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**MEXICAN AMERICAN ADULTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

A Dissertation in
Adult Education
by
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study used a narrative design to explore the perceptions, background and experiences of Mexican Americans who completed their bachelor's degree as adult learners. The study focuses in particular on their experiences of learning to be bicultural. A *Borderlands* framework whereby Mexican American adult learners negotiated university life between two cultures, namely their culture of origin and the host culture, served as the primary theoretical framework that informed the study. Data consisted mostly of participant narrative interviews. Artifacts representing their culture or experience in higher education that some participants either discussed over the phone or actually brought to the interview served as ancillary forms of data. Data were analyzed using a three-dimensional model of narrative analysis.

The findings of the study were then grouped into four major areas. The first set of findings focused on background information as it related to agriculture, educational pursuits, and family of origin. The second set of findings related to opportunities seized through a Mexican American collectivist mindset. The third set focused on how participants negotiated life in the *Borderlands*, geographically or metaphorically as they became more bicultural. The final set pertains to managing life as adult learners in higher education. The study ends with a consideration of the findings in light of theory and educational practice. Suggestions for future research also are made pointing to the immense gaps in the literature pertaining to the process of becoming bicultural for Mexican American adult learners and how that process influences retention in higher education, persistence in academics and college degree attainment.

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of a qualitative narrative research study that explores the perceptions, background and experiences of Mexican Americans who completed their bachelor's degree as adult learners. The study focuses in particular on their experiences of learning to be bicultural. Because this is a narrative research study, I thought it appropriate to begin with a narrative of how I became interested in the study. This chapter then goes on to provide a background to the problem and brief overview of the literature on Mexican Americans in higher and adult education, and the purpose and research questions of the study. It also provides an overview of the theoretical framework, the methodology, and a consideration of the limitations and assumptions of the study. The chapter ends with a consideration of how this dissertation is organized, as well as definition of terms.

Forging a Research Topic: A Narrative

The kitchen clock read 3:00 AM. I was sitting at the table eating a bowl of cereal thinking about next steps for my family. My husband, an Assembly of God pastor, was in employment transition. He had served fifteen years as an assistant pastor and was now sending resumes as far away as New York and Virginia. My concerns were for our children, ages 15, 16 and 19. The words of Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have

for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” were going through my mind. As a woman of faith, I asked myself, “What plans could God possibly have for us as a family, to prosper us, not to harm us, to give us hope and a future?”

During those wee hours of the morning, I felt prompted to look at a Pennsylvania map and to make note of the Assembly of God churches near our residency in Boiling Springs. Highlighting towns such as Shippensburg, Chambersburg, Dillsburg, etc., I created a circle of locations. With a pencil, I connected the locations into what looked like a wagon wheel. In a spiritual way, it appeared to me that the hub of the wheel was the location where a church could be established. The area was called the Village of Gardners. Now, with many thoughts running through my mind, I went back to bed.

The next morning, I showed my husband the map and asked skeptically if he wanted to ride to Gardners to view the area to see the potential of starting a church. To my surprise he said yes. We rode about 15 miles south only to find ourselves surrounded by thousands of acres of orchards. Finding the landscape overwhelmingly agricultural, we wondered how we would start a church if the only life were trees! My husband, therefore, suggested we visit local post offices to learn the approximate number of residents living in the surrounding villages. At the end of our excursion, the number of residents totaled about 7,000. With that figure in mind, we began the church planting process. Our first Sunday morning, Easter of 2001, the service was held in a local public school gymnasium.

About this same time that I had been accepted into the Adult Education doctoral program at Penn State University in Harrisburg. Early on in the program, I knew I wanted to connect my church ministry experiences with my doctoral studies. I decided to focus my research on Mexican American culture because the community of Gardners, and the surrounding area, has a vast

population of Mexican American migrant families. I was confident that Penn State University's adult education program would provide a solid framework for me to explore the cultural significance of Mexican American life.

While taking the night classes at Penn State Capital Campus, I spent my days becoming more involved in the community. I saw firsthand that not only were Mexican Americans underrepresented professionally, but also that rustic migrant camps were up and running in the area. I found that migrant families lacked basic necessities such as toiletries, blankets, food, clothing and housing. Meanwhile, with regard to my studies, I learned that existing research readily showed a significant underrepresentation of Mexican Americans in higher education and a paucity of studies in adult education.

The poverty of the Mexican American migrants in this community was a wake-up call for me. The impression that mainstream culture will privilege some while subordinating others was no longer a theoretical notion for me; it was very much a reality. A number of assignments from my Masters of Education program had focused on the dynamics of privilege and subordination. However, those assignments were primarily relative to urban environments. Thus, being in a rural area, I was not expecting to see need in such magnitude.

Soon our church connected with a number of agencies who assisted migrant families with basic life necessities, namely a literacy center, a migrant opportunity center, a Fruit Belt ministry and a migrant daycare. Recruiting congregational people to enroll in a Spanish language proficiency course, we began to better communicate with our neighborhood. Working with the migrant opportunity center, we connected with other Latinos who were advocates for the Mexican American migrant family as far as housing and education. Linking our efforts with the Fruit Belt ministry we helped provide toiletries, towels and blankets to local camps. Lastly, buying Christmas gifts for children in the local migrant daycare allowed us to be in touch with the needs of the very young as well. In this impoverished environment my research began to take on new

meaning. Research informed our work in establishing a church. The congregation was not only connecting with local migrant families, but with community at large, and I was developing relationships with many Mexican Americans and their families, both through our Church and in some of my work as an educator at Messiah College as an adjunct professor in education.

One particular Mexican American man, José (a pseudonym) from our Gardners community touched my life in a very special way. He had been in the US for only a year when we met in 2005. I happened to be the high school substitute teacher in his class the day he needed assistance with a college application. He was a senior. I readily encouraged his pursuits in higher education, as I saw few from the Gardners area attend college. In 2005, he graduated from high school and went on to college. In the spring of 2012, seven years later, he received his bachelor's degree in teacher education. It was because of José and his story, that I initially became particularly interested in Mexican Americans and higher education. Today, José, who is from a migrant family in our community, teaches middle school 11 miles from our church. He loves every minute of his new professional career! José is a participant in this study, which chronicles the experiences of 10 Mexican Americans who have completed their Bachelor's degrees in higher education as adult learners over the age of 23. It is my initial experience with José and other Mexican Americans in the community around our Church that inspired this study.

Contextualizing the Problem

As research indicates, Mexican Americans dream of a better life than what their communities offer economically and they aspire to have a college education (Benmayor, 2002; California Policy Seminar, 1993; Mina, Cabrales, Juarez, & Rodriguez-Vasquez, 2004; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005). Dreaming of role modeling and paving the way for younger siblings to attend college, they desire a degree in higher education. This desire often shapes their goals,

ideals and futures as Mexican Americans are profoundly interested in improving life for their families and communities (Benmayor, 2002).

Mexican American aspirations and goals are important considering the importance of their professional representation in our ethnically diverse nation. The 2010 Census reveals that 16 percent of the US population is of Latino origin and that three quarters of those Latinos are Mexican American. In 2000, the Mexican American population was 20.6 million people. In 2010, their population was 31.8 million. Mexican Americans are the fastest growing segment of the Latino population as of April 1, 2010.

Yet, in spite of Mexican American aspirations and academic goals, the reality is that “the estimated proportion of the U.S Latino population age twenty-five years and older with at least a bachelor’s degree in 2001 ranged from 25 percent for Cubans to 7 percent for Mexicans” (Smokowski & Bacallao 2011). What is concerning is that 67 percent of the Latino population is Mexican American. Thus, a very small percentage of the Latino population is prepared for employment in professional fields. These percentages take on more meaning knowing that the Latino population is approximately 12.5% of the total US population, approximately 35.2 million people (Caudraz, 2005).

Although Mexican Americans aspire to attend college, and are often enrolled as freshmen, many do not complete a degree program. Without college degrees, some Mexican Americans work in low-income jobs and endure hardships. More than 20 years ago, Attinasi (1989) noted that “America’s racial and ethnic minorities have been and continue to be grossly underrepresented in higher education and in almost all occupational fields that require a college education and do not, as a consequence, have equitable participation in the larger society’s social, economic, and political life” (p. 247). While gains have been made in the last 20 years, the rate of college degree completion among Mexican Americans continues to be low. In 2000, Latinos were 14% of total enrollment at 2-year institutions but only 7% at 4-year institutions” (Miller &

Garcia, 2004, p.192). Degree completion for Latinos has been lower than that of Whites and Asian Americans. As far as percentages of degrees earned, Miller and Garcia (2004) found that in “the 1999-2000 academic year, Latino’s received 9% of the associate degrees, 6% of bachelor’s degrees, 4% of master’s degrees 3% of doctorates and 5% of professional degrees” (p.193). Additionally, despite the available opportunity to enroll in educational degree programs and regardless of the very hardships of life without a college education, aspirations to persevere toward degree attainment dwindle significantly during the course of a four year program (Conde, 2006; Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005).

Contested Terms in Describing Mexican Americans

Who are Mexican Americans in light of their ethnicity? In defining the term Mexican American, Cuadraz (2005) explains that Mexican Americans are of Mexican origin and reside in the US. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the issue of language to describe various communities in the US whose ancestry is from countries that speak primarily Spanish has resulted in a number of contested terms. Some authors, such as Cuadraz (2005), use the terms “Chicana/o” and “Mexican American” interchangeably, though the term Chicano/a is also often seen as a political term (Elenes, 1997) associated with the left leaning Chicano Movement; thus many Mexican Americans prefer the broader term “Mexican American.” Other authors use the broader term “Latino” (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004) to refer to Mexican Americans and people living in the US from a number of Spanish speaking countries; however, the word “Latino” is a socially constructed term that does not actually exist in nature to describe people of one particular origin (Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996). Rather, the term has evolved through the process of human discourse and is, therefore, highly contested as descriptors vary according to national origin, social class and history. Further, in terms of ethnic identity many born of countries of Spanish

speaking-origin, be it from the Americas or from Spain, generally do not identify themselves as Latinos. Most often, they identify themselves with their family's country of origin (e.g., Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador). Thus, the term "Latino" is a socially-created label often used by non-Spanish individuals.

In light of the contested nature of language, in general, the term "Mexican American" is used throughout this discussion to describe people specifically of Mexican origin or descent living in the US. However, occasionally other terms will be used, such as the term "Hispanic" when describing census data, or the term Latino to refer to a confluence of people living in the US whose family is from primarily Spanish speaking countries of origin; in addition, when discussing particular authors' work, I will use the term that they use in order to more accurately reflect what they are saying.

Mexican Americans and Degree Attainment

Since 1990, there has been a 61% increase in the Hispanic population. By 2020, the population is projected to reach 60 million (Hernandez and Lopez, 2004) and by 2050, is projected to reach 98 million "representing 25% of the total U.S. population" (Cuadrez, 2005, p. 217). Therefore, this study requires critical attention regarding educational persistence for America's fastest growing population. Furthermore, degree attainment will not only improve Mexican American socioeconomic mobility, but will place leaders in fields such as medicine, law, media, and education while providing "role models for the next generation" (Lango, 1995).

In support of the above statistics, Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) point out that Mexican Americans are the least educated in the United States with only a low percentage of the total Mexican American population completing college and attaining degrees. The grave under-representation of traditional Mexican American students (full-time, single students between the

ages of 18 and 22 years old) and adult learners (23 years and older) in college degree programs is concerning because the Mexican American population makes up 7.3 percent of the total US population. Furthermore, this under-representation of Mexican American adult learners is even more concerning as adult learners often carry the socioeconomic responsibility of improving life for their families. Adult learners sometimes have one or more children, work full-time jobs and attend evening classes (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). Their family and employment responsibilities often frustrate their aspirations to acquire a degree. In comparison, traditional students frequently live on campus, are not employed, work in part time jobs, do not have children, attend daytime classes and participate in extracurricular campus activities such as sports, student government, and the arts. How these differentiations between adult learners and traditional learners influence degree attainment is strikingly significant to this study. As discussed in greater length in Chapter Two, negotiating multiple responsibilities is one of the many factors in the adult learning experience.

In reviewing differences between traditional students and adult students, Johnson-Bailey (2001) found that women of color, older than their college peers, have challenges that are unique to adult learners. Johnson-Bailey's participants, African American women, "defied the odds to return to and complete school, battling non-supportive families, meager finances, poor health, hostile classrooms, and mountains of self-doubt to find the wealth in each of their circumstances" (Johnson-Bailey, 2001, p. 3). Mexican American adult college students are also likely to defy similar odds while finding the wealth in their circumstances as well.

Thus, in order to have a better understanding of Mexican Americans in light of higher education, it is important to consider some basic background information regarding educational attainment, namely the cultural disjuncture they may experience, the process of becoming bicultural, and what is known in general about Latino adult learners in their accomplishments in degree attainment. A consideration of these facets of basic information will serve to clarify how

Mexican Americans shape their academic experiences in ways that are culturally significant and socially constructive in academia.

Cultural Disjuncture

A segment of the empirical studies, reviewed more fully in Chapter Two, discuss themes pertaining to Mexican American under-representation in university degree attainment. The themes are often related to a cultural disjuncture between Mexican American values and higher education (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Gandara, 1993; Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000). Themes that embrace factors such as test scores, academic self-confidence, family support and finances are more personally oriented. Whereby, themes environmental in nature encompass topics such as racial climate, ethnic community and employment. Topics pertaining to mentorship and student organizations are regarded as involvement factors whereas subject areas investigating ethnic identity, gender, collective community and religion tend to be more socio-cultural in nature. Thus, the recurring themes in the literature of Mexican Americans and higher education fundamentally take on the nature of four broad categories, namely the personal, the environmental, the involvement, and the socio-cultural (Hernandez and Lopez, 2004). Categorized within each of these themes are sub-themes where patterns of commonality begin to emerge leading to a better understanding of the lived experiences of Mexican Americans in higher education.

These topics are worthy of succinct attention as they formulate a basis of concern for under-representation in Mexican degree attainment. For example, Niemann, Romero, and Arbona's (2000) questionnaire survey, taken by 546 students of Mexican descent, disclosed that ethnic social orientation and degree attainment are at a cultural disjuncture because, first, higher education is viewed as a threat to family, religious and gender cultural values. The threat is based

in the notion that a college environment encourages marriage outside of one's ethnicity. Secondly, the disjuncture occurs because some Mexican American participants felt they might have to delay marriage and childbearing in order to attend college and they did not want to do so. Thirdly, other Mexican Americans did not want to engage in the competitiveness often necessary for college success. Lastly, the survey indicated that often times Mexican Americans fear that going to college creates a sense of alienation from their families.

Mexican American are also overtly aware of gender role values—women being home-oriented with primary responsibility for the children, and men assisting in the financial support of the family. Thus, Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, (2000) found that educational pursuits often led to conflict between education and relationship goals and frustrated efforts in degree attainment. Although the participants in this 2000 study are not identified as adult learners (twenty-three years or older) overt gender role awareness and the conflicts caused between education and relationship goals is likely to be true of Mexican American adult learners as well.

The juncture where religion and education intersect is also significant because Latinos, in general, often participate in spiritually-oriented cultural celebrations. Celebrations such as Carnaval (Catholic lent), Semana Santa (Holy week), Dia de Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe (honoring the Virgin Guadalupe), Las Posadas (celebrating Joseph and Mary), and Navidad (Christmas)—to mention a few Latino (Mexican American-oriented) celebrations —are central to the calendar year for those who celebrate religion within Latin culture. Although celebrating the spiritual does not mean attending church regularly, it is safe to say that often Latinos will identify with some type of spirituality. Thus, the literature indicates that “spiritual matters often weave themselves into the daily lives and decisions made by Latino college students” (Hernandez and Lopez, 2004, p. 54).

In discussing education and religion, Rodriguez (1982) dedicates 40 pages to the significance of religion in his life. He expounds on how it impacted his academic years, grade

school through his university studies. Rodriguez' writing is richly descriptive explaining the role of Catholicism in his life in relation to his education and describes the transition when moving from Mexico to the U.S. regarding his religious experiences. He describes differences between the Mexican village dioceses and the American urban Catholic cathedral and how those parishes shaped his faith and impacted his educational experiences. The intersection of education and religion is a subject matter deeply personal to Rodriguez pertaining to his persistence in education, and may also be significant to other Mexican American experiences. Exploring how "spirituality and religion impact Latino student success or hinder the retention persistence of this community" (Hernandez and Lopez, 2004, p. 54) can open doors of understanding regarding the juncture of religion, higher education and factors of persistence.

Degree Attainment, Biculturalism and Crossing Borders

As mentioned above, in 1989, Louis Attinasi, did an in-depth study entitled "Mexican Americans' Perceptions of University Attendance and the Implications for Freshman Year Persistence." Although this study did not research degree attainment among adult learners, it did secure perceptions of young adult college-going behaviors during and prior to the freshman year. Within this open-coded study, data were organized in various ways. Learners were classified as either *persisters* or *non-persisters*. The study was informative in that it exposed how Mexican American students oriented themselves in the university setting. Secondly, the study disclosed opportunities for constructive intervention while offering a number of strategies to improve the Mexican American higher educational experience. While the study is more than 20 years old, many of the strategies identified are likely still relevant today. Research pertaining to degree attainment, such as Attinasi's work, creates an important fundamental framework for this research as persistence is an imperative component of degree completion for adult learners.

Recent studies build on Attinasi's (1989) study bringing new insights to light about Mexican American representation in degree attainment (Benmayor, 2002; Hernandez, 2002; Reyes, 2006; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005). Research completed within the last ten years tends to explore the reasons Mexican American undergraduates succeed in degree attainment, rather than why they fail. However, research completed in the 1990s explored Mexican American student setbacks, crises, and injustices (Negy & Woods, 1992; Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997; Young, 1992). In contrast, now nearly twenty years later research has begun to explore solutions to setbacks for Mexican Americans in pursuit of a university degree. The contrast between the two eras of time is obvious in the data findings. Earlier research is representative of deficit models of study whereas more recent research employs hope for success in degree attainment.

For example, a deficit model of research in Latino degree attainment is identified in Young's study (1992) regarding college students on the Texas-Mexico border. Young investigated ethnicity and gender inequalities, academic failure and negative effects of employment for Mexican American college students. In contrast, ten years later, Benmayor's study (2002) investigated academic successes regarding how Mexican American students negotiated cultural obstacles, integrated multiple cultural worlds, and attained baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees. Thus, 20th Century studies were more concerned as to why Mexican American college students were not completing degree programs while 21st Century studies tend to be more focused on Mexican American degree completions. This study, different than both 20th and 21st Century studies, focuses on adult learners rather than Latino college students in general.

