe herself as a Latina doctoral candidate, she said, “The Ph.D., the three letters after my name, or the first two letters in front of my name will allow me to travel in certain circles.” Keyla described how

completing her doctorate would be a personal fulfillment and doing what she said she wanted to do when she was younger.

I would definitely say to pay it forward. I mean, I think that at this level, whether you're Latina or not Latina, and you're a female or a male. But I think at this level, at the Ph.D. level, because there are so few people with Ph.D.s, I think that it's only right that you do pay it forward and you pay it forward to other candidates.

By "paying it forward," Keyla noted that she plans to help others in the same circumstances. She further noted that it is helpful to be of service in academia because achieving a doctorate is a difficult task that not everyone attempts.

Miranda described her realization that she is doing something that not everyone does when she saw an informational flyer in the restroom at her campus library. She said that each month the flyer had new information; one month, it presented information about the small percentages of people who completed a Ph.D. Miranda recalled her realization, "I'm going to be part of that percent. I'm going to be a part of that small percent, and I am achieving something not everybody does." She experienced an "aha!" moment when she saw the statistics of how few people actually achieve a doctorate.

Similarly, Claudia said that she was involved in a Hispanic student society as an undergraduate student when she had some eerie thoughts about pursuing her doctorate. She reported,

I started to notice there were not a lot of people that I can identify with, in terms of my ethnicity, Latina women. I thought, "I'd like to get my Ph.D. in this

program and kind of help pave the way.” Then I began to learn more about educational policy and process and those things and how that can impact Latinos in general.

She added that she understood the need for different types of administrators, legislators, and people who can articulate a perspective from a Latina critical race lens.

Andrea also mentioned serving as a role model to girls involved in her Latina sorority. “Being a mentor to folks. In my sorority, there are other women who come out, especially if they’re in the field of higher education.” Both Claudia and Andrea discussed how they strived to be role models and serve other students involved in higher education.

Contributions to research were cited as part of the commitment to service. The research by Latina doctoral candidates is important because the literature on Latina/o populations is limited; therefore, participants expressed a responsibility to “give back” or provide research to inform various student populations. All participants reported that their dissertation research topics were relative to their personal experiences, such as in the Latina/o culture, as first-generation college students or transfer students, being from the same geographic hometown, and attaining higher education access. Adrianna described her dissertation topic:

The topic was on Latino males and their first year of college. So, I looked at their transition experience, their pathway throughout childhood and high school, their family experiences, their educational experiences, and how they utilize social capital to achieve academically.



When asked about her dissertation topic, Jennifer replied, “My dissertation focused on the college choice process of Mexican American students from south Texas.” She elaborated that in her research she focused on the supports that were available and accessible to undergraduate students for them to gain access to a college education.

**Summary of causal conditions.** The causal conditions included the categories of motivation, program choice, and commitment to service. Participants reported both internal and external forms of motivation to begin a doctoral program. Program choice included the geographic location of the university and the opportunities that the doctoral program offered, such as courses, career mobility, and available funding. The category of commitment to service included the desire to be a role model to future students and to contribute to the research literature, as each participant had experiences relative to her dissertation topic that drove her passion to contribute to the academic literature.

### **Phenomenon**

The phenomenon is the subject that was explored in depth in this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Latinas as they pursued doctoral degrees in Texas higher education administration programs. Persistence is the phenomenon that is connected to the process for participants to complete the dissertation in their respective higher education administration doctoral programs. In this study, participants who were doctoral candidates pursuing doctorates were experiencing persistence to complete their degrees.

**Persistence to complete the doctorate.** The process for participants to complete the dissertation was identified as persistence, which is the phenomenon determined in

this study. While motivation was previously reported as the initial factor to begin a doctoral program, the term *persistence* was defined as the ability to continue in a program. In order for a participant to persist, she needed to have determination to continue through the dissertation process.

The category of persistence included participants' personal desire and familial relationships. All participants reported that, during the very autonomous dissertation process, they had a personal desire to remain accountable for themselves in order to persist and complete their doctorates, which emerged as the first property in the category of persistence. Adrianna, Claudia, Diana, Isabella, and Keyla said that they had "always wanted" to pursue a doctorate. Keyla described her ability to persist: "I think that you really, individually, you really have to set your mind to it and finish it; nobody's going to finish your dissertation for you." She reported that her chair had delayed her slightly but that it really took the internal need to finish the dissertation in which she held herself accountable to complete the dissertation. Similarly, Diana reported, "In order to persist, for me, it was very intrinsic. When I start something, I have to finish it. The persistence was within myself." She had relied on herself as an individual to push herself to move forward on her dissertation.

Marisol described her ideas on progressing in a doctoral program:

I told a lot of my colleagues who are looking to go into doctoral programs, the fact that if they have completed their master's program, really the thing they need to have to move forward to the next degree is the will.

Marisol discussed how individuals pursuing doctoral degrees must have the drive to continue to completion.

Similarly, Adrianna mentioned, “Quitting wasn’t much of an option. I did question whether or not it was worth it, but I always knew I would finish some time.”

Jennifer remarked, “I’ve never really started something that I haven’t completed.”

Norma described in vivid detail her experiences with persistence as a doctoral candidate, “I had to always tell myself that this is an important goal. I had made a commitment to fulfill this goal and ensure that, if I had an opportunity to speak to faculty, to kind of build up my self-esteem.”

Participants’ relationships with family members, faculty, and peers influenced their abilities to persist. The general consensus among participants (Andrea, Claudia, Cristina, Evelyn, Isabella, Jennifer, Keyla, Marisol, Miranda, Norma, and Priscilla) was that family members had major influential roles in their ability to persist. For example, Isabella, a doctoral graduate, described her family’s significant role in her ability to persist when she was a doctoral candidate.

It is really important to have a core group of people that really supports and encourages you, and I think that has to start with your parents. They have to provide the belief system and the inner strength to believe that you can accomplish this.

Isabella said that, although her parents did not understand everything that she had to accomplish, they remained pivotal in her accomplishment. She discussed her family’s integral part in maintaining her persistence to finish the doctorate. During Isabella’s

weakest moments, when she doubted her ability to finish and felt overwhelmed and exhausted, her family listened to her and inspired her with motivating words.

Familial relationships were a property of persistence for many participants (Andrea, Isabella and Keyla) who noted that, although family members did not fully understand the dissertation process, they were supportive by listening and having conversations about timelines and deadlines. For example, Andrea described,

Kind of explaining the ins and outs of what it is that I'm doing. I talked to them a little bit about my topic. They're kind of like, "Okay. Sounds interesting." But they don't really ask a lot of questions about that. So I think it's mainly like education. Educating them about what I'm doing. Maybe like the stage that I'm in. "So now, I'm in data collection. So now, I'm interviewing. What that means is I'm interviewing everybody twice, and I have to find up to 10 folks." Just kind of explaining the process.

She discussed important deadlines with her parents even though they did not fully understand the entire dissertation process.

Several participants discussed how persistence came from relying on themselves, faculty members, and family. Norma had to rely on all three to maintain the momentum to finish.

Of course, continue to fall back on the support of my family and the idea that they felt that what I was doing was something that was not only challenging, it was something that a lot of people were not doing, and that I was really going

above and beyond as far as my energy, as far as my personal drive and things like that, to fulfill my commitment.

Norma sometimes doubted whether the degree would be worth all of the time that she had dedicated and the loss of time spent with her family. But she relied on the idea that part of this achievement belonged to her family, who had made sacrifices such as loss of time with her in order for her to be successful in progressing to and completing a dissertation. Similarly, Isabella stated, “I just had to kind of persevere and find that internal strength to kind of power through it, and really lean on my committee.”

The phenomenon of persistence involved candidates who reported a need to feel encouraged in their abilities to persist in writing a dissertation by others, not necessarily family. Marisol commented, “It’s just important to always, whether you know you need it or not, somebody who may just ever so often check in with you.” She noted that it can help if it is “somebody who is not your family.” Likewise, Jennifer added that she started “an informal writing group” with a couple of her peers. She commented, with regard to persistence and barriers and strategies, “If anything the stress, students need to really seek out, you know mentorship. Whether that’s from faculty or just peers that are ahead of you in the game.” Claudia reported, “My friends and my bosses, my administrators, my colleagues, regardless of ethnicity, were there for me and would ask how I was doing and things like that.” Relationships with others who were not related to participants were also important for maintaining the momentum to continue through the dissertation.

**Summary of the phenomenon.** The phenomenon of persistence to complete the doctorate was reported by all participants as they mentioned factors that contributed to

the ability to persist. The category of persistence included personal desire, as all participants reported having the drive to keep going through the dissertation stage of their programs. Also, participants' relationships with family, faculty, and peers were identified in the category of persistence.

### **Intervening Conditions**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) described *intervening conditions* as the categories that influence phenomena. The causal conditions included motivation, program choice, and commitment to service and the intervening conditions were those determined to affect the phenomenon of persistence to complete the doctorate. In this study the intervening conditions that emerged were categorized as social support and factors of stress.

**Social support.** The category of social support was identified as one of the intervening conditions because support influenced the participants' ability to persist in their higher education administration doctoral programs. Three types of support were identified: family support, friend support, and faculty support. Within the property of faculty support emerged the issue of validation in the faculty-doctoral candidate relationship.

While familial relationships were previously reported as inherent in the category of persistence, they are also important as an intervening condition. The extent to which participants' family members supported and encouraged the students to keep going in their doctoral programs describes this property. This type of support overlaps the category of persistence. Family support described the help that participants obtained from a spouse or significant other. All participants mentioned that they were the first in

their families to attempt a doctorate, and most of their parents had little to no higher education.

It was interesting to hear the women talk about how their parents experienced limited education. Cristina recalled,

I would talk to my mom and dad, not too much. My mother didn't go to college; she graduated with a GED. She had a third-grade education and decided to go back to school when I was about 4 or 5 years old. I think it was her dream to graduate with a GED. My father received an elementary education, too, and then he went off to the Army. He did earn some college credits afterward. It's hard to have them understand what you're going through. It's something totally alien to them, but they were still very supportive.

Although her parents did not fully understand the doctoral process, they were still very supportive. Cristina added, "I have a brother who got a master's in engineering, and he seemed to get it." Her brother was also a great source of inspiration for her.

Several participants who also took on the roles of wife and mother discussed how their spouses were a large source of support for them. Priscilla and Miranda described how their husbands and parents had assisted them with matters such as schedules and child care so they could balance their roles of wife, mother, and doctoral candidate in addition to other responsibilities, such as work. Priscilla, a mother of two school-age daughters, described the support she had received from her husband.

With husband, it was mostly coordinating, "Okay, remember, this semester, Tuesdays, I don't get home till this time. We've got to do this and this, and make

sure you sign all the papers.” So a lot of it was just coordination. My husband lets me tell him about what I experience, even though I know, for the most part, he doesn’t really care. But he lets me vent when I need to, and just talk about it when I need to.

Husbands such as Priscilla’s were innate support systems to work out the logistics of child care and scheduling while they were getting through her doctoral programs as commuter students who worked full time.

Both Miranda and Priscilla had families with two daughters. Remarkably, both participants reported that their parents had moved to the city where they resided in an effort to help with the children so the students could fulfill their roles as doctoral candidates and working mothers. Miranda discussed whose decision it was for her parents to move to her study city: “It was their decision and they decided basically the day that I called them to tell them they were going to have their first grandchild.” Priscilla’s mother assisted her with her two daughters as a working mother who commuted nearly 2 hours to her program.

Isabella told a profound story about how her family was completely supportive of her getting a doctorate. She reported that her family was in attendance at her dissertation defense.

I was just truly blessed. I always have been. I have an outstanding support system. I have my mother and father and I have one brother, who have been behind me every step of the way. My husband bore the financial burden for our



family the entire time that I was in school, so that I could complete my degree without any distractions.

She also noted that, during her moments of exhaustion, her parents had encouraged her and prayed with her.

Participants expressed family support that ranged from very much to almost none. The support levels were a dimension of the property, family support. Claudia mentioned a disagreement with her father, who had a law degree, even though he maintained support for her to complete her doctorate.

It was interesting. My dad—we got into an argument, a few years ago. He was like, “I didn’t send you to [University E] so you could develop a mind to challenge me.” I was like, “Wait a minute.” So that was kind of tough sometimes.

She also explained her support relationship with her mother: “But my mom, I would call her. Bless her heart. She didn’t understand the dissertation. She didn’t understand the proposal.” Claudia later added that her mom often called her crying, saying that she was proud of her and would pray for her and light candles at church. She interviewed her grandmother and video recorded it to show at her upcoming dissertation defense. In the video her grandmother talked “about her education and lack of education, lack of opportunity.” Claudia remembered that her grandmother mentioned how proud she was of her and how she never thought that she would have a granddaughter achieving a doctorate, which was very helpful for her to persist. Claudia’s story was interesting in that she was on her own for the most part until her last year in her program, when she

met her fiancé. She worked for the same university where she was enrolled as a doctoral candidate. It was amazing to hear her discuss how she had defended her dissertation, married, and was expecting her first baby—all within the same year. Family support was just one type of support that participants described.

Friend support was also identified in the category social support. Those participants who experienced little support from their families relied on support from significant others or friends. Most participants mentioned friends as sources of support during their days as doctoral candidates. It was interesting to hear several participants relate that they had to maintain their friendships outside of the university in order to continue in their doctoral programs. Jennifer reported, “Non-grad school friends were also very supportive, even though I almost never saw them.” Adrianna, a graduate, reflected on her experiences and described how she was mainly reliant on support from friends. She did not rely on support from her family because they did not understand exactly what she was going through. She discussed her support system:

Emotional, psychological, mostly from friends, classmates, to some extent, my advisor, as I mentioned, was awesome. The professional organization that I mentioned, I had a leadership role and the people in it were wonderful and that contributed to my resilience in a big way.

She also reported that she went through a divorce while she was a doctoral student, which was difficult, and noted that her support was mostly from her friends.

In addition to friends, support from significant others was determined to be part of friendship support. Evelyn explained,

I think that a support system comes from a variety of places. I think the relationship that I'm currently in is very helpful. My significant other, he's an MBA student. So he understands the demands of school. We both are in school right now.

She mentioned that his support affirms her decision to continue in her doctoral program.

No matter the source of support, every participant reported having a support system from family, friends, and faculty members. Faculty support emerged in the category social support. The extent to which participants received support and validation was essential to their persistence levels for dissertation completion. Diana talked about how to be assertive when asking for help from a faculty member. She suggested, "You've got to reach out and talk with them." Diana said, "It's you having to reach out to them. I think, as a doctoral student, that's how it should be." A candidate asking for help from a faculty member when she needs it is helpful in keeping the course in a doctoral program.

Sometimes the issue of having to change advisors affects persistence in a doctoral program. Andrea related that she had had little contact and a negative experience with her first advisor. She changed professors, which resulted in a positive experience. She talked about her advisor [herein called Carlos] and his role in being supportive of her as a doctoral candidate. "I've been working with Carlos since I came in. He was the one that was always helping me with everything, from classes, to work, to conferences." She elaborated that Carlos introduced her and fellow graduate students to

others at conferences, which was helpful. Faculty advisors, committee members, and chairs are helpful in encouraging doctoral candidates to keep going.

Keyla described her validating faculty support: “I get a lot of support from my committee. Three of my committee members, three of the four, have been very, very helpful.” She added that her chair had candid conversations with her and that her methodologist, another professor on her committee, was also helpful. She also had another committee member who “took a job out of state. But he was always very supportive in terms of encouraging of when I’m going to get done and so forth.” When pondering the question about validation in her doctoral program, Keyla answered, “I think one of my biggest validations came early on and it came from being accepted to a doctoral fellowship at Washington State University.” She recalled that she felt affirmed in her research ability after someone outside her university accepted her for a summer fellowship.

Faculty advisors were important in providing validation and support to doctoral candidates. Validation is imperative for the successful completion of a doctoral program. At times, seeking validation from faculty member may prove difficult with regard to obtaining research feedback in a timely manner. Strategies to confront delayed dissertation feedback from committee chairs and members were determined to be helpful to attain progress. Keyla reported “trying to get feedback from my chair.” She discussed delayed feedback issues as impeding her progress, such as 6 weeks to get feedback on her first revision of Chapter 4 and another 6 weeks for feedback on her second version. Keyla discussed her strategy for making progress despite experiencing delayed feedback

from her chair. She said that she emailed her dissertation chair, politely noting her timetable and goal to graduate by December. She then sent follow-up emails as reminders. She described the outcome of her reminder email strategy:

He was responsive after that and apologized for dropping the ball. He mentioned that there were no excuses, and then we worked that deadline of when I wanted to get done. I'm so glad I get to be done now. He got back on his A game after being a little off for a little bit.

It seems that delayed feedback is a common concern with doctoral candidates. Various reasons were reported for delayed feedback, including faculty turnover that occurs when faculty advisors/dissertation chairs leave the institution. Faculty have other advisees/doctoral candidates to guide. Isabella described the following:

I had to switch Committee Chairs in the middle of my process. Because the initial Committee Chair that I had was just not assisting me in the way that I felt I needed to be helped. I actually lost almost 6 months of the process, waiting for feedback from her. It finally got to the point where I had to approach the Dean of the graduate school and say, "I find myself in this situation, where I'm not getting a response from her. I'm not getting any feedback. I can't move forward, but need to finish." We had to have a meeting. She came. Some things were revealed about some personal things she was going through. But it set me behind and I had to find an entirely new Committee Head to start over with.

In some cases, personal situations arise with faculty that may impede a doctoral candidate's progress, as was Isabella's experience. She added, "Luckily, my new Chair

was really excited and helped me get on track and really helped me through the process.” In some cases, participants experienced delayed progress due to their own experiences and individual progress. For example, in Isabella’s experience, her faculty chair was having personal issues that impeded Isabella’s progress.

The proximity of faculty members at other institutions influenced participants’ levels of faculty support. Instances occurred with five participants in which faculty members left for positions at other institutions while serving on the participant’s committee. Keyla and Priscilla, both at University B, Miranda at University C, and Norma at University E reported the issue of faculty turnover. Priscilla noted, “My Chair moved away to another state. It seems that all of the responsibility was on me to keep things going.” While faculty left the institution where participants were working to complete their dissertations, as in the experiences of Keyla and Priscilla, the faculty member on each of their committees remained until Keyla finished her dissertation and maintained chair status on Priscilla’s committee.

However, an issue that proved relevant to the majority of participants was the rate at which faculty leave the university for another job. A faculty member may leave a committee for any number of reasons. This proved very challenging in several cases. Miranda talked about changing major professors on three occasions.

I don’t know if the faculty really hindered me. It was more personal and just that thing of feeling defeated because of us losing a professor. The first one, he was there such a short time. Was it him? Was it the university? I don’t know. The second one it was, “Well, health.” You can’t control that. I know my current one,

she's going to stay there. She's not going anywhere. She's going to see me through the end.