Just as there are many components to degree attainment for the Mexican American higher education student, so too are there components to their biculturality that may impact their journey towards degree attainment. Some studies highlight the fact that in order to be successful in higher education, students of color need to be able to cross cultures, namely to be able to understand the

White dominant culture of academia (Benmayor, 2002, Gandara, 1993, Johnson-Bailey, 2001). This is the notion that W.E.B. Debois called “double consciousness” for African Americans and that bell hooks (1994, 2003) alludes to as well. Johnson-Bailey (2001) also draws on this concept in exploring the lives of the Black women adult learners in her study. Employing a similar concept but more specific to Latinos, Gloria Anzaldua (1987) refers to the fact that Mexican Americans often live in the “borderlands” and have to be able to cross cultural borders (both literal and figurative since many actually live close to the US-Mexico border) in order to negotiate living within both cultures. In essence, the literature indicates that Mexican American students thrive in higher education when they are bicultural. Many who have succeeded have crossed cultural borders: dominant culture (or what Lisa Delpit (1995) refers to as the “culture of power”) which is White traditions in higher education. More on White cultural dominant weight impacting the Mexican American university experience is discussed in Chapter Two. For example, empirical literature (Benmayor, 2002; Hernandez, 2002; Reyes, 2006; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005) contains oral histories shared by Latino students enrolled in universities and colleges across the U.S. unveiling components of dominant values that weight the university experience. However, the participants in those studies appear to be traditional age students. Thus, clearly there is a need to find out more about biculturality and crossing borders pertaining to Latino adult learners in higher education, and Mexican Americans in particular. This needs to be kept in the context of what we know about adult learners in general.

Latino Adult Learners in Higher Education

There actually has been little research done that focuses on the experiences of Latino adult learners in higher education. We can glean some insight, however, based on some of the more general literature about adult learners in higher education. As Merriam, Caffarella, and

Baumgartner (2007) note, as early as 1965, the field of adult education demonstrated an interest in the outcomes of participation and persistence in adult learners in higher education and other areas. They note that Johnstone and Rivera researched why adults persist toward degree completion and conveyed the complexity of the issue, and highlight that Boshier and Collins did research pertaining to participation and degree attainment looking at individual background of the learners. Further, Darkenwald, Merriam, Henry, Basile and Livneh have all been involved in some way or another with research disclosing the complex facets of participation, persistence and degree completion. Particularly relevant to the discussion on adult learners, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) conclude, “Many adults have come to expect that instructors will take into account their individual needs and desires and may leave programs when these are ignored” (p. 57).

Kasworm’s work (2001, 2008) regarding the emotional challenges of adult learners reveals that adult learners “seek college entry through a life crisis, such as divorce or separation, work issues, or some form of significant individual need, such as seeking a career with financial stability” (Kasworm, 2001, p.28). Often adult learners struggle to find their own student identity amidst the challenges of hectic work and school schedules. Johnson-Bailey (2001) discusses adult learning in regard to the Black women. She summarizes that Black women as adult learners put other people and their needs before school. They deal with multiple responsibilities in the workplace and at home and are often times single parents. Adult learners of color struggle with feelings of inadequacy and isolation and play catch up in the fields of math and science.

Elsewhere, Johnson-Bailey (2000) also notes that in the adult education literature the topic of race is not discussed directly and therefore could be presumed as insignificant to the field. This has changed in the past ten years, and there has been greater discussion in the field about issues of race since 2000, including the *Handbook of Race and Adult Education* (edited by Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, & Brookfield, 2010), which includes a chapter by

Raquel Gonzales and Maria Mejorado (2010) who explore the race, gender, and class divide in academia from a female Mexican American perspective. They suggest, based on their own experience as women and their scholarship, the need for dialogue regarding issues of social justice. They believe dialogue will open doors of understanding for female Mexican American faculty present and future. Then, as dialogue transforms into action, teaching adults will serve as a tool for raising consciousness. This consciousness may deter female faculty from leaving the field permanently. Both Gonzales and Mejorado are committed to networking with their teacher education department because it is the branch of education that prepares teachers who may someday work among low-income families, English language learners, and low achievers. Gonzales and Mejorado push for dialogue about difference (racism, sexism, and socioeconomic status) so that their students learn to do the same. While Gonzales and Mejorado reflect on issues pertain to racism and higher education, similar issues can arise for Mexican American males (Chicanos) working toward integration into scholastic positions in higher education. For example, Reyes and Halcon (1997) uncover racism aimed at Chicano candidate being interviewed for a tenure-track faculty position. During the interview the candidate was accused of being a separatist by an Anglo professor. The professor's argument was based on the academic experiences listed on the candidate's vita. With a bachelor's in Chicano Studies, a specialization in bilingual education, publications dealing with minority issues, and invitations to be the keynote speaker for two Chicano commencements, the Anglo professor said he had a problem with hiring the candidate because he might teach separatism to the college's impressionable young administrators.

Reyes and Halcon (1997) go on to explain that there are many types of racism prevalent in higher education, but the type encountered by this Chicano candidate is described as covert racism. This type of racism is often not exhibited publicly, but rather on the university campus in isolated events. It is often common "in situations where minorities are being considered for

positions occupied primarily by Whites, as in the case of minorities vying for tenure-track faculty positions at predominantly White colleges and universities” (p.425).

While this chapter makes an important contribution to the literature on Mexican Americans as adult learners, as well as touching matters of persistence and encountered challenges as university faculty, there is still limited data based research on the Mexican American experience in higher education.

Purpose and Research Questions

In the United States, the low educational ranking of Latinos is a critical dilemma. The representation of Latinos in higher education is disproportionate to the number of other ethnic and mainstream White enrollment. Such under-representation may be attributed to a high rate of Latinos dropping out of high school. Additionally, those that do graduate often express that they were inadequately prepared for the rigors of continued study. Furthermore, there is an under-enrollment of qualified Latinos in four-year institutions for personal, environmental and socio-cultural reasons. Thus, under-representation of Latinos with acquired undergraduate degrees is a potentially critical situation that could penalize the US economy and obstruct the wellbeing of the social infrastructure of the nation at large (Gandara, 1993).

Moreover, there is a lack of literature on Mexican Americans in adult education. Given this lack of research, the primary purpose of this narrative research study is to explore the perceptions, background and experiences of Mexican Americans who completed their bachelor’s degree as adult learners at the age of 23 or older. The study focuses in particular on their experiences of learning to be bicultural. The research questions that guide the study include the following:

1. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American college students as told by Mexican American college graduates?
2. What are the participants' perceptions of how their biculturalism shaped their university experience?
3. What aspects of the college environment are significant to Mexican Americans in degree attainment?

Theoretical Framework

While the framework is discussed in detail in Chapter Two, it is helpful to provide an overview of Gloria Anzaldua's (1999) notion of border crossing that informs this study. Border crossing is living simultaneously in two or more cultures where people of different races occupy the same territory, where lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. In a socio-cultural context, border crossing cases the dynamics of cultural assets and cultural identity in the lived experiences of Mexican American undergraduates who have navigated the university experience and gone on to inspire other students of Mexican descent to do the same (Anzaldua, 1987). While Anzaldua discusses border crossing from a personal perspective, authors in the field of education have also discussed similar concepts relating to living in two cultures at one time, namely Sheared and Sissel (2001), Giroux (1994), Johnson-Baily (2001). Others have also implemented border crossing or related ideas framing their own teaching and research pertaining to subpopulations and education (Benmayor, 2002; Hurtado, 1997; Martinez, 2001).

While border crossing is often defined within the context of the political, for the purpose of this study it is viewed as an informative lens from which to explore how Mexican Americans assign meaning to themselves and to their success in higher education. Border crossing is "the

intermingling of not only race and gender, but of language and culture as well” (Sheared & Sissel, 2001, p. 210). It is an emotionally impacting attempt to cross over into places where Anzaldua believes “only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is not stranger” (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 26). For many a Mexican American straddling life across cultures means to reside in a place where bordering communities summon commitment and neither side is fully accepting.

Anzaldua (1987) contends, “We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness... the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still” (p. 85). Thus, the framework captures the struggle of being torn between two cultures where history, language, gender and consciousness are negotiated. These areas of negotiation are discussed further in Chapter Two.

David Abalos’ theory of transformation (2007) for Latinos in the US and Smokowski and Bacallao’s (2011) perspectives on biculturalism, both of which are related to the notion of border crossing, also inform this study and are discussed further in Chapter Two. Abalos’ theory of transformation (2007) suggests that a positive reclaiming of one’s four “faces” of identity (the personal, political, historical and sacred faces) is far better than getting caught in a cycle of self-hatred. Latinos can then reclaim their communities anew, creating new traditions that include higher education and degree attainment. As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, Abalos (2007) offers both an analysis and a model for initiating such changes that he refers to as “transformational.”

The concept of biculturalism, though not necessarily in those terms, is included or implied in both Anzaldua’s notion of border crossing and in Abalos’ theory of transformation. While the literature on biculturalism will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, as a concept, biculturalism means to maneuver through the dominant culture while maintaining ties with the

heritage culture. Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) suggest that biculturalism enables people to address conflict through positive means such as commitment, help and support to community and family. They define biculturalism as the integration of two cultures whereby language, food, media use, norms, and traditions from both native and host cultures are equally embraced, which enables a greater likelihood of degree attainment. Brooker and Lawrence (2012) more specifically discuss how bicultural identity development is related to educational challenges in a study of Latino college students. College students perceived academic challenges as either difficult to master or a threat from which to retreat. Those who perceived challenges as difficult to master were those who gave equal focus to both their heritage culture and the host cultures. They also had greater inter-cultural awareness, proactive coping abilities with discrimination and a healthier psychological well-being. The stress and strain of conflict was eased as students embraced both host and heritage cultures. Thus, the notion of biculturalism is important to this theoretical framework as it regards the relationships between cultural conflict and educational success.

Overview of Design and Methodology

The focus of this study is on the experiences of Mexican American while they were enrolled in undergraduate Bachelor degree program as adult learners. The study is a exploration of personal stories of Mexican Americans who navigated rigorous college environments. This is a qualitative research study, which focuses on how people make meaning of their life experience (Merriam, 2002). Hence a qualitative design was most appropriate for this research study. Narrative inquiry, a particular form of qualitative research, focuses on people's stories of their life experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through narrative inquiry, stories are not only heard, but understood in relation to a social context. The continuity of the lived experiences is

significant to the study as experiences grow out of other experiences bringing to the forefront limitations and practical aspects of the analysis. “Through the constraints and practicalities of inquiry, one or another specific inquiry might appear to focus on one or another aspect within this broad theory of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.2).

Accurately recording and interpreting the participants’ lived experiences results from careful, intense listening on the part of the researcher, the art of narrative inquiry. The interpretive text tells how a person constructs their story, what social positions they hold, and what the personal desires of the participant are at the time of the research. “What narrative researchers hold in common is the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.4). They embrace the notion that the story is the fundamental unit accounting for human experience. Narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology for this study because the focus is on the participant’s life, their personal perspectives and assumptions. In narrative research, as much as possible, stories remain intact. Rather than presenting data exclusively in the form of categories of findings, the researcher examines the content constructively bringing significance to the events in a participant’s life.

In this study, participants graduated from high school either in Mexico or in the United states. They were adult learners (at least twenty-three years old) when attending an institution of higher education. Other criteria for participants are discussed further in Chapter Three. The data has been reviewed according to narrative inquiry methodologies. Interviews were comprised of semi-structured, open-ended questions touching on personal, environmental and socio-cultural issues that Mexican Americans encounter in academia. Data that was collected, recorded, transcribed and verified gave meaning to the experiences of Mexican American adult learners in higher education.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study relates to the expansion of adult education practice pertaining to Mexican Americans and college degree attainment. The ways and means by which Mexican Americans navigate the university experience, negotiate belonging, and apply cultural assets toward degree attainment is important to the practice of adult education as it expounds on the formal and informal ways Mexican Americans make meaning of their experiences in degree programs as adult learners. Providing new knowledge through the stories of the bicultural experiences of Mexican American adult learners, this research informs practitioners and policy makers of the students' perspectives on culturally responsive classrooms. The narratives of the participants are their lived experiences during their education years of college study. Findings compiled from the participants' stories prove invaluable as these narratives expound on bilingualism, border-cultural knowledge, and international experiences which served to create learning environments for these participants.

Secondly, the significance of the study lies in its qualitative/narrative approach built on the discourse of other studies pertaining to nonwhite, non-traditional adult learners and the focus of degree completion. Shedding light on what it means to rise above deterministic stereotype views is a principal component of this research. Building on the work of Lisa Delpit (1995, Carol Kasworm (2003, 2008), Juanita Johnson-Bailey (2001), Gonzales and Mejorado (2010), this research points to how ethnic identity finds purpose and meaning in degree attainment. For example, in Johnson-Bailey's work, *Sistahs in College*, the culturally relevant voices of the participants in her study share their stories of overcoming racial and ethnic obstructions in the journey towards degree attainment. So, too, this research offers insight into persistence and retention for non-White adult students, namely those of Mexican American descent.

In an atmosphere of great challenge for non-White adult learners, matters of retention create an essential part in policy development. In earlier years, research that encompassed matters of retention was centered on white mainstream academic success. For example, Tinto's (1993) model of student retention is recognized in the literature as significant to the field of education because it primarily focuses on the role that the institution plays in influencing academic persistence. Although Tinto's (1993) conceptual model—further discussed in Chapter Two—is notable in addressing issues of retention, the participants were not students of color. Rather, they were full-time residential students who were recent White mainstream high school graduates. Thus, the significance of Tinto's (1993) theory is not necessarily strategically congruent to theories of persistence regarding minority students. However, Tinto's (1993) model is discussed in Chapter Two of this study because new research regarding students of color may serve as a cultural advancement to Tinto's (1993) theory. Findings will complement Tinto's work regarding retention and potentially add new insights pertaining to nontraditional students and degree attainment.

Thirdly, the significance of this research lies within the Mexican American community. The disparity between Mexican Americans and degree attainment hits hardest at community levels. Mexican American communities lack Mexican American representation in overall social productivity. This research will inform the Mexican American community, first and foremost, as to how degree attainment is accessible for some and thus, will assist other Mexican Americans in how to negotiate towards a better future for tomorrow. Understanding how a fellow Mexican American persisted in degree completion is a practical facet of this study that will, for some Mexican American students, make the difference between dropping out and completing their programs of interest.

Assumptions and Limitations

In any research study, there are assumptions and limitations inherent in the study itself.

The assumptions underlying this study are as follows:

1. Mexican American adult students, as members of a specific ethnic minority group, encounter experiences in degree attainment that are different from the white majority as well as different from other racial and ethnic groups.
2. The agricultural, farm-working background and history of many Mexican American college students influence how students perceive degree attainment success. The physically difficult challenges of manual farm labor spur on first generation migrant adults to pursue a college education. Parental hardships pertaining to low wages, poor living conditions, little schooling, and poor health, generate persistence in next generation young adults to strive toward degree completion
3. Higher education policy makers and practitioners seek to more effectively market adult educational programs and are, thus, interested in how Mexican American adult students persist toward degree attainment. As adult education practitioners are also interested in identifying the barriers to participation in adult education, research studies in participation and persistence of adult learners, will contribute to the data and findings accumulated by the researcher for the review of related literature section of this study.
4. Higher education promotes the preparedness of Mexican Americans in light of professionalism.

There are also limitations and strengths in light of the assumptions to any study. The limitation of this study are outlined here:

One potential limitation lies within the choice of methodology, namely narrative inquiry.

“It is not simply the content of a narrative that is critical narrative research; rather, it is the

interplay between the narrative that is told and the structure of the telling that is critical (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Narratives as interviews are told at a particular moment in time. Time can affect the context of the interview. It is likely that the participant told what is in his or her best interest or closest to the mind and heart of the experience at the time of the telling. Thus, self-representation may unintentionally have blurred or distorted truth per se. Life itself is complicated and that complexity may have influenced the telling of lived experiences.

Another limitation pertains to the researcher and the interview process. For the purpose of interpretation, an interview is a research tool enabling a participant to reveal a story about his or her world. Thus, a researcher tries to seize an understanding relevant of the life and culture of the participant (Patton, 2002), which can sometimes involve asking probing questions. Thus a limitation to this study arose in dealing with the tension of wanting to ask probing and appropriate questions while not wanting to ask questions that would be seen as an invasion of participant privacy. Yet, taking the interview beyond the superficial self and addressing painful issues in the participants' lives was necessary during the interview process. This phase of the interview posed sometimes awkward situations for both participant and me as the researcher. Sensitivity to deeply personal issues was important in building bridges of rich communication between me and the participant.

Lastly, another limitation of this study pertains to the cultural orientation of myself as the researcher. I am a White, Euro-American researcher doing research with Mexican American participants. Therefore, cultural and linguistic limitations between me as the researcher and the participants surfaced to some degree. It was not that these Mexican American participants appeared to be less forthcoming about their experiences, but their bicultural experiences in degree attainment did not always resonate with me as quickly or as clearly as if I were of Mexican American descent. Not having experienced cultural confrontations that Mexican American students sometimes experience, such as the challenges in redefining rapport with others I was

quiet to some extent during the interview listening intently rather than trying to make conversation. I know through both literatures that confusion, subordination, isolation, the anguish in negotiating cultural obstacles are experiences common to non-White participants in higher and adult education (Sheared & Sissel, 2001). Thus, implementing cultural sensitivity to issues of race and ethnicity was an important responsibility of mine during the research process. It was important that the interviewee understood that I saw them as the experts and that I saw myself as the learner. Ideas were respected, opinions were valued and conversation was appreciated as this Anglo interviewed these 10 Mexican Americans.

In spite of these limitations, the study is also strong in that I made every effort to follow all research protocols for narrative inquiry and to follow guidelines to enhance the dependability and reliability of the study. Some of these included, asking for clarification on questions, conducting member checks with participants by sending them back the narratives and asking them to comment on them, and consulting regularly with my advisor.

Organization of the Study

This study is written in three parts. Part I is the blueprint of the study, namely how the study design unfolded. This part is inclusive of Chapters One through , while Part II, The Narratives, is stories written from the collected and analyzed information from the interviews. Part III, Summarizing the Findings, includes only one chapter, namely Chapter Fourteen. Looking more closely at what each of the three parts contains, Chapter One has an introduction, a contextualization of the problem pertaining to Mexican American under-representation in degree attainment, a purpose statement with research questions that guided the study and an overview of both the theoretical framework and the methodology. The significance of the study, some assumptions and limitations of the study and definitions of key terms close Chapter One. Chapter

Two provides a discussion of the literature and the theoretical framework, the *Borderland*, as they relate to the study. Chapter Three explains the qualitative research model selected for this study with a rationale for choosing narrative inquiry as the methodology. Chapter Three also includes my background, participant selection, data collection, and analysis and verification strategies. Part II is the narrative section where 10 stories reflect the experiences of Mexican Americans in higher education. Part III is a thematic summary of the findings informing Mexican American degree attainment along with implications for theory, practice and future research. Some final reflective thoughts pertaining to what this research has meant to me personally is the closing for the study.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are contextually descriptive of this research. Terms may be defined differently in other research as several of these words are ambiguous in origin. Thus, the following definitions are scripted for the reader of this manuscript as they are used in the study, lending understanding to the context of the study and the research informing this dissertation.

1. **Adult Learner:** One who is a mature learner being 23 years or older meeting any one of the following criteria: enrolled in higher education either part or full time, works part or full time, have dependents other than a spouse, did not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year as they finished high school.
2. **Biculturalism:** Rooted in the concept of difference, biculturalism is the process of creating of public and private space while concurrently living in two cultures. Sometimes, but not always, people who are bicultural fit into one of

the following categories: “immigrants, refugees fleeing war or oppression, sojourners (e.g., international students, expatriates), indigenous people, ethnic minorities, those in interethnic relationships, and mixed-ethnic individuals” (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011, p. 11). Drawing from psychological, behavioral and social domains, biculturalism is based on how people self-identify with their heritage and host cultures over time. A fully bicultural person has learned to shift between cultural norms according to cues in any given situation.

3. **Border-crossing:** Living simultaneously in two or more cultures where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Anzaldúa, 1999). Within the borderlands today, there is a 2000 mile fence dividing the borders of North America and Mexico. Mexican Americans refer to the borderlands as *el otro lado* meaning the other side. “The border is also the margin of the center, that is, of the superpower; it is a strategic area that enables state power to make commercial concessions that benefit capitalist interests” (p. 107). Paradoxically, to cross the border is more than crossing a physical terrain. It is crossing a social space of historical nature underscoring racial/ethnic and linguistic discrimination.
4. **Borderlands genre:** A discourse that shifts from Mexican-Tijuana history to personal testimony. “The text moves restlessly onward to a history of a larger political family...and brings to light the dehumanization of those Mexican workers who cross over to the U.S. where Border Police hunt them” (Anzaldúa,

- 1999, p. 3). Paradoxically, borderlands genre focuses on crossing into a social space of historical nature underscoring racial/ethnic and linguistic discrimination, but also a place of opportunity to be authentically Mexican.
5. Chicano/a: people of Mexican descent raised or born and raised in the United States. More specifically, the term refers to a person of Mexican origin who does not reject their heritage in order to be an authentically American (Gonzales and Mejirodo, 2004).
 6. Hispanic: a person of Latin-American or Spanish descent living in the US. The word has been used in a geographical context referring to those countries that were originally conquered by Spain. For example, Mexico, Central America, parts of South America were conquered by Spain and their primary language is Spanish.
 7. Latino: a person of Latin-American or Spanish descent living in the US. It is a word that is culturally sensitive describing those whose country of origin is Mexico, South America, Central America, or the West Indies. The official language of origin would be Spanish, Portuguese or French.
 8. Mexican American: “A wide category of people who live in the United States and who have a familial link to Mexico or Mexican culture. It can include people who have roots in the territory conquered by the United States in the Mexican-American War, and who might not speak Spanish, as well as recent immigrants, some of whom might speak an indigenous language” (americanhistory.si.edu/collections/mexicanamerica/glossary.html).

9. Mestizo: “A Spanish term meaning “mixed,” *mestizo* is the racial formula often used to ethnically categorize Latin America, and particularly Mexico. Although it usually refers to a person of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, the term historically has also included people of mixed African ancestry as well.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is an examination of the bicultural experiences of Mexican American College graduates enrolled in an undergraduate/bachelor degree program as adult learners. The research is an exploration of how Mexican American college students navigated the rigorous obligations of degree completion. In light of the lack of research specifically about adult learners who are Mexican American, the primary purpose of the study is to hear the personal stories of college graduates who are of Mexican descent and to learn about the bi-cultural experiences that influenced degree attainment.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section is a discussion of the theoretical framework based in the tension of the borderlands. While some Mexican Americans literally live on the borders of the US and Mexico, many Mexican Americans cross cultural borders living in the metaphorical borderlands. Some, however, do live in the geographical borderlands as well. After discussing the theoretical framework, the second section discloses major issues for Latinos and Mexican Americans specifically in adult and higher education. The third section focuses on persistence in higher education for Latinos in general, while the fourth section reviews empirical studies specifically of Mexican Americans in higher education.

Theoretical Framework: Living Within and Beyond the Borderlands

Obtaining a college degree is a complex, highly challenging feat. Students are responsible for meeting demanding college expectations and high standards, negotiating belonging and applying knowledge obtained in the classroom and personal study. The challenge of the Mexican

American adult learner is even more complex as often times these learners are embedded in histories of migration, rural agricultural labor, and working class-families (Benmayor, 2002). Therefore, this research requires a framework which recognizes the bicultural experiences of Mexican American college students as significant in the process of degree completion.

A Borderlands theoretical framework draws attention to Mexican Americans living within two cultures and identifying simultaneously with the familiar and unfamiliar, the known and unknown, the acceptable and unacceptable, the historical and the current. The borderlands framework that Anzaldua (1987, 1999) introduces is a view of the Americas through a Chicana feminist lens. Elaborating on the socio-political, the genre of the borderlands confronts the challenges occurring when two or more cultures converge. While challenges occur in the converging of cultures, the borderlands also celebrates a new way of connecting people to each other as they create yet another culture. In this study, the notion of border crossing is integrated in the analysis of the lived experiences of the Mexican American adult learner in higher education. Structurally organized into four categories, the outline of this chapter is as follows: the Legacy of Colonization; Language and Identity; Gender across Cultures and the Transformation of Consciousness. These categories draw attention to the bicultural experiences of Mexican Americans as adult learners while addressing the realities of living in the borderlands, both physically and metaphorically.

The Legacy of Colonization

The Borderlands framework serves as an exploration of the experiences of people of different ethnicities who occupy the same space (Anzaldua, 1987, 1999). The occupied space, however, is not only a figuratively socio-political space, but in Anzaldua's original conception of it, particularly in regard to her own life, it was also a literal place. It was a specific geographic

location, namely the U.S.-Mexican border. At the border, many Mexican Americans see their lived experiences through eyes marginalized by power and privilege, as a result of being conquered and colonized as a people. This, of course, has a historical context. Both Anzaldua (1999) and Mexican American writer, David Abalos (2007), discuss how the history of colonization has affected the consciousness of many Mexican Americans. Abalos (2007) discusses how this process has served to “deform” consciousness. Both Anzaldua (1999) and Abalos suggest ways to transform this consciousness, which has been influenced by the processes of colonization, into a new consciousness. But in order to understand how this new consciousness can be developed, one needs to understand something of how the history of “conquer and colonized” has affected the Mexican American culture.

Historical context of colonization. The components of Mexico’s colonized history are literal events occurring as early as 1521 when the colonial period of Mexico began. Spanish forces, led by Hernando Cortez, conquered the capital of the Aztec empire, namely the city of Tenochtitlan (later called Mexico City). Cortez and his *conquistadores* (conquerors) saw the native population of Mexico as a ready basis for slave labor (Fuentes, 1999). For nearly 300 years, from the conquest of Mexico to its independence from Spain in 1821, Mexican independence was threatened. Then, in 1846, the United States invaded Mexico. At that time, Mexico was forced to give up almost half of her nation, namely, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California. Today, a border fence divides Mexico and the United States covering approximately 640 miles of the 2,000 miles of border (Global Security, 2010). The fence is a harsh reminder of Mexico’s colonized past. It is also a confirmation of the breach that continues to distance the two nations politically and culturally (Anzaldua, 1987; Sleeter, 1996). Paz (1985) claims that “any contact with the Mexican people, however brief, reveals that the ancient beliefs and customs are still in existence beneath Western forms. These still-living remains testify to the vitality of the pre-Cortesian cultures” (p.89).

Colonization and ethnic identity. The “Conquest” and the attitudes that surrounded the conquest, are very much alive throughout the Americas, argues Abalos (2007). He contends that many Latinos resist White dominant cultural oppression by expressing deep anti-European sentiments. As sentiments of the dominant culture and the oppressor are internalized certain components of identity—self-esteem, voice and ethnic authenticity—are affected, and people can take on the beliefs of the oppressor or colonizer even when it does not serve their interests. Consequently, some Latinos experience internalized oppression triggered by present day colonialism and/or what Franz Fanon (1961/2004) referred to as the colonized mind. Fanon was a Black psychiatrist from the West Indies who lived much of his life in Algeria. He discusses how colonized people often begin to develop the consciousness of the oppressor and adopt, to some degree (often unconsciously), the beliefs and values of the colonizer while developing what he referred to as a colonized mind.

In his 1961 book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon metaphorically compares the colonized mind to an antenna. The colonized mind is receptive to hostile signals from a divided world, divided as the colonizers and the colonized. Fanon argues that the colonized have been treated less than human. He explains that “cultural values are internalized, or ‘epidermalized’ into consciousness, creating a fundamental disjuncture between the black man's consciousness and his body” (Poulas, 1996, p. 1). Fanon discusses the significance of being in touch with and transforming the ways the mind has been oppressed by the colonizer. He suggests a discourse that goes beyond narrow-minded nationalism calling for a right to equitable development through debt relief, health and global initiatives.

Given the processes of colonization and the history of colonization that many who live in the Mexican borderlands have experienced, Mexican Americans are more likely to take on characteristics of a colonized mind and may suffer from internalized oppression. On the other hand, Abalos (2007) alleges that when ancestry and cultural roots are reclaimed in a positive way,

negative effects of internalized oppression can be transformed. The act of reclaiming a positive identity is, in essence, transforming. Additionally, Abalos (2007) believes that internalized oppression influences what he refers to as the four “faces” of identity, namely the personal, political, historical, and sacred faces. When ancestry and cultural history are reclaimed through engaging the four faces of identity, the individual, and to some extent the community, is transformed in moving toward a more equitable and just future.

In summarizing the legacy of colonization, in light of a borderlands’ framework, Anzaldua (1999) speaks of a new consciousness where there is healing in the divide that originated in the very core of her history. Abalos (2007) discloses a consciousness that turns away from violence while embracing love and compassion. Fanon releases the colonized mind to more equitable ways of justice. What these authors argue, considering the tension of the borderlands, is that a new consciousness, a transformed mind, aims directly at dealing with the legacy of a colonized past and changes the way they perceive themselves. Anzaldua (1999) says it so strikingly accurate when she states, “The work of the *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (p.102).

Language and Identity: “I am my language”

In the deconstruction of a colonized past, a borderlands’ framework examines another facet of Mexican American history, namely the legacy of language. After 300 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization, many Mexican Americans use words that Spaniards brought with them to the Americas from Medieval Spain, though many aspects of the language have changed. Anzaldua (1999) asserts that ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. Clarifying the connection between ethnic identity and language, Anzaldua simply says, “I am my language” (p. 81). She argues that if she cannot take pride in her language she cannot take pride in herself.

“Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself” (p. 81).

Grappling with issues pertaining to language, ethnic pride and legitimacy, Anzaldua alludes to indigenous influence pertaining to language. Shifting sounds, leaving out final syllables, adding syllables at the beginning of words, and borrowing words from the English language creates a linguistic mix for many Mexican Americans, including Anzaldua. This mix creates challenges, sometimes criticisms, for people who hold tightly to their native tongue, as well as those who have moved away from their indigenous language (Anzaldua, 1999).

The borderlands lens captures the historical context of language surrounding what Herrera-Sorbek (2006) calls Chicano Spanish. Herrera-Sorbek (2006) contends that Chicano Spanish has linguistic traits that would be typical of all languages in contact with other languages “particularly when a hegemonic conquering culture is imposed on a colonized one—salient trait of being the borrowing phenomenon” (p.268). When Herrera-Sorbek states that Chicano Spanish is in contact with other languages, she is suggesting that Mexican Americans are acquainted with the indigenous languages that are present in their culture. Anzaldua (1999) lists some of those dialects, such as Standard English, Standard Spanish, Mexican Spanish, working class and slang English, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations) Tex-Mex and Pachuco (p.77).

Pertaining to language as an issue of contention, Sleeter (1996) explains that there is often resistance to giving up one’s native tongue. It is a struggle that is internalized because, as Anzaldua expressed, language and self for many people are integrated facets of identity. To give up language is to give up self, namely there is a dying of self in the process. Discussing linguistic acculturation (the relinquishing of the native tongue while adopting the English tongue), Sleeter (1996) argues that forcing linguistic acculturation upon others is a process of identity stripping. In a discussion with Asian American students, Sleeter found that the students felt they were not

taught English so that they would make it their own language, but rather they felt they were taught English to force them into defining their identities in terms of Western culture and thought. Thus, language as an issue of contention is used to name experience and shape identity.

Herrera-Sorbek (2006) discusses the borderlands language from Anzaldua's perspective stating that there are English and Spanish speakers that react negatively to Chicano Spanish. She addresses this negativity as linguistic terrorism because between 1940 and 1960 Chicano children and adolescents were terrorized into relinquishing their Spanish language. Arguing that there is nothing mysterious about Chicano Spanish, Herrera-Sorbek (2006) contends that any linguist would know the process of language change when two cultures emerge. Herrera-Sorbek (2006) also contends that she, like Anzaldua, remained bilingual in spite of the physical and emotional blows received. Moreover, bilingualism, in the context of the borderlands, geographic and metaphoric, is seen as empowering, rather than diminishing, relevant rather than archaic and transforming rather than condemning. In the book, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldua's closing statement in Chapter Five, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" states, "When other races have given up their tongue, we've kept ours" (p.85). With this statement Anzaldua demonstrates positive stubbornness describing *Mexicanos-Chicanos* as impenetrable as stone, yet malleable. By holding on to their language, they hold on to the hope that their language will remain and, therefore, their identity.

Anzaldua's internalized persistence to continue speaking her native tongue, when the rest of her world demanded she relinquish it, was aligned to her consciousness that had been transformed by hope for a better future. No longer feeling the need to accommodate English speakers, she believed her language was not illegitimate. Consequently, a transformed consciousness enabled Anzaldua to write bilingually, substitute codes without having to translate, and speak freely in her native tongue (Anzaldua, 1999).

Gender in the Borderlands

The role of gender in a borderlands framework is significant to the research as it informs Mexican American academia from both male and female perspectives. Differences in orientations are evidenced in the literature, yet both male and female roles are constrained by barriers regarding historical values of patriarchy (Anzaldua, 1999; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Rodriquez, 2005). Abalos (2007) explains that patriarchy emerges in the daily routines and practices of everyday life in Latino culture. Men are typically assigned the role of the protector while women are usually seen primarily as producers of children. A woman's sexuality can be seen as the honor of the family. However, there are aspects of patriarchy that can often wound the next generation and "cripples both men and women because neither can become full persons" (p. 20). This wounding is further explained in light of a pursuit in education.

Patriarchy, pertaining to females, is often viewed as a systematic domination of women bearing negatively on her academic aspirations. For example, Lango (1995) argues that Mexican American women, enrolled in undergraduate programs, find "it extremely difficult to take on nontraditional behaviors, manners, and attitudes that are looked on by her culture as disrespectful" (p. 46). These educationally oriented behaviors, manners, and attitudes are looked upon as insolent, perhaps, because the student may have chosen to assimilate into the mainstream United States culture and thereby relinquished her distinctiveness as a wife, mother and homemaker. Niemann, Romero and Arbona (2000) found that Mexican American males do not encourage their spouses to pursue education because "educated women may threaten the traditional male authority and the higher status of men who retain the concept of traditional gender roles" (p.49). Thus, if a Mexican American woman does not receive encouragement to pursue educational dreams from outside her immediate family, she is most likely not going to receive it from her Mexican American husband either.

Again, regarding gender and the literature, men are also constrained by influences of patriarchy (Abalos, 2007; Niemann, Romero & Arbona, 2000). Some men are forbidden new relationships with others outside family and community. Pursuing shared goals with others outside the community is often not encouraged. As Abalos (2007) states, “We diminish our own humanity and that of others in order to protect and maintain the tradition of male superiority” (p.20). However, the traditional view of the male role is one of strength and character, more commonly understood as the notion of *machismo*. From a male perspective, machismo is an attribute of honor. Men often describe machismo as the ability to protect, shield, shelter and safeguard the family from harm. It is interpreted as that which is acquired as one transitions from boyhood to manhood (Rodriquez, 2005). Often, Mexican American men perceive machismo as a positive facet of Mexican American traditionalism. Rodriquez further explains that the term “machismo” is a word never really defined by those who use it. It is understood by some Mexican Americans as the ‘proper’ behavior of men.

However, from a feminist standpoint, machismo has a troubling slant to its meaning. Male dominant behaviors oppress female creativity, individuality, and autonomy (Anzaldua, 1987). Anzaldua believed that women of her culture have three choices in the trajectory of life. First, a woman could find her place in the church and become a nun; or, she could find her place on the streets and become a prostitute; or she could look to the home and become a mother. Anzaldua, however, shares the following statement indicating a new dawn is on the horizon. “Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous person” (p. 38). It is in Anzaldua’s fourth choice, entering the world by way of education, that a woman’s opportunity in degree attainment is idealistically connected to Abalos’ (2007) concepts of freeing self from traditional cultural expectations.

Transforming Consciousness

Consciousness, in the context of this section, refers to attitude. Thus, this segment discusses transforming attitude biculturally. As Mexican Americans live between two worlds new cultural experiences and attitudes arise as they negotiate life in dual environments. However, “cultural experiences and attitudes do not supplant the established behaviors and attitudes the person has already internalized” (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011, p.164). Thus, Anzaldua (1999), Abalos (2007) and Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) discuss transforming consciousness biculturally as a way Mexican Americans engage in dominant cultural environments while being fully American and remaining fully Mexican.

Anzaldua’s new consciousness. Anzaldua (1990) advocates a new consciousness that affirms Latinos are responsible to each other. The responsibility is to let go of reactionary, self-righteous attitudes. Such attitudes will only stifle the new consciousness. Although the new consciousness does not forget past grievances, Anzaldua is quick to say it does forgive them. Anzaldua claims that to carry the ghosts of past grievances is to no avail to anyone. She states, “It is not worth the grief. It keeps us from ourselves and from each other; it keeps us from new relationships” (p.147). Thus, the new consciousness is transformative through forgiveness and reconciliation.