The faculty members who sit on a doctoral candidate's committee are critical in completion of the program. The amount of time that a faculty member can validate and advise a doctoral candidate proves helpful in a candidate's ability to persist. Andrea described the importance of faculty validation:

Just to reiterate the importance of faculty validating students, especially Latinas. Coming in, we're often the first in our family to pursue a Ph.D. It can be really overwhelming at times, and so to have a faculty member validate you.

In summary, within the category of social support emerged support from family, friends, and faculty. Social support emerged as a larger category, as it was influential in that it both contributed to and inhibited levels of persistence to complete the doctorate.

**Factors of stress.** Stress was an intervening condition, another emergent category, in that participants either made progress smoothly in their programs or progressed slowly, depending on their levels of stress. The issue of time was determined as a source of stress. When Jennifer reflected on her experiences as a doctoral candidate and her most difficult challenge, she said, "I had self-imposed deadlines. I would stress myself trying to meet those deadlines." Jennifer later described that she even made herself sick with stomach issues that were brought on by the stress of time and dissertation deadlines. Likewise, Keyla discussed time as the greatest reason for her stress: "getting done and being able to manage your time effectively."

The factors of time and writing were two reasons for stress reported by the majority of participants. For example, when Norma was asked about the causes of the greatest amount of stress, she cited the time required to finish the dissertation.

The time it takes to get this done and not just give up. When you get to the end, you're just kind of alone. It's just, "How do I pull this all together, so I do justice to my topic, I do justice to the individuals?"

Claudia's response mirrored Norma's statement about time as a factor of stress; she also noted stress caused by her perception of not having done a sufficient amount of work on her dissertation. "The greatest stress for me was, again, when was enough, enough? Finally, when you're writing, you're like, 'Okay. How much more? How much more do you need?'" Claudia added that balancing the expectations of her committee members was also challenging. To add to the issue of time, Andrea talked about the time required for IRB approval as her greatest cause of stress because it was out of her control. She added, "If it were in my control, it would have happened a lot sooner because I would have taken care of it. But the fact that I waited 8 to 9 months to hear back was out of control."

Another reason for participants to feel stress included educational costs. Stress was identified with regard to financial obligations. Cristina reported that obtaining quantitative data that were out of her control for her mixed-methods dissertation study proved stressful because the Office of Admissions later said that the owner of the data was the Registrar's Office. She then remarked,



But in essence, it's the University. The Registrar did not want to give me the data. I had to go to Legal Affairs, to meet with the Vice President. To argue my point that this data was going to be de-identified, strongly argue that if they were really committed as a university to producing Ph.D. candidates with strong quantitative skills, this is the one thing they could do. I don't know how it happened, but Legal Affairs saw it my way.

After a very challenging experience, Cristina had to write a research grant proposal to pay for the data, which cost several thousand dollars. Funding for research when there is a lack of financial resources is also a great source of stress for doctoral candidates.

Similarly, Diana discussed financial responsibilities, which were a source of stress for her. She stated, "I'm paying for it myself, so it's financial."

I have three—two sisters and a brother that are mentally disabled, and I'm a guardian for them. I am responsible for the financial portion of a portfolio that keeps them going. Both of my parents are deceased and my dad left a little money for them. It's taxing, at this time, because the economy is such. So when you open up the statement from the portfolio and you see that your family lost a good portion of the gains that you gained at one point, it becomes very stressful. My role in my family—immediate family, I don't have. It's just myself and my dog. I do not have any children. So I don't feel that's stressful. But dealing with my brother's and sisters' financial state, their well-being, can be stressful.

Having relationships with colleagues in higher education proved stressful for some participants. Jennifer discussed the stress of forming relationships in the field of

higher education. “Navigating the relationships you forge was also stressful. For instance, learning how the world of academia works with mentors and peers, some of who are overly competitive, and how to network at conferences was particularly stressful.” Jennifer also noted her gender as a form of stress.

Sometimes you do see a little bit of the “*compadre*” system at play. I don’t know if that necessarily—I never felt discriminated against because of my gender outright, but I mean, I think there’s definitely a lack of Latina mentors, in general, in academia, so that’s hard.

The *compadre* system refers to Latinos (males) taking care of other Latinos. In other words, Jennifer’s Latino advisor, from her point of view, seemed to assist Latino students more than Latinas in their academic experiences.

**Summary of the intervening conditions.** In summary, the categories of social support and factors of stress were determined to be the intervening conditions in this study, as participants discussed both of these issues. The category of social support included family, friend, and faculty support systems. Factors of stress involved time, financial obligations, and relationships with colleagues in higher education. The ways in which participants handled levels of support and stress were determined to be the strategies to persist to complete the doctorate.

### **Strategies**

When people experience challenges, tactics are taken through action strategies to influence the phenomenon in some way (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Action strategies are the goal-oriented activities that were performed when the Latina doctoral candidates

experienced the intervening conditions of support and stress during the phenomenon of persisting in their doctoral programs.

**Coping skills.** Coping skills emerged as a category of strategic actions or interactions in response to intervening conditions of social support and factors of stress. These are the ways that participants handled the demands of being a doctoral candidate: balance, spiritual coping, fitness, and friendship.

Balance describes the idea of being able to juggle the various roles that a Latina doctoral candidate takes on to handle the high levels of stress that she experiences. The participants discussed various ways to achieve balance and cope with the demands of pursuing the doctorate. Marisol, for example, described the ways she handled her stress.

I go get a massage. I'm not going to lie. That's become a huge part of my relaxation. Usually I do it like at night. I schedule it at night. So, that way the kids are in bed, and I don't feel guilty about leaving my husband with them. I go for usually it's at least an hour. I come back and it's like, that felt so good. My other coping strategy, I would just say is: Every once in a while just saying, "You know what? I'm not going to go to the library today," and just taking the day off and saying it's okay.

Miranda relied on a combination of coping skills to maintain her balance.

Spiritual coping was identified as a way to handle stress. Many participants (Andrea, Claudia, Diana, Isabella, Jennifer, Keyla, Marisol, and Norma) reported obtaining spiritual strength through prayer, as a means for maintaining balance. Diana mentioned that she worked around stress through prayer. "Prayer, I'm very spiritual. My

family is very spiritual, and luckily I have that tool to put in my tool kit. So when I am stressed, I turn to my religion to get me through.” Diana prayed for guidance, which helped her to manage her demanding role as a doctoral candidate.

Coping skills included fitness and having friendships outside of academia. In addition to spiritual coping, physical exercise was mentioned by five participants (Adrianna, Claudia, Cristina, Keyla, and Norma) as imperative for stress relief. For example, Adrianna talked about her coping skill of fitness: “When it came to fitness, I wouldn’t compromise.” Adrianna discussed how her fitness and friends were a coping strength for her. She noted, “I think the fitness piece was a big outlet for me, doing the yoga and the running.” Similarly, Cristina reported that fitness, specifically running, had helped her to cope with the demands of writing a dissertation.

I tried to make friends away from the university, because you can just die on the vine, I think, if you are totally surrounded by university life. You need to have a life outside the academics. For me, those were my running friends. So that helped, just running and being part of a team.

Having a healthy lifestyle that involved physical activity helped Adrianna and Cristina to relieve stress. Moreover, the relationships maintained in exercise or being a member of a running organization proved helpful in having a life outside of the university. Fitness and friend support were helpful in coping with difficulties in persisting through a doctoral program. Andrea described how her boyfriend helped her cope to maintain a healthy balance.

He helped me a lot. Like we would go for walks, or we used to go to the gym a lot. I found a Zumba class I liked. He's like, "Are you going to go to Zumba? You never feel bad if you go to the gym."

Unhealthy stress relievers such as drinking alcohol and eating bad food were balanced with healthy behaviors of exercise classes, such as Zumba in Andrea's experience. Isabella reflected on a time when she used to drink wine and talk with her family in order to cope with her role as a former doctoral candidate.

At times friends within the same program proved to be helpful with participants' abilities to cope. Friend support was a property for the category of social support as an intervening condition and, similarly, was determined to be a factor in the ability to cope as a strategy. Norma and Claudia were doctoral candidates at the same institution. It was interesting to hear Norma describe how she leaned on Claudia for support when she experienced stress: "Every once in a while, I'll email or I'll text someone, like Claudia, she and I talk a lot, to kind of just vent." Claudia articulated her coping skills as advice for future Latina doctoral candidates:

Do everything that you can to find a balance, a healthy sense of self. Get into counseling, if that's what's going to help you. You're not crazy. It helps to have somebody just to go and talk to someone. Sometimes you think you can talk to your family but sometimes that's not healthy, either. It's helpful to go talk to somebody else. Find people that can be mentors to you. Realize that there are going to be some people that might be jealous of you, that don't want to help you, and just move on.

Sometimes, as in Claudia's experience, it was helpful to have a friend going through the same thing such as persisting in writing a dissertation.

**Summary of strategies.** In the cases of many participants, coping skills were found to be imperative in dealing with stress and doctoral candidate demands. Participants described their coping skills as trying to maintain balance during the dissertation process. The properties of the category of coping skills included a combination of tactics such as balance, spirituality, exercise, and friendships.

### **Consequences**

Consequences are the result of utilizing identified action strategies of coping skills. Accomplishing milestones during the doctoral process, with the final achievement being the completion of the dissertation and a successful defense, was determined to be the consequences in this study.

The category *milestones* refers to making progress through the dissertation phase and occurs at various phases for a doctoral candidate, such as completion of coursework, preliminary examinations, dissertation proposal defense, data collection, data analysis, and writing. The idea of moving forward in the dissertation phase of the program and relying on dissertation committees describes the category milestones.

The idea of experiencing progression in the dissertation phase illustrates milestones. Moving forward within the context of the pursuit of the doctorate was expressed by participants who reported about the ability to move forward during the dissertation phase. Participants employed various strategies to make progress in their programs, such as keeping track of progress or setting deadlines. Evelyn discussed her

strategy to move forward as having a hard copy of her degree plan and marking completed courses to physically view her progress as she was attaining it. Andrea reported that she had accepted a postdoctoral position and had to be finished by a certain deadline. “I had set the date a month before it was actually due to my next position, because the university wanted confirmation that I had defended. It was intense.” She added that it was a “crazy but exciting” time. In Andrea’s experience, setting a deadline to be finished worked for her to complete her dissertation.

In an effort to understand the experiences of progressing through the dissertation process to complete milestones, each participant was asked about her greatest hurdle or challenge in completing candidacy. Each participant expressed the point of the dissertation phase that proved to be most challenging. In discussing her hurdle, Andrea described maintaining the momentum.

I personally was emotionally, physically, and intellectually drained. You’ve been working on this topic for so long, and then I had to wait so long for different processes to go through, and you’re constantly thinking about it. Then you reach a point where you have all the data, and it’s all sitting there. Sometimes it’s all you can do to just sit in front of a computer and make yourself work.

Andrea said that she had to hold herself accountable in order to accomplish the final draft of her dissertation to defend it by the time her postdoctoral position started.

In order to move forward in the dissertation stage, doctoral candidates must rely on dissertation committees. A strategy to make progress as doctoral candidates when hurdles were experienced involved relying on suggestions and help from dissertation

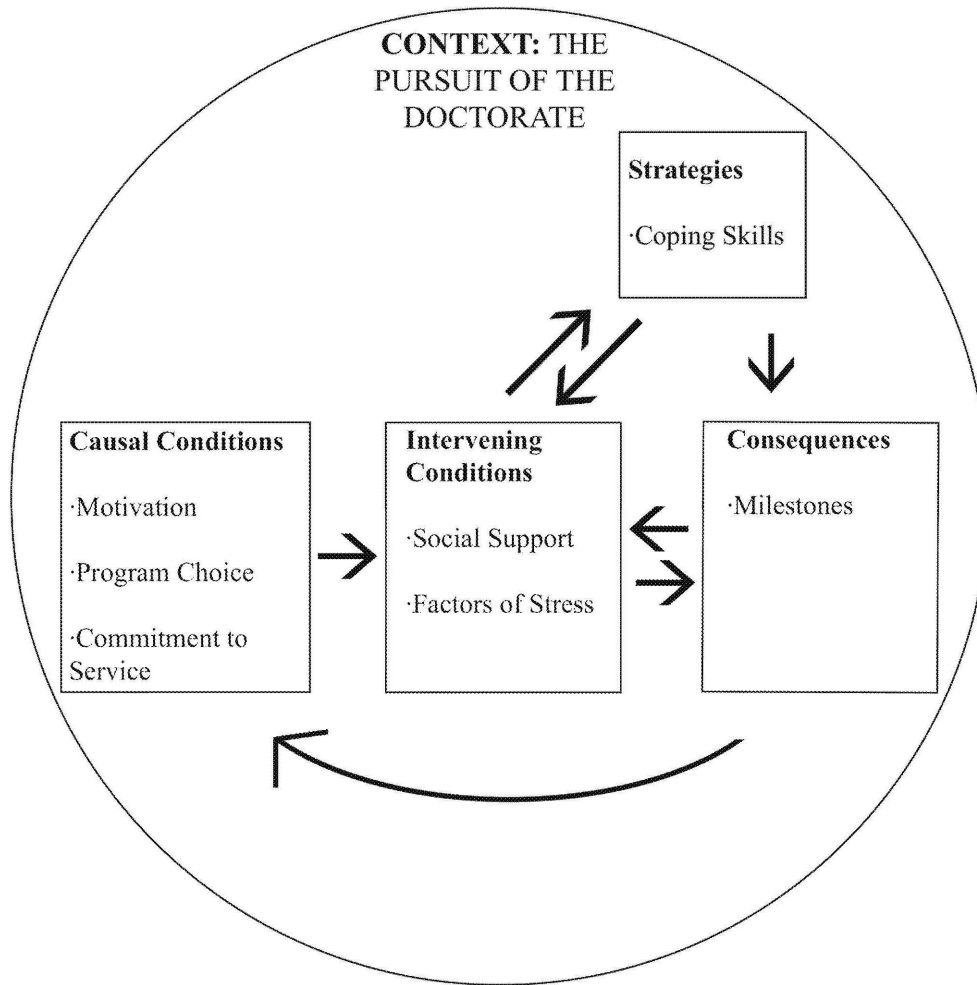
committees, which was reported by all participants. When asked the same question about the greatest hurdle, Diana answered, “The literature review for me was the biggest hurdle.” She expressed that it was not just her own writing but working in the right direction that her committee steered her. In addition to finding the internal strength, Isabella said, “It was just a matter of working really closely with my dissertation committee.” Isabella was not working while a doctoral candidate but was trying to balance her roles of wife, mother, and doctoral candidate, which was difficult. She reported that her husband was helpful because he was simultaneously taking courses as a Ph.D. student and was a large source of support in her roles as wife and mother.

The consequence involved the category of milestones, which refers to participants’ accomplishments at various stages of the dissertation. Moving forward and participants’ reliance on their dissertation committees were emergent in this category. The completion of milestones was evident, with four participants (Andrea, Claudia, Keyla, and Norma) successfully defending their dissertations at the conclusion of this study.

### **Storyline**

The grounded theory conceptual model developed in this present study of Latina doctoral candidates is presented in Figure 5. The phenomenon was determined to be persistence to complete the doctorate, as all participants described factors that contributed to and inhibited their abilities to persist. The action and interaction of the causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences all occurred in





*Figure 5.* Phenomenon: Latina persistence to complete the doctorate.

the context of the pursuit of the doctorate. The striking factor of these interviews was that, although few Latinas pursue doctorates, there is a sense of responsibility to give back to others in academia while this credential is pursued and after it is completed.

The causal conditions included three categories: motivation, program choice, and commitment to service. These causal conditions indicated that there are many reasons why participants begin a doctoral program in higher education administration.

Participants discussed feelings of internal and external motivation to begin their doctoral pursuits. Selecting programs based on their institution's location, opportunities within the program such as format of course offerings, career advancement, and funding were also identified. Each participant conducted dissertation research relevant to his or her personal lives and experiences in higher education.

While in the dissertation phase, they encountered intervening conditions that either contributed to or inhibited them from accomplishing their milestones. The categories of social support and factors of stress were determined as these intervening conditions. Reasons for stress were length of time, financial costs of pursuing the doctorate, and interaction with others in academia. The extent to which participants received social support from family, friends, and faculty yielded either a successful milestone attainment or prompted them to engage in a strategy for handling all of the demands of being doctoral candidates, which was identified as coping skills, prior to completing a milestone. Milestones were reported as the completion of specific dissertation goals including data collection, data analysis, chapter drafts, sending chapters to the dissertation committee, and having a full draft of the dissertation to pursue a defense date. In some instances the completion of a milestone reverted participants back to the element of intervening conditions as a need to obtain more support and guidance from family, friends, and faculty. Participants encountered stressful situations, in which case they completed another milestone. Or, they employed a strategy for coping to accomplish the next milestone. At times when participants accomplished a milestone, they increased their levels of commitment to be of service to

others, which was indicated as a causal condition that further increased their motivation levels, another causal condition.

Many participants discussed strategies for coping to maintain balance while writing their dissertations: spirituality, fitness, and friendships. Participants described their coping skills as trying to maintain balance in their lives during the dissertation process. The use of coping skills either yielded the accomplishment of another milestone or reverted participants to their intervening conditions of social support and stress, in which case both the strategies and consequences proved to be bidirectional in movement with regard to the intervening conditions of support and stress.

It is important to note that four participants had successfully defended their dissertations at the time of the second interview. Nine of the 13 participants had completed their dissertations and were ready to graduate or had graduated. During the first round of data collection interviews, only four participants were doctoral graduates who reflected on their experiences as doctoral candidates. At the time of the second round of interviews, five participants had completed their doctoral programs, reported successful dissertation defenses, and were graduating at the upcoming commencement at their respective institutions.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

This study was designed to understand how Latinas persist through the completion of their doctoral programs. Five sites met the specific criteria of being located in Texas with a doctoral program offered in higher education administration. The TACUSPA (2011) reported five universities in Texas with these programs. For this study, pseudonyms were used to designate the selected sites: University A, University B, University C, University D, and University E. All sites were PWIs.

The participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling of Latina doctoral candidates or recent graduates from higher education administration programs at the five universities in Texas. In total, 13 participants were selected: four at University A, three at University B, two at University C, one at University D, and three at University E.

The conceptual framework chosen for this study was a combination of persistence theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993) and validation theory (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011). Three research questions were address:

1. How do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates describe their motivations for pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration?
2. What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be contributing factors to their persistence in higher education administration programs at public Texas universities?

3. What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be factors that contribute to their validation in higher education administration doctoral programs?

The researcher utilized qualitative inquiry, relying on the meaning created by individuals and the ways by which they make meaning through their interactions with the world (Merriam, 2002). This approach allowed for the experiences of Latina doctoral candidates to be understood. Constructivist grounded theory methods were employed for data analysis, which allowed participants to report their interpretations of their experiences and interactions with the world.

Data were collected via two rounds of interviews with 13 participants. The first round of interviews was conducted face to face and the second round was conducted via telephone. This provided a rich data set that revealed participants' motivations and factors of persistence with regard to pursuing the doctorate. Using grounded theory methods for data analysis, nine broad categories were identified in the data: the pursuit of the doctorate, motivation, program choice, commitment to service, persistence to complete the doctorate, social support, factors of stress, coping skills, and milestones. The categories were then correlated to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigmatic schema, including causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences.