In exploring Anzaldua’s perceptions of a “new” consciousness, Castillo (2006) contends that it is a celebration of biculturality. It is a consciousness that inspires some Latinos to seek new ways to construct ethnic identity and appropriate the right to speak as an indigenous people. However, the new consciousness notion also angers other members of the Latino community who have chosen to assimilate by abandoning native languages, food, and religion for Anglo identity.

The assimilated Mexican American rejects an “indianizing stance” (Castillo, 2006, P. 264) and may even find it incomprehensible. According to Castillo (2006), the “new”

consciousness has become a tokenized term distorting “meaningful intellectual exchange” (p. 264). Counteracting negative opinions and criticisms, Castillo reaffirms that Anzaldua is a poet, and it is in her poetry she has been most inspirational. Powerful is her collection of essays and personal writings as well.

Castillo (2006) goes on to write that Anzaldua’s greatest strength is in providing a counter-narrative to the lived stories of betrayal and loss to a culture of spiritual devastation through her borderlands theory of the ‘new’ consciousness. This inspiring consciousness, which guides Latinos toward their deepest source of wholeness, is similarly expressed by David Abalos (1986, 1993, 1998, 2007) in his theory of transformation. Abalos’ theory expounds on Latinos making right choices. He contends that in making good life choices and decisions, Latinos can tap into the four sources of their being. These sources can serve to link them to themselves, others, and solutions to common problems. Those sources are the personal, political, historical, and sacred faces of one’s being.

Abalos’ faces of transformation. Abalos’ (2007) theory of transformation serves as a guide toward new ways of life for Latina women and Latino men. He uses a key question to introduce ways to transform individual consciousness. He asks, “In the service of what way of life are you living?” (p.9). Abalos challenges Latinos to bring forth the personal, political, historical, and sacred faces of their being through service, not only through service to community, but through service to the nation, as one race, the human race.

Contending that Latinos have four faces, namely the personal, political, historical and sacred, Abalos (2007) points out that it is only in the service of transformation that each “face” can be fully experienced. The responsibilities of each face are briefly described to clarify their distinctiveness

The personal face has opportunity to make choices that inevitably affect the other three faces. For instance, the personal face connects to the sacred face inspiring new forms of justice.

The personal face also connects to the historical face in influencing behaviors that may have emerged from a colonized past such as violence or rebellion. The personal face may also politically participate in creating more loving and just stories. Described as the focal of the four faces, the personal face ultimately expresses transformation. This expression of transformation is described by Abalos (2007) as a change in behavioral patterns. Behaviors that once condemned people are pardoned and newly created patterns speak to better ways of life.

The historical face is caught between traditions. This means that when traditions are no longer respected or held in high esteem, a reaction will be demonstrated. The reaction of the historical face, according to Abalos (2007), will either be negative—self-hatred, crime, dropping out of education, incarceration—or positive intervening against those aspects of culture that are destructive. Abalos (2007) contends that history is made worse as stories of racial victimization are repeated. However, Abalos (2007) also argues that the historical face can refuse to repeat stories that demise and demean the ego of the Latino. Looking to the personal face for strength, the historical face creates new traditions freeing the self from deformation. The political face is shaped by relationships with family, community and larger society. Abalos (1993) affirms that when a Latino/a breaks off a relationship with a “father or lover or ruler there is a political dimension” (p.39). That dimension is political because the “broken relationship” is representative of the desire to “break off” relationships with official politics and lords. Contending that the political face has the ability to resist official politics and lords by struggling against them, Abalos (2001) also strongly affirms that initiatives need to be just, compassionate, and loving. For example, opening centers for children, youth and the elderly in urban settings where finances are limited and needs are the greatest are responsibilities of the political face. These types of initiatives speak to a political paradigm. The political face asks what can be done together, as neighborhoods, to liberate Latinos and end their victimhood. Abhorring structural deformation, the political face seeks out concrete manifestations for democracy and equity.

The sacred face addresses the spiritual situations of Latinos. Abalos (2007) argues that Biblical teaching from the Old Testament book of Genesis affirms that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God and that God is the creator of all life. Therefore, humanity is a co-creator in the likeness of God. From the assumption that humanity is a co-creator, Abalos contends that the sacred face has the instinctive ability to create “new” histories, traditions and stories that will better the lives of Latinos.

Abalos (1993) explains that many Latinos have multiple views of God, many of which are punitive or otherwise negative, which can contribute to a negative view of their own identity. Taken a step further, such views can contribute to their oppression—not only of others, but of themselves as well. Hence, he argues that Latinos need to reframe negative views or images of God to a view highlighting the goodness and transforming power of God. Doing so, he suggests, is embracing one’s “sacred face.” He contends that political action can help free the sacred face: “To cast out demons in our personal lives and society by political action means that we have freed our sacred face from the lesser lord” (Abalos, 2007, p.48).

Freeing the sacred face is the act of transformation whereby one empties their wounding stories into an abyss. They, then, are capable of recognizing the need for affirmation, relationships and community. Abalos (2007) spells out four simple principles in freeing the sacred face. He prefaces his prescription by stating, “Not to repeat the past, but to recreate it by discerning those elements that will lead us now and in the future out of a dead-end” (p. 59).

Abalos first contends that the responsibility of the sacred face is to wrestle with its colonized history going beyond fatalistic despair that formerly led to passivity. Secondly, the sacred face seeks alternatives to violence and rebellion. Thirdly, it analyzes what does not work pertaining to social reform. Then, fourthly, it deconstructs what does not work while offering alternatives that are new and better pertaining to self-doubt, family relationships, finances, and education.

Biculturalism. The notions discussed above, the four faces of transformation and the New Consciousness, depict how Mexican Americans move between cultural contexts. Many authors refer to this as being bicultural (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011), a straddling of two cultural worlds, whereas other authors use the term cultural “integration” (Berry, 2003) to essentially refer to a similar process. Research indicates that the development of a bicultural identity is significant to successfully adapting in the dominant society (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005; Brooker & Lawrence, 2012; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011; Smokowski, Rose & Bacallao, 2008; Torres & Rollock, 2009).

In their book, *Becoming Bicultural: Risk, Resilience and Latino Youth*, Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) discuss biculturalism as a positive factor in Latino family dynamics. Yet, in their discussion, they argue that research is limited because the term, bicultural, is difficult to define. Torres and Rollock (2009) go so far as to say the term is confusing. Smokowski, Rose and Bacallao (2008), attempting to define it more clearly, contend that it is identification with languages, norms and customs of multiple cultures. It also has unique outcomes apart from assimilation (a high involvement in the host culture, where one typically “gives up” the culture of origin) and apart from enculturation (a high involvement in the culture-of-origin, with little involvement in the host culture).

In differentiating assimilation and enculturation from biculturalism, Smokowski, Rose and Bacallao (2008) found assimilation and enculturation to have negative effects on family cohesion and adaptability in their study of 402 Mexican American adolescent-parent pairs. On the other hand, biculturalism had positive effects in this same study. In reviewing the research, Smokowski, Rose and Bacallao (2008) note that risk factors are high for those Latinos who assimilate to the dominant culture and attempt to give up their culture of origin, and they are high for those who remain enculturated with their culture of origin and cannot negotiate the dominant culture. The risk factors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, are lower for bicultural individuals

explaining that fully bicultural individuals have the “ability to switch between cultural schemas, norms, and behaviors in response to cultural cues in any given situation” (p.11).

This ability to switch between schemas, norms and behaviors in response to cultural cues is called cultural frame switching (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). Bicultural individuals have two sets of interpretive frames from which to interpret life’s experiences. They have developed the ability to perceptually shift their thinking to fit situational demands. Perceptual associations with either the host culture or the heritage culture based on cues, symbols or contexts triggers the cultural frame shift. For example, hearing a language or seeing a flag could elicit an association with either host or heritage culture. The flag or a language, in this example, serves as stimuli activating a person’s bicultural network of cultural knowledge. Thus, bicultural individuals have a wide range of “social skills and mastery of cognitive frame switching that allows them to handle diverse cultural situations” (p.185).

Ease in shifting cultural frames also enables a person to retain their ethnic cultural identity while initiating a positive affiliation with the dominant culture. Similar to these findings, Brooker and Lawrence (2012) found that bicultural individuals handle challenges better than those who assimilate to the dominant culture by giving up their culture of origin. They interviewed 35 newly arrived immigrant adult students in Australia, finding a positive affiliation between biculturalism and higher education success. Brooker and Lawrence (2012) established that despite discrimination, poor housing, low socio-economic status, limited transportation, crowded medical facilities and difficulty in building social networks, those who were bicultural—committing to both the host culture and culture-of-origin—were generally positive in their outlook on college and tended to excel overall. Those who were not bicultural saw discrimination as challenging and struggled with study habits and language acquisition.

Although none of the 35 participants in Brooker and Lawrence’s (2012) study were Latino, the study is significant to Mexican American degree attainment as their research points

out that biculturalism influences college degree attainment. Relative to research on Mexican American degree attainment, Brooker and Lawrence (2012) discuss challenges that could easily thwart ones efforts to complete a college degree program as an immigrant newly arrived to a host cultural setting. Yet, the bicultural students in Brooker and Lawrence's (2012) study implemented positive approaches to handle challenges and went on to succeed in their college experience. Similar challenges are cited in research pertaining to the Mexican American college students in which those Mexican American students who embraced both the host culture and their heritage culture also went on to succeed in their college experiences as well (Aguilar, 1996; Benmayor, 2002; Lango, 1995; Lopez, 1995). Thus, Brooker and Lawrence's (2012) study is pertinent to this literature review as they have demonstrated how biculturalism positively impacts higher education across ethnicities.

Another study where biculturalism played a positive role was in Torres and Rollock's (2009) research pertaining to biculturalism as a mechanism underscoring psychological well-being, namely self-esteem. Ninety-six adults, the majority of Mexican American descent, participated in a 29-item inventory (Cultural Life Style Inventory) which examined approaches to navigating between two cultures as Latinos. The inventory measured acculturation with a focus on "language use, extra-familial language use, social affiliation, cultural familiarity, and cultural identification and pride" (p. 220). Torres and Rollock (2009) defined biculturalism as living at a juncture where two cultures intersect and where there is a preference to speak both Spanish and English. Their study indicated that bicultural individuals sought to maintain the customs, norms, values and traditions of both mainstream culture and the culture of origin. They also found that retaining traditional Latino cultural norms and values while incorporating facets from the dominant culture was affiliated with positive self-esteem.

Related to research on biculturalism, Bacallao and Smokowski (2005) believe so strongly that becoming bicultural is the answer to Latino stress in living across cultures that they created a

bicultural skills training program. The program's curriculum addresses aggressive behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse that are often triggered by highly assimilated or highly enculturated life styles. With a focus on developing strong bicultural skills, program participants' self-determination is enhanced, pressure to assimilate is resisted and the ability to discern appropriate behaviors in any given situation is initiated.

Bacallao and Smokowski's (2005) program, *Entre Dos Mundos/Between Two Worlds*, is eight weeks of multifamily group sessions whereby topics of discussion are based on cultural conflicts, coping with racial discrimination and negotiating the challenges of school. During each session a theme question is presented that serves as a focus of discussion for that session. Questions are relevant to balancing the demands of two cultures, decreasing worry, handling discrimination and ways to strengthen relationships with non-Latinos. With positive outcomes deriving from the onset of the program, Bacallao & Smokowski (2005) consider biculturalism not only a "critical mediator of acculturation processes but also an appropriate target for intervention" (p. 187).

Not everyone of course uses the term "bicultural". As noted earlier (2003) described the process of acculturation using the terms assimilation, marginalization, separation and integration being last. Unlike others, he discussed the effects of the immigrant group's presence on the larger society and how the immigrant group also changes the larger society. According to Berry (2003), the larger society could implement any of the following descriptors in an acculturative setting, namely segregation whereby forcing the non-dominant to separate, exclusion where marginality is imposed, or multiculturalism where diversity is accepted. Thus, Berry sees acculturation as mutual; both dominant and non-dominant groups are affected. This is not to say these descriptors are not conceptualized in Smokowski and Bacallao's (2011)

study. However, Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) primarily explore only non-dominant cultural group dynamics.

In summary, Fanon (2004), Abalos (2007) and Anzaldua (1999) allude to notions that move beyond a colonized past towards a future embracing “un-colonized” liberties while Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) establish biculturalism is an antidote for borderland duress, and Berry (2003) further theorizes how it also effects and changes the dominant culture. Anzaldua (1999) and Abalos (2007) suggest ways that consciousness transformed becomes hope for those living in two cultures. While Fanon suggests a discourse that goes beyond narrow-minded nationalism calling for a right to equitable development through debt relief, health and global initiatives, Abalos seeks a better tomorrow through the theory of transformation. Anzaldua’s promotes a “new” consciousness advocating forgiveness without forgetting. These authors believe a colonized people can transition from conquered to conqueror, from overcome to over-comer, from displaced to occupied and from cultural to bicultural.

Latinos in Adult and Higher Education

Now that the theoretical framework has been laid out, this section will focus on major issues for Latinos in adult and higher education as discussed primarily from an adult education perspective. There is actually a very limited literature base about Latinos in adult education, particularly those in higher education, but there is some adult education literature that speaks to the experience of minorities and adult learners in higher education. This section begins with an exploration of the literature about culture in general in adult higher education, and how it can be applied to Latinos and Mexican Americans in higher education. Then, the second subsection will discuss the limited literature specifically about Latino adult learners in higher education.

Cultural Issues and Adult Higher Education

To be sure, education has been the leading thrust in socializing people of all ethnicities into main stream culture. The classroom, where cultural values are defined, is a place where people are either marginalized or empowered (Guy, 1999). Often times a cultural mismatch between cultural history and the learning environment occurs. The mismatch, according to Guy (1999) has been the catalyst in prompting adult educators to seek “new approaches to teaching and learning based on the socio-cultural experiences and backgrounds of the population” (p.6).

Adult educators have often served middle-class, employed, white adult learners. However, the number of African Americans, Latinos, and Native American enrolled in adult education has risen considerably. Guy (1999), therefore, introduces a culture-based adult education whereby educators question the relationship between cultural origins of adult learners and the classroom environment. “The nature of the fit between learners’ cultural backgrounds and their educational experiences is of central concern because of culture’s importance in establishing criteria for success or failure” (p.13). Guy (1999) is quick to point out that biculturalism—whereby people of color maintain their culture of origin as well as that of mainstream culture—is significant to adult education goals because adults learn in classroom environments where a multiplicity of cultures not only coexists but thrives!

In referring to adult learners and their own perceived abilities, particularly in regard to the African American women in her study, Johnson-Bailey points out the common characteristics of people of color regarding adult education. Her research (2001) indicates that adult learners not only doubt their ability to succeed, but they feel less capable than younger students. Adult learners carry of sense of guilt pertaining to their lack of time to carry out family responsibilities. Adult learners often put other people’s needs before their own. They struggle with feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Playing catch-up is ongoing for the adult learner, especially those who

are single parents. Their academic short-comings in the disciplines of mathematics and the sciences often discourage adult learners and keep them from pursuing degree attainment.

On the more positive side, Johnson-Bailey (2001) also found that the African American women adult learners in her study were mature and had a seriousness of purpose. Their wisdom and their faith in God were evident in their bi-cultural experiences as students of color. "One idea that is constantly repeated by mature women who are entering or reentering higher education is that they are different from their younger counterparts because their understanding of the world is more informed" (p.43). The mature learner knows that the academy will not be easy nor will it be fair. With this awareness, the adult learner perseveres, with a sense of urgency, determined to succeed. Often times, adult learners are able to see school as a mirror of life's circumstances. With that approach, they perceive school challenges as a series of negotiations. Tolerating the ambiguous and coping with the environment, adult learners determine to navigate the cross cultural challenges of academia. While Latino/as were not included in the Johnson-Bailey's study, it is likely that much of the insights of the experience of the African American women in her study could be applied to Latinas as well.

From a politics of neglect, Sissel, Hansman and Kasworm (2001) argue that adult learners are often disregarded in higher education. Although Sissel, Hansman and Kasworm (2001) do not directly address the needs of Mexican American adult learners, they point out that the neglected in higher education are the dark skinned, the disabled, and those who are older students. Their study found that higher education is an elitist environment, a place for white, young-adult, leadership development. Embracing a residential (on-campus) population, higher education caters to the needs and interests of younger, unmarried, and often full-time student. There is an underlying higher education mentality that indicates older students should be in the labor market and not in school.

Often, adult learners, students of color and the disabled are left out of the descriptive landscape of higher education institutions. Policies, programs, and even publications such as admissions information, web page discussions, and catalogue descriptions embrace a White, young adult student population. Adults are viewed as “at-risk,” needy, marginal or secondary. This type of labeling is often associated with student failure. Labeling affects learner expectations and influences actions of educators. Other repercussions occurring from neglect is lack of status, privilege and power. As adult students must often attend school in the evenings and on weekends, they are denied full access and support from their institution available to traditional students.

The solution to neglect is visibility. Sissel, Hansman and Kasworm (2001) argue that adult learners are distanced from the collegiate world of traditional age student development. Visibility is, therefore, critical as it will open people’s eyes to see the need for change. If adult learners’ experiences are positioned so as seen by others, essential questions regarding what higher education looks like for the adult learner will emerge. Pertinent questions would be regarding issues of access, curricula, and support. Those who should be asking the questions are adult educators, administration professionals, continuing-education personnel, community development agencies, social services, human services, and civic organizations. These agencies and organizations should inquire if higher education responds to adult learning needs.

The nature of ‘positionality’ locates adult learners in relation to others and is the key component in change. As institutions promote leadership for all learners, space will advantage adult learners. Students, such as Mexican American adult learners, will no longer be judged as fragmented learners who cannot give sufficient to colligate matters. They will not be viewed as marginalized, invisible, of limited abilities. As educational institutions seek out a new understanding of adult life, access, support and learning experiences will be enriched and degree completion achieved.

Clover (2006) addresses issues of language for adult learners arguing that educators need to listen to the language of the classroom and begin to critically reflect as to how higher education can be more culturally responsive. Although Clover does not particularly speak to the language needs of Mexican American adult learners, she does attend to language needs of the culturally exploited, colonized, marginalized and subordinated. She addresses the need for new approaches to opening cross-cultural conversations that will remove assumptions of racism in the language of higher education.

There are many ways that educators can encourage antiracist language in higher education settings. For example, Clover's (2006) study showed that art-based assignments are valuable in cultural and antiracist dialogue. In Clover's study involving 24 project participants and 6 educators, participants were assigned to create collectively murals, quilts and sculptures. The participants represented ten different cultures. Throughout the projects, over a period of six months, learners stopped, looked and discussed stories. The three projects were collective works whereby images, symbols, metaphors and ideas were those of the group rather than the individual. The projects created cohesiveness in terms of language allowing learners to say they cared about racism while collectively speaking out. The "collectivity" of this assignment informs language pertaining to voice. Underlying racist assumptions are often difficult to address as one voice, but a sense of safety is in the power of the collective voice.

One of the languages of cross-cultural communication is art-based learning. However, for the Mexican American adult learner, issues of language are more complex than for Latinos in general. Taking pride in language, dialect, Chicano Texas Spanish, and Tex-Mex is a critical part of Mexican American identity. Their language is a cross pollination between English, Castilian Spanish, North Mexican, Tex-Mex, and Nahuatl Indian. Anzaldua (1987) calls this cross pollination the language of the borderlands. It is a juncture of cultures. Therefore, literacy proficiency requires perceptive analysis as to how language skills are developed and tied to the

social experience (Garcia & Duran, 1991). Native language is a critical component of cultural pride, ethnic identity and of the Mexican ethos (Sparks, 1998; Anzaldua, 1987; Martinez, 2001).

Diversified language activities, such as those Clover (2006) mentioned, would tie Mexican American adult learners into the social experiences in the higher education setting. Yet, there also needs to be an uprooting of dualistic thinking and collective consciousness whereby the Mexican American no longer feels the need to beg for approval or forgiveness for their language. As adult education becomes more receptive and responsive to language needs of students of color, Mexican Americans in particular, those activities promoting cross-cultural dialogue will influence college success and degree attainment. Language and ethnic identity are kin to each other, thus, attention to both will promote academic and economic mobility for all ethnicities.

As higher education settings aim at interracial, cross-cultural and antiracist dialogue learners and educators will listen and talk across difference. Diverse learning activities built into the programs of adult learners will enhance critical literacy while crossing cultural conversations. Diversified course activities incorporate language as a vehicle of enhancement, enrichment and mobility for today's adult learners.

Latinos in Adult Higher Education

As noted earlier, there is a very limited literature base that explores Latino issues in adult education in general and adult higher education more specifically. Sheared and Sissel (2001) in recognizing the limited literature in the 1990s, pertaining to people of color and women in adult education, put together an edited volume, *Making Space: Merging Theory and Practice in Adult Education*. In a contributing chapter, Marcano (2001), in discussing her experience as an adult learner and as a Puerto Rican in Chicago, expounds on how Latino students work around issues of community in the arena of higher education. As a Latina in a professional world, Marcano

crosses borders with those who look and sound like her, as well as with those who are culturally different. She shares her own lived experiences in relation to machismo and the patriarchal influences in Latino society. Her experiences in obtaining tenure in higher education and her previous work in the community expound on what it means to negotiate between and across borders. Sheared and Sissel (2001), in reflecting on Marcano's story, contend that Marcano's success in higher education, despite issues of gender value and dominant social pressure, relates to her resiliency moving between borders and making space for others like herself. The secret is not becoming complacent while in positions of power and authority, but continuing to impact the system for social change.

More recently, in a collection of stories reflecting race in adult education, edited by Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, and Brookfield (2010), contributing authors Gonzales and Mejorado (2010) discuss their personal experiences regarding race, gender and the socioeconomic divide in higher education. Sensitively sharing their lived experiences as professors in a teacher education department of a large institution, they tell their meaning of belonging as Latino faculty in the field of higher education, and capture the complexity of their situation and the resiliency of their character. Risking their gains of tenure and promotion, the two women approach the discussion with trepidation. Determined to give voice culturally and socially to their own legacy of activism, both professors engage in dialogue in an environment "that has a history of marginalizing women of color" (p. 56).

Gonzales and Mejorado (2010) explain how two pieces of literature/research, Cuadraz's (2005) *Chicanos and higher education: Three decades of literature and thought* and Gandara's (1993) book *Over the Ivy Walls*, inspired them to share publically their stories as adult learners. Given the limited literature about Latinos in education, and because these pieces also inform the field of specifically adult education the next few paragraphs expound on the impact these authors had on Gonzales and Mejorado as adult educators.

The first piece, a summary of three decades of thought pertaining to Chicano/as, focuses on severe Chicana under-representation in higher education. Cuadraz (2005) traced the development of the field and highlighted key studies and notable events. While expounding on notions significant to each era, she contends there is advocacy and value in telling lived experiences as such telling evolves into traditional research. Thus, Mejorado and Gonzales were inspired to share their testimonies of activism hoping to make a difference for Latinas yet to come into the field.

The second piece of literature that served as a vehicle of motivation for Gonzales and Mejorado was Gandara's (1993) book *Over the Ivy Walls*. The book is based on a study reflecting Chicano/as perspectives in higher education. Participants, 30 men and 20 women, satisfied "the most stringent criterion of academic success: namely an MD, PhD, or JD degree conferred from a highly regarded American university of national stature" (Gandara, 1993, p. 18). In reading Gandara's book and pondering the study's data, Gonzalez and Mejorado connected personally, socially, culturally and even politically with Gandara's sample population. Like the participants in Gandara's study, Gonzales and Mejorado were from impoverished backgrounds. More importantly, and similar to Gandara's participants, Gonzalez's and Mejorado's parents foresaw poverty as a temporary situation. As their parents instilled hope by telling stories of successful ancestors who owned land and were autonomous in their ventures, Gonzales and Mejorado became autonomous as well as they grew into adulthood.

Another common factor Gonzales and Mejorado had with Gandara's participants was in regard to college peers. In Gandara's (1993) study, the participants said peers were academically competitive and cared about educational achievement. Mejorado, too, expressed how peers helped her succeed contending it was the power of peer influence that made a difference in her academic success.

Gonzales and Mejorado, as adult education faculty, had notions that their ideas would be valued, ethical standards would rule, faculty and staff would collaborate and be respectful, resources would be shared and accomplishments would be recognized. However, the reality of their situation was a different scenario than they had expected. The women note that their credentials were questioned, suggestions were rebuffed, accomplishments were ignored, scholarly work placed aside and they were strongly advised not to file grievances within the department. The environment served to awaken their social consciousness and instill a hope for change. Gonzales and Mejorado contend they practiced their social consciousness in the earlier years of college life and they were ready to do it again in their roles as faculty. Already fine-tuned was their legacy of activism. They knew how to engage in activist scholarship and were committed to their role as Chicana faculty. With energy to construct and respect their own reality, rather than conforming to mainstream paths of higher education, they were inspired to tell their stories. They wanted to share their stories because they had personally come to understand that adult learners can doubt their ability to succeed in higher education, especially those students who are labeled minorities. For that reason, Gonzales and Mejorado pushed for dialogue pertaining to the influence of racism. They believed this type of dialogue would aid present day instructors “to understand the impact of culture on teaching adults and to learn the value of cultural capital,” (p. 67) creating instruction around experiences students bring to their learning.

Persistence in Higher Education for Latinos in General

While there is limited literature on Latinos in adult education, there is quite a large body of literature on Latinos in higher education and a large body of literature on student retention in higher education. To have an understanding of persistence issues, however, it is helpful to have a grounding of what is known about those entering higher education as first year students.

According to Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, and Cabrera (2008), the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) has been conducting a survey of first year college students every year since 1966 and collecting data pertaining to various aspects of their lives such as gender differences, parental education, citizenship status, native language, and family income. On a more personal level of inquiry, the annual survey also touches on student study habits, high school grade point, self-perceptions of academic competence, preparations by high school subject area, and aspirations at college entry. Over the past more than 40 years since the annual survey has been administered, over 13 million first-time entering college freshmen—of all nationalities and ethnicities—have participated in the survey. Over 1,900 colleges are represented in this initiative.

From the CIRP Freshmen Survey, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, and Cabrera (2008) created a trend report from the years 1975-2006 marking distinctive characteristics of Latina/o student population. Their two primary comparison groups were entering Latina/o college students at four-year institutions and non-Hispanic White students. The 2008 trends report tracked trends pertaining to Latino males and females regarding gender differences and parent education. In addition to these comparisons, Hurtado et al. (2008) also reported data regarding citizenship and native English speakers across ethnicities, namely Mexican/American or Chicano, Puerto Rican and other Latin American students.

One of the more significant findings regarding persistence and Latina/o student trends in higher education is 8.2 percent of first-time, full time students at four-year institutions are Latina/os. Approximately 60% of those students are females. The CIRP Freshmen Survey indicates that the Latina female student population has risen significantly since 1975. The survey also indicates that during high school Latina females reported studying/doing homework six or more hours per week as compared to male students who invested less time.

The Latino male student population has dropped from 57.4% in 1975 to 39.2 % in 2006. Hurtado et al. (2008) found that almost half of the 3.4 million Latino males between ages 16 and 24 enter the workforce and 269,000—between the ages of 18 and 34—are in local, state or federal prison. Approximately 12,000 (ages 18-24) enlisted in the Armed Forces. As the Latina/o trend report does not include community colleges, Hurtado, et al. (2008) are quick to point out that a large portion of Latino males could be registered in two year programs which leaves persistence and higher education wide open for further research as to why Latino males are not persisting in higher education. While Hurtado et al (2008) do not discuss issues related to adult students per se, their analysis offers some useful information about trends that also relate to persistence of Latinos.

Vincent Tinto (1993) has done numerous studies of retention issues in higher education and attrition in higher education in general. Numerous authors refer to his theory. In trying to take into account cultural issues, Guiffrida (2006) makes an attempt to enhance Tinto's (1993) work by examining empirical studies that do not fully support Tinto's theory of academic success in higher education. Tinto's theory proposes that "students need to 'break away' from past associations and traditions in order to become integrated into the college's social and academic environment (Guiffrida, 2006). Guiffrida (2006) found more often than not that minority students did not need to break away from past associations, but rather pull closer in order to academically persist and succeed. Guiffrida's (2006) argument is that Tinto's theory is grounded within a Western assimilative paradigm that does not recognize cultural variables. Therefore, the theory becomes problematic when applied to minority students. Tinto's (1993) indicates that the more a student is academically and socially engaged in campus life, the greater the commitment is to graduate. Guiffrida (2006), however, again argues that White "commitment" is grounded in different motivational orientations than minority student motivational orientations. Guiffrida (2006) also contends that Tinto's theory does not account for bicultural integration and the ability

of minority students to succeed academically while being a part of both majority and minority communities.

Despite the arguments that Guiffrida (2006) and others have raised, Tinto's work regarding persistence has had an extensive appeal in higher education. Persistence is crucial in the big picture of Latino college success. Despite the 85% enrollment increase between the years of 1988 and 1998, the reality is that Latino college students continue to lag behind all other groups in degree attainment (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). The issue of undocumented students in higher education affects persistence as well as access to higher education in general.

Undocumented Mexican American students often come to the United States as young children. Contreras (2009) found that her participants—all undocumented students in higher education—were appreciative of their parents' efforts to bring them to the U.S. for a better life, namely one that offered economic and educational opportunities. Yet, her participants also described their underlying fears of deportation. Knowing that deportation is only a breath away and not knowing whether they will be employed after they have attained a degree fuels non-persistence in academia. Even with the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) before Congress, strong anti-immigrant sentiment threatens deportation and can discourage even the most promising of students.

As the DREAM Act is federal, no state has adopted this action yet. The DREAM Act will allow undocumented high school graduates to pay in-state tuition afforded to documented in-state students so long as they meet the criteria established in bill. For example, one of the criteria may be the person must be of good moral character and have lived in the US at least five years. As of November, 2012, 11 states have done things like the DREAM Act, namely California, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin, but no state has and cannot adopt the DREAM ACT before it is passed first by Congress.

Rincon (2009) argues that all states should offer in-state tuition rates to undocumented youth. Contending undocumented high school graduates, assimilated into American culture, are entitled to in-state public college tuition rates, Rincon (2009) makes this argument based on the student's value as a human being. States opposed to offering in-state college tuition rates to undocumented students consider this bill promoting illegal behavior and endorsing illegal immigration. Yet, Rincon (2009) disagrees stating discriminatory opposition devalues human dignity and is similar to Jim Crow techniques of civil rights movement. Denying in-state tuition rates is denying equal opportunity similar to the inequalities of 1960's and 1970's. Thus, Rincon (2009) believes no human being is illegal. Advocating undocumented youth who have completed grade school and have attained a high school diploma in public education are as much American as any documented youth, Rincon (2009) promotes equality and human dignity as her argument's basis.

Literature regarding Latino student persistence in higher education points to specific factors influencing persistence and degree attainment, namely personal, environmental, involvement, and socio-cultural. A review of these specific factors is important in order to understand why Latino university students lag behind other groups in degree attainment (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004).

This section is comprised of two discussions. The first pertains to persistence and Latinos in general in higher education and is largely based on Hernandez and Lopez (2004). They drew research from personal experiences with Latino students in higher education. Then, a second discussion follows regarding research exploring multiple Latino populations such as Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Cubans, Central Americans, etc. A discussion based only on Mexican American participants is considered later.

Personal Factors Influencing Persistence

To illustrate how personal factors affect college student persistence, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) reviewed grade point average (GPA), test scores, academic self-confidence, support of family, and finances. Their report showed little influence regarding grade point average and the affects it has on student persistence. Their review of several studies also showed insignificant connections between test scores and student persistence. However, in a large study of 890 participants, Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2009) investigated GPA's among three distinct Latino status orientations which he categorized as assimilators, accommodators, and resisters. This 2009 study found that the GPA does influence Latino student academic and social adjustment in higher education. Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2009) noted that GPA scores varied among the three orientations. For example, students who saw themselves as assimilators (they did not think minorities faced a lot of discrimination) had the highest GPA in the freshman, sophomore and junior years. Those who saw themselves as accommodators (strongly endorsing mainstream ideology) and as resisters (skeptical of mainstream ideology) had their highest GPA in their senior year. The reason for the higher GPA for accommodators and resisters in their senior year may be attributed to increasing their time in extracurricular campus activities. Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2009) surmised that students who are more race-conscious do "not disengage from their campus environment but rather seek out opportunities to build supportive social networks" (p. 649). This seeking out of opportunity, in turn, influenced not only GPAs, but student persistence and degree attainment.

In an earlier study that explored personal factors influencing persistence, Hernandez (2002) noted that academic self-confidence is closely related to achieving high grades. He reports that academic self-confidence is equivalent to mental outlook. Claiming that the single most important factor influencing college retention is a positive mental outlook, Hernandez (2002)

found that Latino students who were confident in their academic abilities were more likely to succeed in higher education. Furthermore, students who demonstrated a positive mental outlook were able to see within themselves the potential to persevere and to attain a college. Gloria, Castellanos, and Rosales (2005) support Hernandez's premise agreeing that "beliefs about oneself are consistently indicated as a reason for the low enrollment and graduation rates of Latina/os from higher education" (p.205). Their study, of 99 Latinos, indicated that a student's sense of self is enhanced as the student engages in peer-mentoring and educational support programs. In particular, "the increased perception of social support from friends was also related to an increased sense of self-efficacy" (p.216).

Thereby, Hernandez & Lopez (2004) recommend that university faculty and staff do what they can to encourage the development of an optimistic, positive mental outlook among Latino college students. Affirmation is, therefore, critical for the academically under prepared student and for first generation Latino students who lack self-confidence. In addition, assessing levels of self-confidence of incoming freshmen students may enable universities to facilitate the development of self-confidence for those students who lack in this area.

The support received from family is also a personal factor affecting college student persistence. Familism, the "behavioral manifestations of Latinos that reflect a strong emotional and value commitment to family life" (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004, p. 40), often reflects the importance of family as a source of emotional support. Across generations, the meaning of family remains significant. Whether the college student is first generation or third generation, family is an important resource for encouragement especially in issues of persistence and college degree attainment (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2009; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004).

Following further, family is a powerful source of influence in Latino culture. Sometimes Latino college students have responsibility placed on them by immediate and extended family. The family may look to the student to make contributions to household financial expenses as well

as expecting them to engage in community service endeavors (Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Gloria et al. (2009) in their study of 99 Latina/o undergraduates, who did not persist, found that family was one of three constructs significantly interrelated and predictive of academic non-persistence decisions. The study indicates that familial relationships, encouragement and support were among the most important aspects of transition facilitating Latina/o student adjustment to academia and ultimately decisions pertaining to persistence.

Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2009) found Latino college student participants, categorized as assimilators, were more likely to have at least one parent who was college-educated. Assimilators, believing minorities face little discrimination, endorsed “the American logic of opportunity” (p. 649). Coming from families with higher socioeconomic status, these students had an easier time transitioning into mainstream educational life than students categorized as resisters and accommodators. Thus, these findings indicate that family educational background does play a role in student persistence and achievement.

In the discussions of Latino students and family support, much of the literature suggests that universities should do all they can to communicate with the student families through bilingual and culturally sensitive recruitment materials, as well as parent orientation programs (Mina, Cabrales, Juarez, Rodriguez -Vasquez, 2004). Developing trust and rapport with faculty assists the parents, as well as other family members, to better understand the academic stress and rigor placed on the college student stemming from course work and faculty expectations. Thus, family support can serve as a valuable asset in fostering student perseverance and persistence in academia.

Financial need is a third personal factor that can play an integral role in college student persistence. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) report that often Latino students are economically disadvantaged and are from less affluent families. Therefore, financial aid often plays a significant role in student degree attainment. Hernandez (2000) found that Latino students in

particular are experiencing high levels of stress due to lack of finances. This lack, in turn, affects mental outlook and negatively impacts persistence. Moreover, Latino students are more likely to work longer hours than non-Latino students and are also more likely to drop out of college because of financial burdens.

In short, personal factors influencing Latino persistence in higher education are significant because they inform the student's academic ability to succeed. Although grade point average and test scores seemed to have shown little influence on student persistence, they are still personal factors of student achievement that should be treated as such. Accordingly, other personal factors reviewed—academic self-confidence, support of family, and finances—are strong indicators of student persistence and should also be considered as influential, not only regarding academic persistence only, but retention and degree attainment as well.

Environmental Factors Influencing Persistence

The second set of factors, according to Hernandez and Lopez (2004) influencing Latino student persistence are environmental in nature. Racial climate, the presence of ethnic community and whether or not the student lives and works off campus are environmental factors influencing student persistence and retention. Facets of racial climate may hinge on the type of institution the student chooses to attend, namely Hispanic serving, historically Black or traditional White, etc. The type of institution regulates campus climate. Subsequently, the racial climate influences the student's sense of belonging, marginality, isolation, discrimination and their overall intent to persist (Gloria, et al., 2005). In a study of 8 Latino students at the University of Alaska, Reyes (2004) found that participants were surprised, as well as angry, when confronted by prejudice and inequity on the university campus. These participants chose not to respond directly, but rather to work harder academically. They understood what Reyes (2004) calls institutional racism.