### **The Findings**

Figure 5 displays the conceptual model developed in this study. Because all participants described factors that influenced their persistence, the phenomenon was labeled persistence to complete the doctorate. The initial factors or causal conditions for

participants to begin their doctorate included motivation, program choice, and commitment to service. Participants identified intervening conditions of social support and factors of stress that either contributed to or inhibited their ability to persist to accomplish milestones. The category of coping skills was identified as the strategy used by participants when they confronted challenges in navigating doctoral pathways. The consequences were determined as milestones, which included the steps toward completion of the dissertation. Milestones also referred to any successes that led to progress in the doctoral program, such as completing coursework, preliminary examinations, the dissertation proposal, data collection, data analysis, writing chapters, and ultimately the finished dissertation with a successful defense. This process was not linear because categories intersected and overlapped.

### **Discussion**

A review of the literature revealed that researchers have determined that Latinas are the least formally educated demographic group (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; González, J. C., 2007), possible due to the clash between home and school cultures (Garcia, M., 2006; González, J. C., 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Stress factors identified in this study were similar to those reported by Ponterotto (1990), who found that Latina doctoral students experienced stress when adjusting to the rigors of academia, an emphasis on competition instead of cooperation, and the autonomy of the dissertation process. Latina doctoral students also experience high levels of stress due to factors of time, familial roles, and financial responsibilities. According to Castillo, Conoley, and Brosart (2004), Latinas attending a PWI may go through an acculturative process in

which they may adopt behaviors of the university culture that may conflict with family cultural values. A person who faces two competing cultural strands may experience distress when attempting to identify with both cultures (Castillo et al., 2004). Such feelings were inherent in the finding that Latinas confront many factors of stress as doctoral candidates.

One factor of stress was how the Latinas felt when they were in the dissertation phase of their doctoral programs. In Quarterman's (2008) study on diverse graduate students, they reported feelings of alienation, isolation, and loneliness with regard to nonsupportive environments at PWIs as the dominant barriers to their retention. Several participants who were single and had yet to have children noted that writing the dissertation was an isolating experience, even though parents and siblings, who lived in other cities, were supportive. According to Herrera (2003), challenges of being a Latino student in a doctoral program at a PWI included excessive self-doubts. Findings from the current study showed that, at some point, the majority of the participants had questioned whether the process was worth the time, effort, and money to pursue a doctorate.

A dominant message throughout this study was the idea of upholding familial roles and expectations. Accomplishing goals in higher education by Latinas comes with personal sacrifices, as described by K. P. González et al. (2004). Adding to the finding that Cantrell and Brown-Weltry (2003) reported as Latinas experienced pressure to begin families, the participants in this study who were wives and mothers experienced pressure to fulfill simultaneous roles of wife, mother, and doctoral candidate.

The majority of the participants stated the importance of being accountable as family member in their roles of daughter, wife, and mother. The concept of familism (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Quijada, P. D., & Alvarez, 2006) was evident as the women reported struggles to maintain balance in familial roles in addition to roles in the doctoral programs and employment. Valdés (2008) reported that the concept of *familismo* means that people prioritize family members' needs over their own needs, being respectful to immediate and extended family members and self-defining with regard to the relationship within the family. Single participants without children (Adrianna, Andrea, Jennifer, and Keyla) indicated that their degree programs had delayed them starting families.

Castillo and Cano (2008) explained that the term *marianismo* refers to the expectation that Latinas are to take on a submissive role with men and to uphold familial roles to the utmost. Castillo, Perez, Castillo, and Ghosheh (2010) noted that Latinas endure sacrifices to take on the roles of wife and mother. These gender roles are inherent in the concept of *familismo*, which Castillo and Cano (2008) further described as identifying with and attaching to family structures, both immediate and extended. They also cited the cultural value of *respeto*, which represents the duty of a position within a gender-specific hierarchical structure. When Latinas fail to take on these traditional gender roles, others within the Latina/o community may view them as *vendidas* or “sell outs” (Niemann, 2001). The results of the current study showed that Latina participants experienced stress when upholding their many roles of wife, mother, daughter, and worker, in addition to being a doctoral candidate.



Another dominant message in this study was that social support was especially critical in terms of persistence. Resilience by Latino doctoral candidates comes in part from support not only from family but also from friends, who may or may not also be enrolled in doctoral degrees, as well as from faculty members. Seeking support from other women of color and Latinas was helpful to the majority of participants. This approach to handling the demands at PWIs was also found to be successful in Barajas and Pierce's (2001) study, which examined the combination of race and gender in the experiences of Latina/o undergraduate students. In that qualitative study, findings indicated differences between Latinos, who were found to be more accepting of the dominant culture even though they mentioned having psychological identity conflicts, and Latinas, who experienced negative stereotypes of themselves and focused on their group identity as Latinas.

The ability of the participating Latinas to achieve milestones in specific higher education administration doctoral programs in Texas was exacerbated by the fact that all of them felt responsible to add their voices to the extant literature regarding research topics relevant to their personal lives. While Fuerth (2008) and J. C. González (2005) studied Latinas in any doctoral program, the current study expanded the literature by highlighting the experiences of Latinas in a specific doctoral program: higher education administration. The major motivating factor among the participants was a desire to advance research in higher education and to be mentors to others who were pursuing such degrees.

## **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked, *How do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates describe their motivations for pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration?*

The participants identified both internal and external motivational factors that sustained them in their persistence toward the degree. Internally, most participants reported an innate desire to pursue a doctorate. Externally, participants were motivated to continue in their doctoral programs for the sake of other family members, such as parents or children. The combination of motivation, both internal and external, and commitment to service had influenced participants to start the doctoral program. These findings agreed with those reported by Dorn and Papalewis (1997), who found that groups of students who feel committed to each other and share common goals, such as earning a doctorate, are more likely to reach their goals. The women in this study were motivated individually and by others, as well as committed to their dissertation topics, which related to their personal experiences in efforts to add their voices to the research literature.

The majority of participants were first-generation doctoral students whose parents had received limited education. These results agreed with research by Gloria and Segura-Herrera (2004), who found that Latino/a parents of college students had low levels of education and were unfamiliar with how to navigate the U.S. higher education system. The majority of participants reported discussing matters of general dissertation deadlines with their parents and commented that their parents did not understand the entire dissertation process.

The findings of this study added to previous research on program choice as the research examined the motivation of Latinas to select a doctoral program in higher education administration. A quantitative study conducted by Poock (1999) examined the program application decisions of students of color in higher education administration doctoral programs. Findings indicated three themes for selecting higher education administration doctoral programs: (a) faculty influence on the decision to apply; (b) non-faculty such as spouses, partners, current students, and employers; and (c) program qualities such as reputation of the university, faculty reputation, and rigor of the program. The current study examined not just reasons for selecting a higher education administration program but also motivations for beginning and persisting to graduation in such a program.

In this study, participants' commitment to service and the idea of giving back to other students aided in their start of the pursuit of the doctorate. Agreeing with findings reported by Lango (1995), participants in this study were mature, with serious commitments to the doctoral program. This could be due in part to the fact that Latinas are underrepresented in achieving doctorates, as noted by Calasanti and Smith (2002). The women in this study reported that they felt responsible to contribute to current and future students who are striving to attain a doctorate.

Arredondo and Castillo (2011) used a model of scholarly engagement to review how two institutions, the Association of American Universities and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, could work collaboratively with another organization, the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, to focus

attention on the Latina/o educational achievement gap. They recommended using a seven-part test to address Latina/o student educational engagement: being responsive to the Latina/o community; respect for collaborating with others; remaining neutral in academic matters; accessibility of community partners; integrating teaching, research, and service; coordinating engagement activities; and entering into partnerships to obtain sufficient resources (Arredondo & Castillo, 2011).

Latina faculty mentors are often unavailable to participants; few participants reported having a Latina or Latino dissertation chair. Because so few Latinas are in the doctoral pipeline, it was interesting to note that all participants in this study had a personal connection with their dissertation topics, which ranged from first-generation college students to transfer students to higher education issues with Latina/o cultures.

### **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked, *What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be contributing factors to their persistence in higher education administration programs at public Texas universities?* Social support was a crucial factor of persistence for the women in this study. Families were reported to be a large source of support for the participants, as well as friends. Social support from peers contributed to participants' persistence, consistent with research by Tinto (1997); however, families and faculty were also forms of social support. The results of the current study showed that, while the parents of the participants may not have fully understood all that the doctoral process entails, they maintained support by taking care of children, by praying, and by being constant motivators to the students throughout the

process. Rodriguez et al. (2000) found that Latinas' mothers played large roles in their daughters' success in attaining educational goals. Similarly, in this study, the family was found to be a large source of support for the participants, which agrees with the aspect of familism that confirms the family unit as a critical aspect of Hispanic culture (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Quijada, P. D., & Alvarez, 2006). The family unit was also found to be a source of cultural capital, which agreed with research by Ceja (2004) that found that parents had influenced their daughters in both direct and indirect ways and spoke to the cultural capital influence of family in Latina women's professional development. The participants in this study reported that they discussed the doctoral process in limited detail with their families, but they shared their timeline or specific deadlines with regard to the dissertation progress and success.

Family and friends were found to be supportive in contributing to the persistence of the participants, which agrees with Gloria's (1997) research about the two factors, including support from family and friends, that contributed to the positive experiences of Chicana undergraduate students. This finding also agreed with findings from Tinto's (1997) mixed-methods study that found that support networks of students and collaborative learning environments contributed to students' ability to persist. Friends as support systems contributed to the social capital of participants and the women reported having friends both in and out of their academic doctoral programs. Faculty validation was found in the current study to be important for participants to persist in their programs, in agreement with Torres's (2006) report that the achievement of a doctoral degree involves many difficult cultural choices that can affect the candidates' identity.