The presence of ethnic community is also considered an environmental factor influencing student persistence in higher education. Ethnic community is an interaction between students of like-culture (similar backgrounds). When Latino students interact with other Latino students, particularly with those who are doing academically well, persistence is often generated (Mina, et al., 2004). The larger the ethnic community the more persistence is generated (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). The presence of ethnic community on the college campus sometimes compensates for Latinos historical feelings of discrimination and injustice. As Latinos are particularly susceptible to matters of marginality, appreciation and acceptance emerging from the presence of an ethnic community significantly affects student persistence and academic retention.

A third type of factor that is environmental in nature is the Latino student residency and place of employment. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) found that living and working off-campus could be a hindrance to strong academic persistence. When considerable time is spent at work or at home persistence in academics is affected. The number of hours a student is working also comes into play pertaining to persistence. Living and working on-campus can have a positive effect on persistence as long as the hours of employment are minimal. However, with the need of finances for college expenses, minimal hours are not always feasible (Lopez, 1995). Thus, increasing funding opportunities to underrepresented groups would allow Latino students to work fewer hours and invest more time in academics.

Involvement Factors Influencing Persistence

As personal and environmental factors influence Latino college persistence, involvement factors also affect persistence, namely faculty-student interaction, mentorship and participation in student organizations. Based on their review of the literature and studies, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) found Latino students more likely to persist if they had contact with faculty outside the

classroom. Also, interaction with minority faculty proved to be the most significant facet of campus interaction that actually affected grade point averages. Hernandez (2002) points out that as faculty serve as role models—minority faculty or non-minority faculty—student academic persistence is strengthened because the student's need for personal contact is gratified.

Mentorship is also another significant involvement factor often provided by a student's friends, family or university staff (Mina, et al., 2004). Under the construct of social support, friends and mentors influence persistence for Latino college students (Gloria et al., 2005; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Lopez, 1995). The extraordinary worth in mentorship is the transfer of scholastic skills, educational ideas and instructive encouragement. Often Latino college students are unprepared for the rigor of college expectations and lack access to particular resources that would benefit their academic endeavors. Mentors often bring those resources to the forefront and share information helping the student succeed academically.

Another involvement factor is participation in student organizations. Persistence is strongest among students involved in leadership positions in campus organizations (Hernandez, 2002, Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Students involved with campus organizations demonstrate an overall satisfaction with the college experience. They often make friends who are from similar socio-cultural backgrounds. Involvement in non-ethnic organizations also proves to influence persistence and retention because such organizations often promote leadership development, community, student government, athletics, the arts and academics.

Socio-cultural Factors Influencing Persistence

Socio-cultural factors include immigration status, ethnic identity development, gender orientation, community focus and religion. Each of these factors can either positively or negatively influence persistence in Latino academia. The socio-cultural factors influence how

Latino college students navigate and negotiate the university experience inside and outside of the college classroom.

Regarding immigrant status, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) found that adaptive strategies for schooling were somewhat different for students who are immigrants. These students often have had a long history of discrimination and have therefore developed a dual frame of reference regarding schooling in higher education. Immigrated students tend to simultaneously evaluate their current situation as well as their anticipated future. Opportunity in the host country, be it the U.S. for the Latino immigrant, is incentive to persevere and persist through challenging and rigorous academic expectations.

Ethnic identity development, also a socio-cultural factor bearing influence on Latino college persistence, refers to a sense of membership in an ethnic group. That sense of membership—especially for the Latino college student enrolled in a degree program in the US—requires the student to establish their personal identity within the framework of both their ethnic heritage and dominant American culture (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). This is no easy task for even the most acculturated of students. Establishing an ethnic identity often means acquiring the skills to live in both worlds, namely the Hispanic world and American culture.

Continuing with the factors that influence student persistence, a third factor is socio-cultural in nature. Latinos demonstrate pride in their ethnic heritage and often see themselves as community representatives in a socio-cultural sense of the word. Every Latino community, whether its origin is Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Cuban, etc., is culturally unique (Hernandez, 2002). The life of the community stems from its ethnic history. Latino college students revel in that uniqueness and need to be connected with that uniqueness on and off the college campus (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). The literature pertaining to community and Latino college student persistence touches on many facets of community student participation. For instance, students may be involved in coaching after-school sports, tutoring, local church

ministry, community center events, and local business activities. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) point out that community can reinforce student persistence when the external community is supportive to the goals of higher education. Likewise, participation in an external community can hinder student persistence when the external community does not support the goals of a college education.

Lastly, religion is a socio-cultural factor that may impact Latino college student persistence. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) found that religion is as important to Latino ethnic identity as ethnicity. Regardless of whether a Latino college student is Catholic, Protestant or members of some other religious sect, often Latinos, in general, embrace issues of spirituality in their daily lives. Spiritual matters are woven into the very decisions they make as college students. Sometimes religion influences the way learners respond to education in White dominant university environments because education and religion are both cross-cultural terrains where life's decisions are negotiated. For example, the symbolism of La Virgen de Guadalupe is a compelling image in the context of Latino religious life, both past and present. The Virgin serves today as a model of aptness and faultlessness. For some Latinos, this symbol is a seal of faith in the interplay between family, church, community and the institution (Rodriguez, 2005).

Empirical Literature on Mexican Americans in Higher Education

Little research has been done pertaining to Latinos in general in Adult Education or Mexican Americans more specifically relating to higher education. However, there is empirical work related specifically to the Latino group of Mexican Americans and persistence in higher education. Nineteen studies were found and are reviewed here that are specifically about Mexican Americans in higher education.

Of the nineteen studies reviewed, none were mixed methods research. Seven were qualitative studies, where one of the seven (Reyes, 2006) was a case study; the other twelve were quantitative research studies. All of the studies' populations were Mexican American university undergraduate or graduate students. Aside from the one case study (Reyes, 2006), the sample sizes in the remaining qualitative studies ranged from small qualitative studies of 10 participants (Hernandez, 2002; Huber, 2009; Sanchez, Reyes & Singh, 2005) participants to midsized qualitative studies such as Benmayor's (2002) study of 41 participants. The sample sizes of the 12 quantitative studies ranged from 50 participants (Gandara, 1995) to the largest quantitative study of 546 (Niemann, Romero & Arbona, 2000) participants. In addition, as discussed above, Hurtado, et al., (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshmen Survey that has been conducted every year since 1966. The meta-analysis survey dealt with issues and trends of Latino students from the years 1975-2006. These findings were discussed in Chapter One.

Of these studies reviewed, adult learners (age 23 years old and older) were identified as participants in only four of the studies (Gandara, 1993; Lango, 1995; Lopez, 1995; Niemann et al., 2000) clearly indicating the need for research in this field. Two studies gave no indication of the age of the participants (Benmayor, 2002; Huber, 2009). The remaining 13 studies indicated that the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old. The majority of the quantitative studies explored how Mexican American students negotiated the university experience regarding internal cultural factors such as ethnic loyalty, ethnic social orientations, cultural awareness and family support. However, Lopez (1995) looked exclusively at academic support in relationship to negotiating the college experience while Lango (1995) looked specifically at high school preparedness regarding the college experience. These studies were two of several that explored the role of gender in the university student experience (Lango, 1995; Lopez, 1995).

In reviewing the literature, emerging topics were often socio-cultural in nature. Primarily, these studies explored how socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity and community impact higher education. A disclosure of each of these areas brings to the forefront of scholarly research how socio-cultural factors significantly bear influence on Mexican American student persistence, retention and degree attainment.

Socioeconomic Status

Both Negy and Woods (1992) and Lango (1995) found evidence that socioeconomic status and acculturation bear influence on Mexican American student achievement in higher education. Their studies determined that parents with higher levels of education—as well as higher levels of socioeconomic status—had adult children who were more acculturated into mainstream society. Moreover socioeconomic status played a major role in the participants' levels of acculturation and that the level of the parents' education also bore significance on the participants' levels of acculturation.

Furthermore, in regards to socioeconomic status and student success, Lango (1995) found that second generation Mexican American students from middle-income families integrated easier into mainstream academics than first generation students. Her study also found that second generation subjects often had attended a high school represented mainly by Caucasians and were enrolled in college prep courses in high school. “Having already competed with Caucasians in high school gave the Mexican American woman the sense that she was not academically inferior to Caucasians and could equally compete” (p. 46). Thus, exposed to collegiate degree programs, Lango's participants strove to acquire a degree in higher education. They, then, gained upward mobility and those things which were once unobtainable (Lango, 1995).

Lopez (1995) found student perceptions of their socioeconomic status played a vital role in the way Mexican American college students perceive financial challenges. Such perceptions become the pivotal point at which a student determines whether or not to continue their education. If challenges are interpreted as barriers, the student withdraws from school. If the challenges serve as fuel the student perseveres. This theory hinges on the informant's past history as to whether or not he or she experienced similar challenges in high school and learned at that point how to cope with those types of experiences (Lopez, 1995).

The socioeconomic challenges in high school may not be as difficult as those faced in college, especially for the undocumented, illegal U.S. resident. While in high school, as well as in elementary school, student rights to public education are protected under the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe*. However, most often, when undocumented high school students graduate they are ineligible for public college in-state tuition rates because they lack U.S. citizenship. For example, Contreras (2009) found that all 20 of her participants were concerned with finances. More than half worked at least twenty hours a week in jobs such as cleaning offices, child care, construction, and serving in restaurants. One particular student worked at least forty hours a week. Long hours made it difficult for participants to connect with peers, professors and family. One of Contreras' participants expressed that she believed financial aid is a legitimizing political act and as an investment it would have sizable returns in Latina/o business and in leadership (Contreras, 2009).

Adding to the argument concerning undocumented youth entitlements, Huber (2009) argues that undocumented students should not only receive public tuition rates, but also financial aid. Her research, involving 10 Latina, undocumented female college students, points to the cultural wealth that undocumented college students bring to the university classroom. For example, aspirational and familial capitals are descriptors of the Latina ability to be resilient, maintaining hopes and dreams, in the midst of racist oppression. Secondly, Huber (2009)

contends that undocumented Latina students have a unique ability of bringing linguistic capital to the cultural forefront of higher education. Many of these students are not bilingual, but trilingual speaking English, Spanish and a native language learned in the barrio where they were raised. Thirdly, a sense of social capital is often present in the character of undocumented Latina students. They have succeeded in navigating around the barriers in undocumented terrain. Such students know how to embrace social networks which can create opportunities to social resources and financial assistance. Lastly, Huber (2009) discloses the multiple forms of spiritual capital that such students bring to the table. “Spiritual capital can be understood as a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself” (p. 721). Huber (2009) concludes that spiritual capital provides a sense of hope, faith and determination to persist with their academic dreams. Such a sense of hope, as Huber (2009) describes, can often enable the Mexican American student, regardless of immigration status, to pursue degree attainment despite the financial barriers.

Coinciding with those findings, a study done by Lango found that a low socioeconomic status does not negatively impinge on a Mexican American woman’s capability to enter graduate programs. In fact, Lango (1995) indicates that often Latino female students who perceived their education as a way to advance socioeconomic status were motivated to pursue degrees of higher education. Her quantitative study of 391 Mexican American females—240 women who were undergraduate seniors and 151 women who were in graduate programs—showed that female Mexican American academic success did not hinge on socioeconomic status. These women perceived an education as a way to advance their socioeconomic status. Thus, even though Lango’s (1995) study was not specifically about student persistence, the study does indicate that Mexican American female persistence in education is not always influenced by a low socioeconomic status and that these women most likely persisted because they saw a better tomorrow for themselves and their families through degree attainment.

Often among low-income Mexican American students are parents who model a hard work ethic. Gandara (1993) did a qualitative study with 50 Mexican Americans—30 men and 20 women—who had met the most stringent criterion for academic success. They either had acquired MDs, PhDs or JDs from highly regarded American universities. This study indicated that despite “serious economic disadvantage, most of these subjects’ parents were doing the kinds of things reported to be important for instilling in children the motivation to achieve” (p. 54). Thus, the socioeconomic need creates the will to persist. Gandara concluded her study indicating that more than two-thirds of her participants felt that persistence was most important, not innate ability, regarding personal characteristics enabling the student to succeed.

Gender

Five of the empirical studies compare and contrast gender issues pertaining Mexican American college students regarding degree attainment (Aguilar, 1996; Gandara, 1993; Lango, 1995; Lopez, 1995; Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000). Each study, however, examines different and unique facets of gender as a thematic topic in the literature. Thus, each study lends a rich, informative piece to the research landscape. For example, two studies, Gandara (1993) and Lango (1995) investigate influence of parent education. Niemann, Romero, Arbona’s (2000) study critiques gender and feelings of alienation. However, considering variables researchers have selected to view, family influence, as a sub-topic, is a recurring theme regarding gender and higher educational experiences.

For example, Niemann, Romero and Arbona (2000) found that gender roles are connected with prioritizing marriage and family life. They found that the Latina women in their study see marriage expectations as unfair and unalterable. Thus, Latinas may internalize feelings

and refrain from reaching toward their educational dreams. Those who do endeavor to attain an education carry a strong sense of belonging with home and family. Lopez (1995) also found that feelings of domestic responsibility influence college students, males and females, whose culture emphasizes the importance of holding true to traditional gender values. Thus, attending college in pursuit of a degree may increase a sense of alienation from family across genders.

Niemann, Romero, Arbona (2000) also combine gender and a concept referred to as cultural awareness in evaluating family influence. "Cultural awareness reflects the individual's cultural knowledge, such as language, history, traditions, and cultural heroes, and is considered the more general component of cultural change"(p. 48). Their study indicates that Mexican Americans are overtly aware of gender roles, namely women are home-oriented and men assist in the financial support of the family. As a result, cultural awareness sometimes serves as a barrier to college degree attainment. When deeply rooted traditional values are internalized, the Mexican American student experiences discouragement and may decide to drop out of college. Aguilar (1996) also addresses these issues finding that often the college experience is inconsistent with Mexican American family expectations, responsibilities, and traditional values. Aguilar (1996) refers to these gender-oriented conflicts as intra-cultural barriers. The internalized conflict cannot always be easily ignored or brushed aside despite academic aspirations. Thus, for both males and females conflict between education and the parameters created by cultural awareness can influence degree completion.

Another example of how the studies capture the essence of family influence regarding gender and degree attainment is with respect to parental expectations. Gandara (1993) and Aguilar (1996) explore parent education and the impact parent aspirations have on student academic achievement. Lopez (1995) examines the impact of family influence as well as other significant relationships such as with peers and university faculty. Lastly, Lango (1995) observes

how older students, females between the ages of twenty and thirty, navigate the university experience lending an adult education perspective to the topic.

Another facet of the literature, pertaining to gender, is the uniquely diversified participant samples. Participant criteria stipulations were designed by each researcher and no two samples are alike among these five studies represented here. For example, Lopez (1996) required participants to be Mexican American. Yet, Aguilar (1996) stipulated that participants be Mexican American and first in their family to attend college. In Lango's (1995) study, stipulations were not mentioned, but the participants are females from middle-income families who, for the most part, had mothers who had earned a high school diploma. One third of their fathers also had high school diplomas. Gandara (1993), on the other hand, had the strictest of all stipulations requiring that participants had achieved a doctoral level degree and were from low-income families whereby "neither parent had completed a high school education or held a job higher in status than skilled laborer" (p. ix).

Notably, the criteria for the participant samples in Gandara's (1993) study and Lango's (1995) study differ, but the findings do not significantly differ. For example, Lango's (1995) research findings indicate that more than 70% of the females reported that education was important to the family. Those findings are understandable because most of Lango's (1995) participants had parents with some level of high school education. However, surprisingly enough, Gandara's (1993) findings are similar to that of Lango's (1995) despite the fact that Gandara's participants' parents did not have high school diplomas and some had never finished grade school. Interestingly, 94% of Gandara's (1993) male participants reported that mothers' perceived education as important and 75% of the females described their mothers as perceiving education as important. In addition, both Lango's (1995) and Gandara's (1993) studies overlap in findings pertaining to the perceptions of the participants' fathers. Both studies reveal that the fathers of

males and females took a backseat in perceiving the importance of education in comparison to the mother's perceptions of education.

On a contrasting note, Aguilar (1996) found that the female participants felt that both mother and father perceived education as important, but, in general, mothers did show more of an interest in student achievement than the fathers. Again, in contrast to information in Aguilar (1996), Gandara (1993), and Lango, (1995), Lopez (1995) indicates that the older male participants (between the ages of 20 and 30) reported negative challenges from their mothers regarding domestic responsibilities. The older participants found more challenges with their mothers than the younger male participants (between the ages of 18 and 21). Thus, in determining the role gender plays in regard to family influence, research has a plethora of outcomes that make it actually difficult to understand clearly the function gender plays in degree attainment in higher education.

Before closing this section pertaining to gender, one additional finding is worthy of mention. Gandara (1993) touches on the differences in how well males and females do academically prior to college. Due to the significant differences between males and females in her study, these findings are pertinent to the sub-topic of gender. Keeping in mind that all of Gandara's (1993) participants had earned doctoral level degrees, 67% of the male participants reported doing poorly in school, at some point, prior to college. Doing poorly is described as having a C or less. In contrast, only 20% of the female participants ever received a C or less. From these findings, one could presume that possibly a female doing poorly in grade school or high school may be predictive of her future academic success. However, a male doing poorly may not be predictive of his future educational achievements. To make such assumptions, more research would be necessary to support this supposition. However, Gandara's statistics are an alert to practitioners on all academic levels cautioning them not to be too quick to judge a person's future by their present academic performance, especially if they are of minority status.

Considering the above studies in regard to gender, just as was the case in consideration of socioeconomic status issues, the ages of the participants are predominantly between 18 and 24 years old. While a few of the studies specifically refer to adult learners, the majority of the studies are about gender issues affecting traditional age students. There could be cohort or age factors as they intersect with gender that the research does not deal with in this case. Overall, given the little research reporting how gender issues impact Latino adult learners, it is clear that more research is needed on the ways adult learners negotiate academia, equity, family responsibilities and undocumented student issues in higher education as it relates to gender.

Ethnicity

Significant components of ethnic orientation that affect educational success in higher education are cultural awareness, ethnic loyalty, and the degree of biculturalism. These components can determine various connections between educational goals and national origin. Niemann, Romero, and Arbona (2000) indicate that cultural values and traditions of an ethnic group may create external and economic barriers in the pursuit of higher education. Therefore, ethnic orientation can hold potential risk factors in the Mexican American's attempt to pursue an education because education is viewed as a practice inconsistent with traditional cultural gender values.

Cultural awareness, as a component of ethnic orientation, can lead to conflict between education and relationship goals. As mentioned previously, Niemann, Romero, Arbona (2000) found that Mexican Americans are overtly aware of traditional gender role values, namely women are home-oriented and men assist in the financial support of the family. Moreover, cultural awareness initiates conflict because deeply rooted traditional values are internalized. Such values are not easily ignored or brushed aside. Even in light of very sincere aspirations to enroll in a

higher education program, be it male or female, some conflict between education and relationship goals occurs in light of the parameters created by cultural awareness.

According to Niemann, Romero, and Arbona (2000), and as noted earlier traditional gender roles are connected with prioritizing marriage and family life. Often Latina women see these roles as unfair and unalterable. Latinas often internalize these feelings and refrain from reaching toward their educational dreams. Those Latinos who do endeavor to attain an education carry a strong sense of belonging with home and family. These feelings are especially critical to college students whose culture emphasizes traditional gender role values. Consequently, attending college may increase a woman's sense of alienation from family (Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000).

Ethnic loyalty is also a component of the Latino college student's sense of orientation. Distinct from cultural awareness, ethnic loyalty is informed by ethnic pride and is intensified by perceptions of discrimination against Mexican Americans. It is considered the psychological component of ethnic orientation. Those who scored high in ethnic loyalty on the Keefe and Padilla (1987) cultural orientation scale were afraid of being perceived as elitists in their pursuits to receive a degree in higher education. They felt if they would spend a significant amount of time in a predominantly White populated university they would be perceived by their own community as having "joined" those who are racists. Moreover, they would be view as "disloyal" to their ethnicity.

Ethnic loyalty also encompasses issues of marriage. Mexican Americans feel strongly about the need to marry within their own ethnicity meaning they often prefer endogamous marriages (Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000). Education is perceived as a barrier to endogamy. Therefore, is perceived that ethnic loyalty leads to conflict between education and relationship goals. However, there is a flip side to this coin, namely that the study showed that in some situations a male attending an institution of higher education would be perceived as consistent

with traditional values. For example, going to college is a form of fighting discrimination because the earned degree would advance his ethnic group. Clearly then, earning a college degree would prove to be consistent with traditional values of male leadership and authority (Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000).

Another component that is related to ethnic orientation is that of biculturalism. Biculturalism often refers to “the synthesis of cultural norms from two groups into one behavioral repertoire or to the process of switching between behaviors across situations” (Chavez, 2007, p.20). Chavez (2007) also found that there is an increase in the number of people who define themselves as bicultural and bilingual. She emphasizes that it is the changing demographics of the United States that create this occurrence. Chavez also contends that by the year 2050, the Hispanic population will be the largest and fastest growing U.S. minority and comprise 25% of the U.S. population.

Another area related to ethnic orientation that is reviewed, but not significantly, in the literature is the intersection of religion and culture. This junction is not the fulcrum of empirical thematic topics like that of biculturalism or ethnic loyalty regarding ethnic orientation. But it is significant in the Mexican American college experience for some participants in these studies. For example, Lango (1995) detected junctions where religion and culture intersect among adult learners. She compared female college seniors to female graduate students, Lango (1995) found that older students—ranging from 30 to 44 years of age—not only acclaimed to be either Catholic or Christian—but said they maintained religious affiliation with a traditional Mexican faith. These same students said they were very comfortable being in a group with Caucasians. Aguilar (1996) also found similar junctions where culture and religion overlap. A little more than 15% of her participants—13 of 84—attested that their religious values were influential cultural factors that helped them reach their professional goals. Her participants defined religious values as faith, prayer, respect, and the presence of God in their lives. As noted above, Huber (2009) also

discussed the importance of spiritual capital in the lives of her participants. Also, one of Gandara's (1993) participants, a linguistics professor, discussed her early education at home. She explained that her father was a lay preacher and a Sunday school teacher. He spent much time educating this participant with problem statements that encouraged problem solving. The participant attended a Spanish-speaking church whereby she learned to write reports on required reading. She believes these intersections of religion and literature paved the way for her future as a linguistics professor.

Considering the above studies which examined ethnic loyalty, biculturalism, community and the intersection of religion and culture, it is important to recognize that the ages of participants in these studies are also primarily between 18 and 24 years old. While some of the studies include adult learners, these studies are predominantly about ethnic orientation as it impacts traditional age students. Clearly more research is needed that contributes to the diminutive findings on Mexican American adult learners in higher education as it relates to ethnic orientation and degree completion.

Community

In the studies reviewed, community was understood as "the ways people organize their values, their beliefs about their rights, and their practices based on their sense of cultural belonging rather than on their formal status as citizens of a nation" (Fluentes, 1992 p. 4). In light of academia, Mexican Americans measure the value of education, not by individual class mobility or increased economic power, but by the "collective" advancement and well-being of the community at large (Benmayor, 2002). The term "collective" is indicative of specific cultural logics and practices with cooperative claims for fairness and a sense of belonging. Through a lens of cooperation, Mexican Americans often create a realm of cultural belonging transcending legal citizenship. The term transcending in this context means to function as a community with a renewed sense of distinctiveness while carrying the responsibility of advancement for the

community at large. Rising above the injustices and prejudices experienced as people of color, Mexican Americans are seeing themselves as a community “with agency—with goals, perceptions, and purposes of their own” (p. 4).

Pertaining to higher education in this new millennium, the marginalized are drawing collectively upon their bicultural experiences and responsibilities to creatively affirm equal inclusion (Benmayor, 2002). Even though education is often viewed as a form of hegemonic reproduction—where subordinated are excluded—the collective community has begun to frame marginality as a site, no longer of resistance, but of opportunity.

Critiquing the Research

Absent from 17 of the empirical research studies is the exploration that religion has on Mexican American student persistence. In the two studies that do reference religion (Hernandez and Lopez, 2004, Lango, 1993) little attention pertains to student persistence. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) offer a brief synopsis pertaining to spirituality and Lango (1993) merely describes a percentage of the participants as Catholic. Clearly, it was not the purpose of these studies to explore religion as a factor, and whether or not students were asked about this is unclear.

However, because of the nature of religion, this topic could possibly impact the social and cultural orientation of Mexican American student persistence. Mexican American writers, Anzaldua (1987), Martinez (2001) and Rodriguez, (2005), allude to the role religion and spirituality played in either their lives personally or in the lives of other Mexican Americans. For instance, Anzaldua (1987) notes Virgin Mary as the model for the Mexican female. The Virgin is one who is self-sacrificing, frail and sacred in her role as wife and mother. This socio-cultural component of spirituality is often embraced by people of Mexican-origin. Writings, other than these empirical studies, reference the significant facets pertaining to Mexican American

spirituality—Virgin Mary, la Virgen de Guadalupe, the Catholic church, faith—as integral components of the Mexican life (Tisdell, 2003; Martinez 2001, Rodriguez, 2005). Thus, the absence of dialogue pertaining to religion in relationship to persistence would perhaps be the topic of a worthwhile study. The empirical studies selected in this study ignore issues of religion which are often times intrinsically motivating for the Mexican American university student (Anzaldua, 2002).

In conceptual pieces such as Rodriguez (2005) and Anzaldua (1987) religion is clearly noted as instrumental in informing cultural identity. On the other hand, in Benmayor's (2002) empirical study, cultural identity is the focus of the study yet the notion of religion is excluded as a component of Mexican American orientation in higher education. Never acknowledging religion as a possible piece of cultural identity, Benmayor (2002) explores how reclaiming identity impacts Mexican American student's success in completing their undergraduate programs.

For Mexican American students who have grown up in homes where pictures of the Christ hang and crucifixes are displayed, the significance of religious symbolism is often ingrained in the matrix of their lives. If Catholicism is meaningful to the Mexican American student, then, research should consider the possibility of students spiraling back to their deeply pious, spiritual roots as a source of strength and perseverance (Tisdell, 2003). Thus, religion is a subject matter that should not be ignored in the research of Mexican Americans in higher education.

Lastly, a limitation in the empirical studies is the dearth of information regarding the connections—or disconnections—between patriarchy, religion and Mexican American student persistence. The relationships between the three entities would seem pertinent—even worthwhile—exploring considering the patriarchal foundation of the Catholic Church and the interest in spirituality among many Mexican Americans. Rodriguez (2005) professes that he felt

like he had turned his back on patriarchal traditions by becoming a university student and for a time he did turn his back on the Catholic Church. He states, “I knew that I had violated the ideal of the macho by becoming such a dedicated student of language and literature” (Rodriguez, 2005, p. 137). He goes on to explain that a macho man is a patriarch who is steady, constant, and serious. Women are those who voice prayers to God. Rodriguez is quick to correlate the religious with the patriarchal. Thus, future research could investigate and explore the correlations between religion and patriarchy as they impact the Mexican American university experience and the community at large.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed salient socio-cultural issues of Mexican American university students pertaining to patriarchy, religion, socioeconomic status, cultural orientation, and cultural citizenship. The literary pieces focused on Mexican American university students whose cultural logics were counter-hegemonic. Thus, they negotiated belonging and applied cultural assets in their academic settings. Despite social and political struggles in university life, the participants in these research studies articulated a cultural logic where the value of education was not about authenticating power for the sake of power. Rather it was about the empowerment and the betterment of the “collective” community. The Mexican American students in these studies achieved academic degree status for their cooperative development and interests in Mexican American life.

Specific to the Mexican American’s journey to degree completion were issues of machismo, spiritual development, and marriage. These motifs were examined through a theoretical framework whereby a “borderlands” framework was implemented. In light of the strengths in implementing a “borderlands” model, Mexican American student success was

informed by the ability to live in two cultures simultaneously and make meaning of their social interactions with others.

Chapter Three expounds on social interactions and “borderlands” experiences through the voices of Mexican American scholars who negotiate belonging on the college campus. A qualitative methodology—narrative inquiry—is explained in detail. Mexican American graduates share their stories of how they navigated the university experience, negotiated belonging, and applied cultural assets in the university classroom.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this narrative research study is to explore the perceptions, background and experiences of Mexican Americans who completed their bachelor's degree as adult learners at the age of 23 or older. The study focuses in particular on their experiences of learning to be bicultural. As there is a lack of research on Mexican American college degree attainment in the fields of adult education and Latinos in higher education, this research explored the experiences of Mexican Americans who earned college degrees as adult learners. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American college students who attained degrees?
2. What are the participants' perceptions of how their bicultural experiences shaped their achievements in degree attainment?
3. What aspects of college life were most significant concerning persistence in degree attainment for Mexican Americans?

As the study is qualitative in nature, this chapter describes a qualitative approach and substantiates why this paradigm was appropriate for this research. Secondly, the chapter explains a particular type of qualitative research known as a narrative inquiry; so the second section describes narrative approaches to research. The third part of the chapter is a biographical synopsis of my personal background followed by the criteria for participant selection, data collection procedures and analysis methods. The chapter then closes with an examination of verification procedures and strategies.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach, unlike research that is laboratory based in a controlled environment, is sometimes referred to as descriptive inquiry. Seeking to understand the real meaning of relationships and the essence of phenomena as they occur naturally, a researcher is involved in interviews that advance information relevant to the study's purpose. A qualitative approach can involve the analysis and examination of artifacts, cultural texts, historical art and photographs that describe "routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005. p. 1).

Grounded in the assumption that people construct reality based on their lived experiences; this model allowed the researcher to focus on the way people experienced life and conceived themselves capable of creating knowledge. The model also allowed for the exploration of the ways people invested in learning and communicated with others as Patton (2002) describes as characteristic of this type of approach. The motifs, patterns and themes that surfaced from the initial data collection and successive investigations were the outcomes of the model. Data were collected through the method of in-depth interviews revealing the lived experiences of the participants. Informal observations (recollections of the participant's activities, behaviors and actions) and artifacts (art, relics, newspaper articles and photographs) provided rich resources in the qualitative process of inquiry as Denzin and Lincoln (2005), as well as Patton (2002), deem necessary in qualitative research.

Choosing a qualitative approach for this research was appropriate for three reasons. First, it allowed the researcher to focus on the meanings of the lived experiences of the

participants. Secondly, the researcher, though a listener, observer and analyzer, was more importantly a learner. The participants were the voices, the educators. This learner-educator relationship enriched the study enveloping each narration in authenticity. Thirdly, the approach was inductive. No hypothesis was necessary at the onset. The absence of a hypothesis placed the focus on important questions which were addressed in section regarding future research.

In expounding on the first reason for selecting a qualitative approach, the opportunity to make meaning of lived experiences, the data, which was considered soft data, provided rich narratives of people, places and dialogue throughout the study. Merriam (2002) contends that “qualitative researchers are not interested in people’s surface opinions as in survey research, or in cause and effect as in experimental research; rather, they want to know how people do things, and what meaning they give to their lives” (p.19). This “making meaning” factor was significant in clarifying participants’ perspectives about the way they lived their lives. While listening to participants’ lived experiences meaning often materialized as questions were answered from the participant’s frame of reference. Needless to say, the meanings of the participants’ experiences were respected and treated carefully in the process of writing the individual stories.

Though the participants were the primary meaning makers or story tellers, the researcher was also a story teller making meaning of the participants’ experiences. Clandinin (2006) contends that people are storytellers defining the ways they experience the world. This general concept is that education and educational research is the construction and rebuilding of individual and collective stories; students, educators and

researchers are storytellers and actors in their own and other's stories. Thus, this approach made way for the researcher to personally make meaning of the uniqueness of each participant's life.

The second reason a qualitative approach was chosen was that the researcher became the student or, as mentioned above, the learner. Stepping into the participant's world and literally walking with them, listening to their stories and responding to their dialog, allowed the researcher to gain knowledge and learn from participant experiences. As a matter of fact, the less the researcher talked during the interview the richer the data were in the analysis. Contending that a qualitative approach broadcasts voices that are excluded from dominant political structures, Squire (2005) uses examples from qualitative studies that explored working class life, slavery and women's experiences. Thus, qualitative research operates "as bids for representation and power for the disenfranchised" (p. 101). Clandinin (2006) further explains that qualitative research crosses borders and focuses not only on individual levels of human experience, but also on human experience in a social context. Additionally, Clandinin (2006) argues that the inquirer does not bracket themselves out of the inquiry, but rather "co-constructs some of themselves into the inquiry relational process" (p. 47).

Lastly, the qualitative approach was selected because it was an inductive method where unrelated pieces of information were utilized to build theory. An inductive method of research differs from a deductive model because there was no hypothesis at the beginning of the study. The inductive approach did not forecast a hypothesis; rather, important questions emerged as the study unfolded. For example, when a number of participants shared experiences about living in a low-income family setting, then, socio-

cultural themes and patterns emerged giving meaning to the lived experiences. From themes and patterns, theory was born (Merriam, 2002). In a general description of qualitative inquiry, Patton (2002) explains that inductive analysis in qualitative research is an immersion into “details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes and interrelationships” (p. 41).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry describes how a person constructs their story, what social positions are held and what the personal desires of the interviewee were at the time of the research. Using this type of methodology the focus was on recording, transcribing and creating an interpretive text. Chase (2005) contends that the distinctiveness of narrative inquiry is, first, in its organization of events. Consequences of actions and events over time are connected in the inquiry. Secondly, the narrator’s voice tells a story of lived experiences rather than describing or attesting to facts and figures. Thirdly, stories are grounded in a social context where the narrator was situated in some type of commitment with others. Fourthly, a story becomes a joint production of the narrator and the listener (researcher). The significant distinction, however, between the researcher and the narrator is that the researcher eventually transitions from working relationally with the interviewee to compiling texts for a larger audience (Clandinin, 2006). What the researcher of this study found was that the transition was not always easy as there were sincere concerns for the participant feelings and a keen understanding of the audience’s/reader’s expectations. Thus, the transitions were taken seriously so as not to offend the participant while at the same time meet the expectations of those who would be reading the study. Some things the researcher would have liked to have dug deeper getting to the crux of certain situations because

the reader would have been interested in that particular information. However, the researcher had to leave well enough alone because of the participant's reluctance to share any more in depth about the experience. Thus, throughout the interviews, the researcher always had an underlying sense of contest knowing that the transition from relational listener to analytical investigator would be the next step in the research process.

Narrative inquiry was an appropriate choice for this study primarily because the heart of this type of methodology capitalized on the lived experiences of the interviewees. This type of inquiry opens space for the interviewee to be creative, metaphoric and descriptive in talking about their own identity as it relates to culture and the world around them. This was true of the interview experience of Karin Ikas with Gloria Anzaldua. Ikas asked Anzaldua (1999) about an intercultural situation regarding relationships between Chicano culture and Anglo-American influence. As interviewees often do, Anzaldua used a metaphor to describe herself in that particular context (Anzaldua, 1990). She used the example of a banyan tree to relate to her own roots in her Mexican heritage. Anzaldua's personal perspectives were descriptively rich in dialog making the interview rich in data. Thus, in this study, narrative inquiry left room for personal perspectives lending rich data in the final analysis. It spotlighted the skill of "story telling" whereby real-world experiences developed naturally: What narrative inquiry did not do was "specify operational variables, state testable hypotheses, or finalize either instrument or sampling schemes" (Patton, 2002, p.40). Thus, this approach served to qualitatively unfold the mysteries of Mexican American degree attainment from very personal perspectives.

An important task in using narrative inquiry as a methodology was in constructing social critique. In doing such a critique, the researcher embraced a dual awareness of the participant's story as well as society's tendencies regarding dominance, power, and privilege. Accordingly, the researcher examined society through the lens of the

participant and, then examined the participant through the lens of society. As in the case with Mexican American graduates and their aspirations in degree attainment, the researcher explored the narrative content of the Mexican American's story while taking into consideration what power relations in society were "maintained, reproduced, and subverted" (Merriam, 2002, p. 311). This type of social critique was valuable in grasping the big picture culturally and contextually. However, in this process of social critiquing, the researcher was sensitive bringing attention to the affects that history, gender, family and life experiences had on the participant. The dialog unfolded naturally as the participants told their stories sometimes with emotional tones and other times dispassionately.

Lastly, a narrative inquiry illuminated linguistically the language of the participant as it was spoken, namely the spoken text as Merriam (2002) references this facet of narrative inquiry. Taking into account the participant's physical voice regarding pitch, intonation, pronunciation and projection was an asset this model of qualitative study expects of the researcher. These physical facets gave meaning from a linguistic angle providing a window into the participant's experiences as a Mexican American student. This linguistic facet of inquiry was significant in the transcription process because several of the interviews were done through telephone conversations. The participant's voice intonation, pitch and expression were recollected during the transcription and analysis process lending authenticity to the outcome of the study. However, asking the participant to repeat themselves during the interview was common as the researcher had difficulty working through the accents that many of these Spanish speakers used in conversation. Even in the face to face conversations, the researcher often asked the interviewee to

repeat themselves so as to clarify information and thus, in the end, verify exactly what was said.