The current study expanded on Gándara's (1982) study in that social support was determined to come not just from family but also from friends, significant others, and faculty. Findings indicated that persistence was the ability to continue to fulfill responsibilities of being a doctoral candidate while confronting intervening conditions of social support and stress factors. Participants relied on their families for social support, which agreed with Gándara's study, in which participants' mothers had played a crucial role in the students' persistence. Also, Gándara found that students demonstrated a strong work ethic and relied on support from immediate family members, such as parents. Gándara's participants differed from the participants in this study in that they had yet to marry, while six participants in this study had families for which they were responsible as wives and mothers, in addition to being doctoral candidates. Several participants had sought other Latinas and/or women of color for psychosocial support to aid in their retention in their programs.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked, *What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be factors that contribute to their validation in higher education administration doctoral programs?* Because few participants experienced feelings of imposter syndrome, validation from faculty was imperative for participants to handle such feelings in order to persist. Gloria and Castellanos (2006) reported that Latina/o doctoral students experienced feelings of imposter syndrome, which was congruent with statements made by Claudia in this study. Claudia stated that she had difficulties in being one of two Latinas in her program. She described how she coped with this by discussing

issues with a counselor, using support from her family and fiancé, and exercising. In the current study, participants noted that their scholarly work was related to higher education issues within the Latina/o culture or personal experiences within higher education, which is a strategy to resist the margins, as reported by Achor and Morales (1990).

Support from faculty members and participants was noted as influential to levels of persistence, which confirms research by Brown et al. (1999). The role of dissertation chairs/advisors in aiding Latina participants to persist and navigate their doctoral programs agreed with research findings reported by Torres and Hernandez (2009). However, issues that impeded such relationships included faculty turnover. While some researchers (Garza, 2006; National Council of La Raza, 2004; Nora et al., 2006; Zalaquett, 2005) have identified multiple barriers that Latinas/os experience as undergraduate students, this study added to the extant literature in that the participants reported barriers of progressing through their doctoral programs due to delayed feedback from dissertation committee members/chairs. The participants reported strategies of communicating and even changing dissertation committee members/chairs in response to issues of delayed feedback.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Theory, Educational Policy, and Instructional Practice**

Based on the findings of this study and the significance of cited research (Nora et al., 2011; Oseo-Kofi, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011; Tinto, 1975, 1993), implications and recommendations for theory, policy, and institutional practice are identified.

## **Theory**

The current research contributes to theory by providing an examination of the contributing factors to the persistence of Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs. These were determined to be motivation, program choice, commitment to service, persistence to complete the doctorate, pursuit of the doctorate, social support, and coping skills to deal with factors of stress in order to achieve milestones. While some researchers (e.g., Fuerth, 2008; González, J. C., 2005, 2007; González, K. P., et al., 2004; Hernandez, 2000; Rendón, 1994) have reported studies related to the factors of persistence among minority and nonminority college students and their decisions to remain in or withdraw from (permanently or temporarily) higher education, that research mostly concerned undergraduate students or Latinas/os in doctoral programs in general.

This study adds to persistence theory as it presents another contextual layer of adult students who are pursuing advanced degrees who may have life experiences whereby their persistence is not continuous. Results of the current study showed that two participants (Adrianna and Cristina) had stepped away from their doctoral programs for a brief time, only to return due to funding opportunities; they persisted and graduated. Cuádriz (2006) reported that students in doctoral programs had characteristics such as family socialization practices that were influential to their educational achievements, instead of institutional processes or structured opportunities. The current study adds that validating support from family, friends, and faculty aided in achievement by Latinas in



persisting through their doctoral programs, especially with four participants who had completed dissertation defenses at the conclusion of this study.

This research contributes to theory as it investigated a population and context in higher education that had not been previously explored. It highlights the pathways to the doctorate, influences, and experiences. The definition of persistence was previously reported as the continuation of a higher education program at any level with persistence decisions, consisting of either persisting to graduation or dropping out of a program (Tinto, 1993). This study expanded on the definition of persistence to include stopping, then reentering programs to continue to graduation. Other research studies have not highlighted this phenomenon. This study examined the roles that participants assumed in addition to that of doctoral candidate, such as worker, wife, and mother, which influenced their experiences with persistence. Life experiences have caused stopping and reentering by some adult students who have families, as was found in this study. Scholars could rethink how they view perspectives on persistence, when life context determines otherwise.

### **Educational Policy**

Although several studies have explored the issues of Latinas in doctoral programs and the factors that allow them to succeed and be resilient (Fuerth, 2008; González, J. C., 2005; Howell, 2003), few have included the perspectives of Latinas who are in Texas higher education administration doctoral programs. Current policy remains focused on Latinas in undergraduate education, although Latinas are making slight gains in advanced degree programs. The Latinas in this study began their doctoral programs

because they were motivated to serve others in higher education administration programs and to be of service to others in the field of postsecondary education. As the number of Latinas/os in higher education increases, it is important to note that Latinas deal with the highest levels of stress of all groups of students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and are often the most underrepresented racial/ ethnic group (Calasanti & Smith, 2002) in the doctoral pipeline.

### **Instructional/Institutional Practices**

Educational institutions have been challenged to provide instruction that incorporates messages about cultural roles and provides validating learning experiences for all students. Montoya (1994) reported that Latinas live in two worlds in which they must negotiate home and school cultures. Since a common goal of these women was to attain the doctorate in order to rise on the career ladder at a higher education institution, programs should consider the needs and goals of Latina students in order to address their specific experiences. Rosales (2006) commented that Latina doctoral students experience feelings of alienation and isolation from other students and from doctoral programs in general. In this study, all participants were first-generation doctoral students.

Despite the levels of social support and degrees of stress that participants experienced, the need to provide quality programs for all students rests on the institutions, specifically PWIs, whereby evaluations could be completed. With the focus on needs specific to this student population, campus and classroom practices could be modified to provide services and best academic instructional practices. To increase the

numbers of successful Latina doctoral students, an evaluation is important to determine student satisfaction in such programs so that appropriate changes can be made.

Providing opportunities for social connections for doctoral candidates and their peers, as well as faculty, could be helpful for instructional practices. A policy to facilitate social support for doctoral students could provide academic opportunities outside of regular class times by which doctoral candidates could gain support from peers and faculty members. Policies could be implemented at institutions that are just not specific to Latina student populations but are designed to increase persistence levels of all students of color pursuing doctoral degrees with regard to social support opportunities. A study completed by Lawson and Fuerher (2001) concerned how graduate students cope with the stressful demands of graduate school during their first year. Findings indicated that social support came mainly from fellow students, faculty, and friends outside the department. Services could be incorporated to provide such opportunities for faculty and students to interact. Based on the findings of this study, it would be helpful for doctoral students to have opportunities to connect with peers and faculty members, such as brown bag discussion lunches or programs. This study showed that social support also involved Latinas' family members, as the dissertation process is an all-consuming process.

The majority of the participants described the residency requirement as rigid, particularly as almost half of the women reported that they worked full time. It was difficult for them to balance roles of worker and doctoral student. Many described challenges to fulfill the full-time status for two consecutive semesters, especially if they

worked full time. Therefore, residency requirements for students in higher education administration programs should be reviewed for consideration of revisions.

### **Recommendations From Participants**

Drawing from their experiences, the participants in this study made several recommendations to help Latina doctoral candidates to persist and to succeed in the doctoral program. First, Latina doctoral candidates should have opportunities to develop direct and open relationships with faculty members, whereby timelines and frameworks may be developed. Second, institutional policies should assist doctoral candidates to be aware of how to navigate the dissertation process, including the following: (a) a dissertation learning community to provide collaboration between faculty members and doctoral candidates to ensure steady timelines and progress, (b) a dissertation study hall to assist in completing structural and procedural duties, (c) writing groups to assist in maintaining mechanical support, (d) a dissertation seminar to ensure that faculty and students agree on the logistics of the dissertation, and (e) a required course that provides information and instruction about the dissertation structure, proposal writing, and the organization of chapters.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was bounded by a particular group: Latina doctoral candidates who were persisting through the dissertation process in higher education administration programs. A major component of this qualitative research was to understand the ways in which social context and educational processes occur in the lives of students and educators in the higher education pipeline. Educational persistence and validation among

racially diverse communities relates to the navigation of postsecondary pathways. Both persistence theory and validation theory were applied in this study to understand the experiences of Latina doctoral candidates and graduates at Texas institutions who desired to be educational leaders. One factor in this study was that all of the participants were the first in their families to be doctoral candidates.

This study identified areas in which research could be advanced: (a) replication of this study to explore persistence among other student populations in advanced degree programs; (b) a study on Latinos or other students of color in other doctoral programs; (c) a quantitative survey to examine persistence factors among advanced degree-seeking students; (d) when Latinas actually know about a doctorate or the pathway to achieve one; (e) a new model for minority students in doctoral education; and (f) using the categories identified in the findings in this study to serve as the basis to develop a survey to be administered to a large population of students. This study found that social support from others was important for persistence in higher education, which is congruent with research on the support of Latina doctoral students (González, J. C., 2005). For these first-generation students, support from friends and family came from two worlds: home and school (Torres, 2006). In this study, the most successful Latina doctoral students had support from home.

Support from others, specifically from peers who understand and can communicate steps with other peers in a doctoral program, would be an interesting area for exploration. In Banda's (2013) study concerning Latinas in undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs, a key factor of their support

systems was the role of fathers. Gándara (1982) found that high-achieving Chicanas who had completed a doctorate had received high levels of support from their mothers and that the students had relied on support more from their parents than from family members outside of the immediate family. In the current study, a key finding was the extent to which the participants' parents played important roles in the doctoral candidates' support systems. While the parents of these participants may have had limited education, they carried the role of cheerleader by providing support as their daughters communicated general time lines or deadlines within the dissertation process. It would be interesting to explore the parental roles with Latinas in their pursuit of the doctorate in the social sciences and/or physical sciences. What are the implications or associations, if any, of the maternal role versus the paternal role in the educational persistence of advanced degree-seeking students such as Latinas or other diverse student populations? Future studies may explore the role that mothers or fathers play and their educational influence on Latinas in various doctoral programs. Is the mother's role different for Latinas pursuing doctoral degrees in other fields? Would this hold true for any Latina pursuing a doctorate in a social science field?

Findings included strategies and barriers that Latinas encounter when they navigate doctoral pathways. Latinas with doctorates are underrepresented in U.S. higher education. This study provided a perspective for researchers and educators to consider regarding Latina student populations. The conceptual model in this study included the context piece of the pursuit of the doctorate; however, this context piece could be examined further with regard to diverse populations of doctoral students. Also, it would

be interesting to examine Latinas' persistence and validation in other higher education institutional types, such as HSIs or Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as this study explored only Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs at PWIs. Strategies for persistence and validation contribute to the success levels of all students, especially those from racially diverse communities. Considering the increasing numbers of college students and the changing U.S. higher education and political landscapes, this research is timely and informative.

### **Conclusion**

This study was reported in five chapters. Chapter I provided an overview of the research problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions that guided this study. Chapter II reported a review of the research literature involving both persistence theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) as the two-part conceptual framework. Extant literature revealed issues between home and school cultures among Latinas. Many factors were found to contribute to the persistence of Latinas in higher education, including community colleges, HSIs, family support systems, faculty-student mentorship and validation, and peer relationships. Barriers and strategies with regard to Latina/o populations at the undergraduate and then graduate levels were discussed.

Chapter III described the methodological framework used in this study, including a description of the participants, sites, data collection methods, and process of constructivist grounded theory data analysis. The findings were presented in Chapter IV, along with the developed conceptual model that described Latina persistence to complete

the doctorate. Chapter V included a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

The increasing population of Latinas/os has changed the American landscape of higher education. Latinas face challenges in pursuing doctoral degrees, as they are the least-educated demographic racial/ethnic group. The findings in this study revealed factors that contribute to or impede persistence, including social support, commitment to service, motivation, program choice, and coping skills that aided in attainment of milestones. Participants reported using coping skills to overcome factors of stress in the pursuit of the doctorate. The final milestone was the accomplishment of the doctorate. As one participant stated, it is a long process to obtain the doctorate and candidates must maintain “the will to finish” in order to accomplish the arduous tasks of completing the dissertation.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**INFORMED CONSENT**

Project Title: Latinas in Higher Education Doctoral Programs at Public Institutions in Texas: Persistence and Validation

**You are being invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Texas A&M University. You are being asked to read this form so that you know about this research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part in the research. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefit you normally would have.**

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Latinas as they pursue doctoral degrees in higher education administration programs at public universities in Texas. This study seeks to understand the extent to which they experience persistence as they navigate through their doctoral programs.

**WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you have identified as a woman who is Latina, Hispanic, or Chicana; are either a doctoral student in or a recent graduate from a higher education administration doctoral program in Texas; and are in the doctoral candidacy stage or have recently completed your program within the past one to two years.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE ASKED TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

There will be a total of 13 participants.

**WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

The alternative is not to participate.

**For studies that give course credit:**

N/A

**If this is a treatment study:**

N/A

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IN THIS STUDY?**

The participants will be asked to respond to open-ended questions from an interview protocol. This interview process will last between 60 to 90 minutes. A second interview will be conducted over the phone for 30 to 45 minutes.

**Suggested template:**

N/A

**Add, if applicable the following statement:**

N/A

**Add, if applicable the following statement:**

N/A

If you leave the study early, you may be asked to complete the following activities:

N/A

**WILL VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDINGS BE MADE OF ME DURING THE STUDY?**

Yes, the participants’ responses will be audio recorded.

**Required recordings:**

N/A

**Optional recordings:**

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the data may be transcribed in order to support the research only if you give your permission to do so. Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

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

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The things that you will be doing have no more risk than you would come across in everyday life. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There is no direct benefit to you by being in this study. What the researchers find out from this study may help other people with societal benefit.

**WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS TO ME?**

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**WILL I HAVE TO PAY ANYTHING IF I GET HURT IN THIS STUDY? N/A**

**WILL I BE PAID TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**WILL INFORMATION FROM THIS STUDY BE KEPT PRIVATE?**

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Rose Anna Santos (PI) will have access to the records.

Information about you will be stored in a locked box. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

**WHOM CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

You can call the Principal Investigator to tell him/her about a concern or complaint about this research study. The Principal Investigator Rose Anna Santos (Doctoral student) can be called at 361-548-0496 or emailed at [rose.santos@tamu.edu](mailto:rose.santos@tamu.edu). You may also contact the Principal Investigator's advisor, Dr. Fred Bonner at 979-845-7273 or [fbonner@tamu.edu](mailto:fbonner@tamu.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research and cannot reach the Principal Investigator or want to talk to someone other than the Investigator, you may call the Texas A&M Human Subjects Protection Program office.

- Phone number: (979) 458-4067
- Email: [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu)

**MAY I CHANGE MY MIND ABOUT PARTICIPATING?**

You have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide not to participate or stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study, there will

be no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, etc. You can stop being in this study at any time with no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, etc. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

**I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. A copy of this entire, signed consent form will be given to me.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:**

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Presenter

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Alias: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Institution/Degree: \_\_\_\_\_  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*

PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates describe their motivations for pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration?
  - What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be contributing factors to their persistence in higher education administration programs at public Texas universities?
  - What do Latina doctoral candidates/recent graduates perceive to be contributing factors to their validation in higher education administration doctoral programs?
1. When did you start your program? (If applicable – when did you graduate?)
  2. Thoughts about your graduate school: What reasons lead you to select your Ph.D. program?
    - How do/did you think your previous school experiences prepared you for your PhD program?
  3. Motivation as the initial factor of persistence: Why did you decide to start your doctoral program? What factors motivated you to pursue a doctoral degree?
    - Will you please describe your doctoral program?
    - Why did you choose the higher education administration doctoral program?
    - Are/Were your experiences as a doctoral student the way you thought it would be? How so?

4. Goals: What is/was your goal for finishing your doctorate? (a matter of personal fulfillment, professional status, or higher salary)
  - What do you want to do when you graduate? (If graduated) what do you currently do post-graduated?
  - Do you think your program is preparing/ has prepared you to do that? Why? Why not?
  - Do you think your doctorate will give/ has given you something that you do not already have? If so, what?
  - Do you think your program is preparing/has prepared you to for that? Why/why not?
  - How do you envision your life in 5 years? 10 years?
  
5. Difficulties with doctoral schooling: What has been/ was particularly difficult about your doctoral program?
  - What are/were the most challenging aspects of being a doctoral candidate?
  - Do/did you have any faculty members who you think hinder/hindered your progress?
  - Do/did you encounter any difficulties in meeting the demands of being a doctoral candidate? If yes, what do you consider to be the most difficult?
  - What do/did you most worry about or what causes you the greatest stress with regard to your doctorate pursuits?
  - How does/did that worry or stress affect your school experiences? How do you work around such stressors?
  
6. Coping Skills: What kinds of support do/did you receive in terms of emotional, intellectual, and/or spiritual, if any, while you are/were attending graduate school?
  - What coping strategies do/did you use when things become/became difficult or challenging?
  - What drives/drove you when you are/were challenged (tired or overwhelmed) to stay motivated in fulfilling your role as a doctoral student?
  - Do/did you know of any support services offered by the university that you can pursue to help you succeed in completing your doctorate?
  
7. Obstacles: Difficulties with roles and responsibilities: How would you describe the different roles that you take on? (in addition to your role as a doctoral candidate/graduate/current job position -- i.e. wife, mother, worker)
  - Do/did any particular individuals or family members serve as barriers to you pursuing your doctorate? How?
  - What role(s) does your family play/have played as you handled such barriers?
  - Do you think any of these barriers were connected to your gender? If yes, will you please describe them? How did you cope with such barriers?
  - Do/did you encounter any challenges as a female doctoral student? If yes, what?

8. Validation: Do you have any faculty members who you think help you? If yes, how?
- Do you have any faculty members from similar ethnic background? If so, what are your experiences like interacting with them?
  - How does/did the university make your experience more challenging than you think it needs to be?
9. Validation/Support: Are/Were there any individuals (friends, family members, groups) who help/helped you while you persist/persisted through your doctoral program? If yes, will you please describe how they help/ have helped?
- Do you and your family talk about you going to doctorate school? What are those conversations like?
  - Are there any individuals (friends or family members) who helped you while persisting through your Ph.D. program? Will you please describe them?
  - Are there any groups (neighbors, religious group, social networks, family, peer, informal, formal) that you can speak about that help/helped you in continuing/completing your Ph.D. program?
10. Gender / Being a Latina: How do/did you feel being a Latina doctoral student in relation to other female students (i.e. White, African American, Asian etc.)? Could you describe any experiences with this?
- How does/did your gender affect interactions with faculty members in your department?—*If answer is positive, then ask – Do/Did you experience any challenges as a woman in persisting though your doctorate program? How do/did you handle such challenges?*
  - What role does/did your family play as you handled such challenges?
11. Validation:
- How do you describe or think you are doing/did here at your graduate school in terms of academic performance?
  - How do you describe yourself as a Latina doctoral student/graduate?
  - How do you see yourself as an achiever at this level?
  - Do you see yourself as successful?
12. Gathering General Information/Tell me about yourself.
- What is your age range [25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50]?
  - Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
  - When did you start your doctoral program?
  - Do you have siblings?
  - How long have you lived in \_\_\_\_\_ (location of graduate school)?
  - Are you 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc. generation (Were you born here? Were you parents born here? Grandparents?)



- Has anyone else in your family gone to college? Who? Where? What types of degrees did he/she/they attain?
  - What schools did you go to before beginning your doctoral program (large/small, any special programs, etc.)? And, how long did you live at the location of your graduate school?
13. Is there anything that I did not ask you that I should have? Is there anything that you would like to share that I did not give you a chance to talk about? If you could provide some advice to the next generation of Latina doctoral students, what would you say?

# APPENDIX C

## OPEN CODES CHART EXAMPLE

**Goal for finishing doctorate**

**GOALS**

4. Goals: What is/was your goal for finishing your doctorate? (a matter of personal fulfillment, professional status, or higher salary)												
Martha	Adriana	Cristina	Jennifer	Miranda	Diana	Evlyn	Keyla	Andrea	Norma	Claudia	Isabella	Priscilla
Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes	Open Codes
<p>Work to do</p> <p>Money</p> <p>Personal</p> <p>Success</p> <p>fulfillment</p> <p>Nuclear family</p> <p>Have graduate degree</p> <p>My mom and my dad</p> <p>Brother has undergraduate degree</p> <p>May contain</p> <p>Barely finished high school</p> <p>Important</p> <p>Some personal fulfillment</p> <p>My father ADHD twice</p> <p>And not complete</p> <p>Completed coursework</p> <p>Worked on his proposal</p> <p>High school principal</p> <p>10 years being gone</p> <p>No extension</p> <p>Hired as Director for high schools</p> <p>Started coursework</p> <p>Worked to proposal</p> <p>10 years ago?</p> <p>Difficult</p> <p>"You're not going to do that"</p> <p>Important</p> <p>Back of my mind</p> <p>Remember</p> <p>Not going to continue</p> <p>You can continue and finish</p> <p>Family reasons</p> <p>Professionally</p> <p>Stamp of credibility</p> <p>Take seriously</p> <p>Move forward</p> <p>Three letters</p> <p>Credible</p> <p>No debts</p>	<p>First personal fulfillment</p> <p>Started with money</p> <p>Invest time and money</p> <p>Something</p> <p>Have to finish salary</p> <p>Hasn't been too much</p> <p>Making more money</p> <p>Stand as an advisor</p> <p>Gradually</p> <p>Gained seniority</p> <p>Changes in time</p> <p>Want position</p> <p>Out of my Ph.D.</p>	<p>Definitely important</p> <p>Degree</p> <p>Gain access to position</p> <p>Higher-level</p> <p>Economically</p> <p>A job</p> <p>Get through that program</p> <p>Gain skills</p> <p>Not higher education focus</p>	<p>Something different</p> <p>More personal</p> <p>Administrator</p> <p>Personal goal</p> <p>Be of service</p>	<p>Interview me</p> <p>Financial status</p> <p>Work in higher education</p> <p>Salaries low</p> <p>Low pay</p> <p>Professional status</p> <p>Salaries</p> <p>Delta bonus</p> <p>Higher ed</p> <p>Not even high salary</p> <p>Personal</p> <p>Have kids</p> <p>No kids when started the program</p> <p>Two little girls now</p> <p>I'll don't finish</p> <p>Let them down</p> <p>Latina</p> <p>Need to do this for them</p> <p>My husband</p> <p>Also for him</p> <p>Part of process</p> <p>PhD program</p> <p>Cr-</p> <p>Little bit more personal</p> <p>Pamela</p> <p>Dead</p> <p>Might get even better</p> <p>Both still alive</p> <p>Part of a too</p>	<p>Professional status</p> <p>Work in higher education</p> <p>Salaries low</p> <p>Low pay</p> <p>Professional status</p> <p>Salaries</p> <p>Delta bonus</p> <p>Higher ed</p> <p>Not even high salary</p> <p>Personal</p> <p>Have kids</p> <p>No kids when started the program</p> <p>Two little girls now</p> <p>I'll don't finish</p> <p>Let them down</p> <p>Latina</p> <p>Need to do this for them</p> <p>My husband</p> <p>Also for him</p> <p>Part of process</p> <p>PhD program</p> <p>Cr-</p> <p>Little bit more personal</p> <p>Pamela</p> <p>Dead</p> <p>Might get even better</p> <p>Both still alive</p> <p>Part of a too</p>	<p>Personal achievement</p> <p>Personal</p> <p>Education with a Ph.D.</p> <p>Own a business</p> <p>Good money</p> <p>My business</p> <p>Backwards in career</p> <p>Do that</p> <p>Later part of career</p> <p>Passionate</p> <p>Work in education</p> <p>Professional</p> <p>opportunity</p> <p>Personal fulfillment</p>	<p>Personal fulfillment</p> <p>Higher education with a Ph.D.</p> <p>Own a business</p> <p>Good money</p> <p>My business</p> <p>Backwards in career</p> <p>Do that</p> <p>Later part of career</p> <p>Passionate</p> <p>Work in education</p> <p>Professional</p> <p>opportunity</p> <p>Personal fulfillment</p>	<p>All of the above</p> <p>Personal fulfillment</p> <p>Working for so long</p> <p>Disertation for 2 years</p> <p>Time away from work</p> <p>Income</p> <p>Having a full-time steady job</p> <p>Taken that risk here</p> <p>So much work out there</p> <p>My support system</p> <p>My family</p> <p>Support me</p> <p>Boyfriend</p> <p>Long distance</p> <p>3 years</p> <p>All worked as hard</p> <p>Finally</p> <p>The reward</p> <p>Walking with diploma</p> <p>Man's assumed all degrees</p> <p>Bachelor's</p> <p>Ph.D.</p> <p>Each a sense of achievement</p> <p>Professional status piece</p> <p>Conference</p> <p>So many years</p> <p>Become a colleague</p> <p>Advisor</p> <p>now</p> <p>Meaning</p> <p>Through this process</p> <p>Also helpful</p> <p>On same level</p> <p>Definitely money</p> <p>Need some of that</p> <p>All the loans</p> <p>Don't know</p> <p>Money is really left</p> <p>My boyfriend</p> <p>Law school</p> <p>Fair share</p> <p>Finish what I set out</p> <p>Making an impact</p> <p>Field and practice</p> <p>Achieving</p> <p>For my family</p> <p>And folks behind me</p>	<p>Personal fulfillment</p> <p>every thing</p> <p>Keep me going</p> <p>Get it done</p> <p>Cross that stage</p> <p>Hoping</p> <p>Another</p> <p>Good salary</p> <p>Get me through</p> <p>For this season</p> <p>Get your dissertation</p> <p>Offered</p> <p>Not a lot of us out there</p> <p>Has the</p> <p>Send out</p> <p>Information</p> <p>Make your contacts</p> <p>Publicize</p> <p>7 graduated</p> <p>high school</p> <p>Fulfillment</p> <p>As a parent</p> <p>Knowing have my Ph.D.</p> <p>Back myself up</p> <p>Sometimes</p> <p>saved question</p> <p>Part of my fulfillment</p>	<p>Probably all three</p> <p>Probably started out</p> <p>Personal fulfillment</p> <p>Moved along</p> <p>Stated and salary</p> <p>Ultimately</p> <p>Became about future</p> <p>Generations</p> <p>Something</p> <p>Needed to do</p> <p>Leave a legacy</p> <p>Behind for my son</p> <p>At it's core</p> <p>Has to be for personal</p> <p>Fulfillment</p> <p>Don't think anybody</p> <p>Put themselves</p> <p>Didn't</p> <p>genuinely want it</p> <p>For themselves</p> <p>Was for me</p>	<p>Definitely for personal</p> <p>Probably started out</p> <p>When on my Bachelor's</p> <p>Get my doctorate</p> <p>Higher conversion</p> <p>Married</p> <p>My wife</p> <p>husband</p> <p>Talked about that</p> <p>Associate</p> <p>Actually a decision</p> <p>Had to do it</p> <p>Okay being Mr. and Dr.</p> <p>Conversation</p> <p>An early decision</p> <p>Part of it is that</p> <p>Pretty goal-driven</p> <p>I'm going to do it</p> <p>It get it done</p> <p>Might procrastinate</p> <p>But I'll get it done</p> <p>Definitely need it</p> <p>For future advancement</p> <p>Do want to move up in the administration</p> <p>Love star</p> <p>Possibly</p> <p>elsewhere</p> <p>Have the doctorate</p> <p>Long time before Leap</p> <p>Financial</p> <p>benefit</p> <p>What it cost me</p> <p>Definitely not for the money</p> <p>It'll be a while before I see that</p>	

## APPENDIX D

### COLLAPSED OPEN CODES CHART

Goals: What is/was your goal for finishing your doctorate?  
(a matter of personal fulfillment, professional status, or higher salary)

Marisol	Personal success ABD twice Family reasons Professional credibility Three letters
Aдриanna	First personal fulfillment Salary Gained seniority
Cristina	Gain access to positions A plus
Jennifer	Different
Miranda	Professional
Diana	--
Evelyn	--
Keyla	--
Andrea	--
Norma	--
Claudia	--
Isabella	Probably all three—personal, professional, salary
Priscilla	--