Background of the Researcher

My decision to conduct research with Mexican American college graduates who identified themselves as adult learners was based on personal interest in Latino bicultural experiences in degree attainment. I positioned myself in the research as a white femal adjunct professor in an institution of higher education. My own lived experiences as an adjunct professor speak to primarily white, Anglo students enrolled in teacher education. While I understand the rigors of higher education, I only understand those rigors as a white female. Therefore, being culturally sensitive to research participants of Mexican descent was particularly important to me. Being careful not to project my own experiences and knowledge onto them, I listened carefully across cultural borders.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) discuss cultural aspects of research stating that “border-crossing may raise some particular problems in fieldwork” (p. 84) as cultural groups do not always share middle-class America’s definition of research, and are sometimes leery of researchers. At times, throughout history, research has not always served the best interests of the cultural groups that were the focus of an analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2003), therefore, encourage research methods in cross-cultural settings to acknowledge indigenous ways of relating and knowing. Therefore, I was personally concerned to acknowledge cultural ways of life for the participants as I listened to their experiences of Mexican Americans in higher education.

Researchers have more specifically discussed how the positionality of the researcher can affect the research process (Benmayor, 2002; Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Lather, 1991; Tisdell, 2002) since there are possibilities of misinterpretation, or assuming that the researcher understands more

of the cultural experience and cultural space of the participant than may be necessarily the case. Delpit (1995) also discusses this in referring to the educational process in general, and explains the idea of cultural spaces in terms of cultural differences stating that these differences are sometimes misunderstood, unappreciated, even ignored and can erode into forms of racism. She, therefore, contends that it is important for people to have a basic understanding of who the people are and how they are connected to and disconnected from one another because in understanding one's place (or positionality) difference can be recognized and appreciated.

Given the possibility for misinterpretation or misrepresentation, it was extremely important for me to do member checks (Merriam, 2002) with each participant. Making sure that narratives were accurately heard and that the main points the participants made in telling their stories were correct. As is discussed later, Squire (2005) highlights the importance of taking a cultural narrative approach while offering strategies for ensuring that the cultural narrative is accurate. I did do member checking as a cultural narrative technique and this is discussed in further detail later on in this chapter.

While I am not Mexican American, I have had experience supervising student teachers in the field of teacher education who are Mexican Americans. They taught me something of their own experiences in dealing with the educational system on a college level. Further, my extensive review of the literature as discussed in Chapter Two, has given me the background knowledge to bring some cultural understanding to the study. Nevertheless, it was important for me to continuously attend to the possibility of misinterpreting information given the fact that I am white and have always lived in mainstream society. This will be discussed further in the verification methods used in the study.

Participant Selection

Selecting a purposeful sample of participants was critical for research purposes, namely for data collection and analysis methods. According to Merriam (2002) and Patton, (2002) a purposeful sample is one where the researcher selects particular subjects to be included in the study because they facilitate the expansion of the study. They are people who are knowledgeable about the research topic. Therefore, participants in this study were selected because they were Mexican American college graduates who were adult learners while they attended a four year university or college. I initially talked to colleagues teaching at various higher education institutions to recruit participants; they sent out an e-mail to graduates who would be likely to fit the criteria, or to list-serves through their universities aimed at Latino students. I also contacted universities that sponsor a C.A.M.P (College Assistance Migrant Program) program for Latino students. There were approximately 60 responses, but not all fit the criteria for the study.

Participant selection was a critical component in the research process because the sample needed to be comprised of men and women of Mexican descent who had attended college while they were 23 years old or older and had attained at least an undergraduate degree. An exception to the criteria was that a participant may have begun their college career immediately following high school as a young adult, but dropped out completing the program. Then, as an adult student they re-enrolled in a college degree program. Also, selected participants were either born in Mexico themselves or were first generation Mexican Americans meaning at least one parent was born in Mexico.

Selecting adult learners was specific to this topic as this dissertation has an adult education focus. Participants, as adult learners, are those who have surpassed the teenage years and are in the adult years of their life. Each of these adult learners had experienced some life changes that served as a catalyst to enroll, or re-enroll, in college (Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

Those life changes and the participant's responses to those changes are significant components of this study.

During the interviews, sensitivity to adult learner developmental stages created a more holistic setting for open dialog. This sensitivity gave way to purposeful conversation which, in turn, led to a rich, descriptive data collection. This notion of sensitivity during the interview process created a positive rapport between researcher and participants as discussed by Patton (2002). He states, "Rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment" (p. 366). Thus, questions in the interview were posed with warmth, kindness and a genuine interest in the lived experiences of the participants as adult learners.

In summarizing the selection criterion, participants had attained a high school diploma either in the United States or in Mexico. They were adult learners (at least twenty-three years old) while attending college. Also, they had to have attained at least a bachelor's degree. Lastly, one parent was born in Mexico making the participants first generation Mexican Americans. There were 10 participants in the study.

Data Collection Procedures and Methods

Research design, the plan chosen to implement a research topic, was comprised of multiple stages of process. Data collection and analysis were two process stages preceding the culminating stage, research findings. The chosen plan for data collection was indispensable to analysis and analysis was essential to the dependability of the findings of the study overall. As noted above, interviews, observations (formal and informal) and the analysis of documents and artifacts were the data in the collection. Given that this was a narrative research study, the primary means of data collection was the narrative interview itself. Documents and artifacts were secondary forms of data. Each of these is discussed below.

The Narrative Interview

The primary means of data collection is the narrative interview, the purpose of which is to implement first person stories to document a person's lived experiences (Clandenin, 2006). While some narrative interviews are unstructured, most follow a type of semi-structured interview format, in that most interviews begin broadly to get the participant to talk more freely. Follow up questions are typically asked in light of how the participant responds. Data received from a "semi-structured" interview is in the form of a story as told by the participant. "The semi-structured interview contains a mix of more or less structured questions" but they are not asked in a particular order, but rather are asked when appropriate to the flow of the conversation (Merriam, 2002, p. 13). However, the interview format of this study had general open-ended questions which allowed the participant to recollect memories that described their experiences (Patton, 2002). Interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes.

The structure of this narrative interview followed a format that was adapted from Johnson-Bailey's study of African American women who returned to higher education as adult learners. I began with an opening statement that went something like this:

I am very interested in the experiences of Mexican American students in higher education. I would like to ask you questions about your bicultural experiences as an adult learner while you were working on your degree. Although I will be asking questions and seeking answers from you, I want you to know you are free to take your time in answering the questions and that you can refuse to answer any question that you wish. My intention is to learn about your story. Although I am not Mexican American, I love to listen to stories that tell about bicultural experiences in education. It is my hope that this will be an enjoy time together.

There were three main questions guided this narrative interview, namely:

- (a) Can you tell me a little bit about how you grew up in relation to being a Mexican American?
- (b) What does it mean to you to be bicultural and how did that develop?
- (c) What were your most significant experiences growing up or as an adult that led you to pursue a bachelor's degree in higher education?

In following a narrative format, follow up questions were asked in light of their responses.

Appendix A provides a more detail outlining the opening statement, the three main questions, and some follow up questions (depending on how participants responded to the three main questions.)

Johnson-Bailey (2001) expounds on the narrative questions in her study of African American women who re-entered college. She stressed the importance of interview questions that are reciprocal in nature. In referring to her study, she contended, "As stories were solicited from the participants, they would often in turn ask the researcher to tell them about her academic experiences" (p. 100). Johnson-Bailey actually fit all the criteria of her study and was a participant in her own study; she was an *African American re-entry female college student* and her experiences overlapped with those of the other participants. While I am not Mexican American, and therefore not an "insider" to this study, I did encourage participants to ask questions pertaining to my interest in the topic because, as Johnson-Bailey (2001) points out, this liberty encourages collaboration rather than simply responses. Further, by giving the participants liberty to ask me questions rapport between us was strengthened.

In qualitative research studies, whether or not the researcher personally knows the participant or not plays an important role in how the interview session is structured. If the researcher and participant are well acquainted the ease of conversation could possibly be less awkward than if the two were meeting for the first time. In the case of this research, I knew only one of the participants personally. Thus, several brief phone calls and a number of emails served to build rapport prior to the interview. Again, as mentioned earlier, rapport was important in

easing the stress that generally correlates with an interview. Graciously, the participants were open and honest with feelings, thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and often divulged sensitive information pertaining to their lived experiences of degree attainment. Early-on contacts, therefore, were very important in setting the stage for the relaxed interviews.

Considering the nature of the study and the dynamics of attaining a degree as a Mexican American student, one interview sufficed the study's purpose. Although often in narrative studies researchers do multiple interviews so that together researcher and participant revisit themes and sub-topics, I chose to do one interview because the nature of the open-ended questions drafted sufficient data lending rich meaning to the participants' lived experiences. Further, I didn't want the time factor to overburden participants as each of them was very busy with life in general. However, after the interviews were completed, I did contact, via email and phone calls, several of the participants for clarification reasons regarding certain specifics of the interview. Even my requests to resolve certain clarification issues created a strain on the participants as they had to find time to get back with me. Some took longer than others to respond to my correspondence or phone calls. Some apologized for taking so long. They all did get back with me eventually. However, I could sense that time was of the essence in their lives. Thus, I could not help but be deeply appreciative of the hour or so they gave me to do the one interview initially.

As mentioned earlier, several participants were recruited through Penn State's C.A.M.P (College Assistance for Migrants Program) as well as through Penn State's electronic list serve. Not mentioned earlier is that, one of the participants was recruited because I met him seven years ago when he first arrived to the US from Mexico. We have been friends since that time. Another participant was recruited through a friend of mine. This particular participant is my friend's son-in-law. Thus, all ten of the participants were recruited either through my efforts or someone else associated with Penn State University.

The interviews were taped with a digital recorder and transcribed by me. The interviewee selected the place for the place for the interview. In many cases, the place was a Mexican restaurant where the atmosphere was relaxing and the food was delicious! I was glad to travel to the designated places in appreciation for the participant's willingness to cooperate in the study. I also treated the participants to their meals.

Squire (2005) explains that often in a cultural narrative interview there is data left out of the participant's self-disclosed stories. She contends that in cultural narratives, the "cultural genres do not leave out the unsayability and ambiguity that make 'telling the whole story' impossible" (p. 102). Thus, there is the notion that a cultural narrative generates connections between individuals and across social and historical moments. Moreover, the researcher should leave space for what Squire (2001) calls the "unconscious" (p.102) or what is invariably the "unsaid." Squire (2005) contends that a partial solution to such questions is to borrow from cultural theory a notion that describes the unsaid as "constitutive of cultural representations" (p. 102). This is why (as will be discussed later), I asked participants to provide a cultural symbol or metaphor that related to their experience in higher education, namely to also get at what was unsaid. Sometimes the participants' thoughts and feelings were more easily expressed and accurately represented through symbols, metaphors and cultural artifacts. In this facet of the interview process, cultural became contextual cultural genres, always in contest, leaving gaps in understanding the whole story or experience.

Field Notes: Photographs and Memos

Field notes, pertinent analytical and interpretive tools in qualitative research, are significant as the researcher reflects on what is heard, seen, experienced and thought in route of data collection. As field notes sometimes encompass photographs, newspaper articles, official

documents, participant written memoranda and diary segments, this study primarily drew data from interview transcripts. However, unwritten recollections of the researcher's personal thoughts, feelings, speculations, hunches, insights, comparisons and contrasts were used the same way written field notes are used, namely as a valuable resources of information. While I never did plan on writing field notes, I did plan on transcribing the conversations immediately after the interview because I wanted to recollect things such as what made the participant laugh, tear up, frown, smile, etc. So, though this study has no physical paper trail of field notes, it does have a long paper trail of recollected notes which were used purposefully in analyzing the data. Recollected field notes served also as a reminder of the participant's attire, language, impressionable remarks prior to, during and after the interviews. The researcher went so far as to mentally note the ways participants culturally and linguistically interacted with Mexican American restaurant owners and servers. These recollected field notes were then formatted into the study as valuable socio-cultural data. Thus, there is something to be said about recollected field notes serving as secondary data in qualitative research.

Documents and Artifacts

Documents and artifacts are often used in qualitative research, and were used in this study, as supplementary forms of data. Participants were asked to bring or create a metaphorical representation of the experience under study as suggested by Keller, Fleury, and Perez (2009). These documents and artifacts were used as cultural elicitation devices. As cultural-elicitation components, they were part of the interview process whereby participants were asked to share a symbolic artifact depicting their experience as an adult Mexican American college student. Clandinin (2006) contends that illustrative methods allow participants to bring their own life experiences to the discussion. Keller, Fleury, Perez (2009) found that photo-elicitation and other

forms of symbolic visuals uncover cutting edge elements that capture the cultural and social context of the participant's experience.

Keller, Fleury, Perez (2009) further contend that significant visual pieces/images allow “participants to reveal dimensions of their lives that augments narratives” (p. 429). In this study, such artifacts did help in designing intervention strategies. The visual pieces ultimately triggered discussion about the participants' lived experiences as Mexican Americans pursuing college degrees. The participants analyzed the images themselves, and then, collaboratively with the researcher, made connections between situations in their college experiences. The use of music or poetry could also have had similar affects. However, these participants did not bring any music or poetry to the interviews. In any case, the use of metaphorical representation was a way of providing the participant with another opportunity to describe their college experience and, thus, add another layer of meaning to their experiences. Further, as noted above, Squire (2005) suggests using cultural elicitation pieces in narrative types of research to get at what might be initially unconscious, unsaid or ambiguous. Thus, using this technique to elicit additional information about the lived experiences of Mexican Americans in higher education was beneficial to the study because it provided another window from which to discuss the participant's experiences.

Data Analysis

Clandinin (2006) conceptualizes data analysis for narrative inquiry as three dimensional. She lists the narrative inquiry dimensional spaces as: personal/social, past/present/future, and situational. “Studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters: they focus on the personal and social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry: and they occur in specific places or sequences of places” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 47). It is within these three spaces that the

data for this study was categorized (including the narrative interview transcripts). Field texts discussing significant people in the participant's life were categorized as "personal and social." Events over time, past/present/future, were categorized as "temporal." Specific places were categorized as "situational." This format of organizing data provided structure in analyzing the experiences of the 10 participants.

Clandinin (2006) contends that as narrative inquirers work with participants they need to be open to the many imaginative possibilities for compiling and composing field texts. She goes on to say that "regardless of the kinds of field texts, it is important to be attentive to situating field texts within the three dimensional narrative inquiry spaces, that is positioning field notes with attention to the temporal, the personal and social, and place" (p. 48).

Building on Dewey's view of human experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) created this three-dimensional metaphor conceptualizing narrative inquiry. They drew upon "Dewey's criteria of continuity and interaction as well as his notion of situation" (p. 47). Thus, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed their method of exploring human experience through a Deweyan theoretical lens. Their notion of the personal/social space was drawn from Dewey's view of interactive human experience while their temporal space was taken from Dewey's concept of "continuity." Their space for specific places was drawn from Dewey's "situational" view of human experience. Thus, in using the three dimensional model, I sorted data from each story according to the participant's personal and social experiences, events over time and places where they either lived or visited. This method of categorizing their experience offered a consistent and structured method of analyzing each interview separately, and then doing an analysis across participants' stories; this analysis process made identifying themes and patterns pertaining to participant experiences in higher education more clearly visible.

Attentive to situating field texts within the narrative inquiry spaces, the data were organized differentiating the temporal from the interactive and the interactive from the

situational. Situating the data in this three dimensional format provided a sense of how participants threaded their stories around time, place, and relationships. Also, organizing the components of each story in this three dimensional spaces served as a cross-reference of field texts with the transcriptions.

In the analysis process, each participant's experiences were listed under three headings, namely interactive experiences, temporal experiences, and situational experiences. After the data were categorized, each story was rewritten with large sections of the narrative being direct quotes from the participants. Leaving many of their statements intact, the participant's genuine and authentic selves, as Mexican American adult learners, was reflected in the analysis.

Verification Strategies

Creswell and Miller (2000) contend that verification strategies are implemented through the researcher, the participant or through reviewers not affiliated with the study. They explain that the researcher is expected to return to their data over and over again to see if the interpretations make sense. Thus, the data in this study was revisited numerous times for verification purposes.

Secondly, Creswell and Miller (2000) contend that since a qualitative paradigm is socially constructed and reality is what the participant perceives it to be, it is important to check how accurately the participant's realities have been represented. Therefore, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that the participant be involved in assessing the interpretations. Aligning with this suggestion, study participants were included in assessing the accuracy of their own stories as told by the researcher. Assessment reviews occurred several times throughout the course of the research process. Clandinin, Pushor

and Orr (2007) encourage negotiating texts with participants to ensure authentic representation of their voices and stories in significant ways. They contend that there are times when the researcher must sustain or extend their conversations with their participants and then, also, prolong their interaction with the text in revisiting, rethinking, and rewriting it. Relative to extending conversations to revisit, rethink and rewrite the text, the researcher corresponded numerous times after the interviews gathering clarification from the participants pertinent to specific experiences that the participant had discussed. Understanding that research is only as valuable as the findings are credible, findings in this study were confirmed, evidence was substantiated, credibility was established and trust was exemplified before findings were established. Verification, as a research vehicle, enabled the audience of this study to believe that research findings were rooted in a thorough investigation.

Thus, verification strategies affirmed, confirmed, and established these research outcomes assuring readers that findings are authentic. The effort made to reiterate what a participant was saying or describing in the course of the interview helped to assure that findings in this study were not misrepresented by the researcher's own bias or cultural misunderstanding. As a researcher's point of view can possibly be distorted data as it can be interpreted differently from what is actually said in conversation or from what occurred in the context of the study, the researcher had the participant carefully read the textual analysis before any summary of the findings was formulated. Understanding that with qualitative analysis, the researcher's point of view is clearly in the mix of collected data, the researcher encouraged the participant to add or detract from the analysis by correcting text or by adding additional information to the text. "The observer has a point

of view that is central to the datum and it is in the articulation—in the revelation of his point of view—that the datum of inquiry is assumed to emerge”(Patton, 2002). Thus, verification was extremely essential to ensure trustworthiness.

To make certain of the trustworthiness of the study’s findings and to compensate for possible distortion of information, implemented in this research four types of verification were implemented ensuring the study is credible, dependable, confirmable and transferable. Credibility, giving authenticity to the work, was verified through member checks, informal and formal feedback. Dependability, lending stability to the study over time, was verified by an audit trail (disinterested expert renders judgment about the quality of data collected). Transferability, the ability to apply data and findings in other contexts, was verified through the rich, thick descriptive data from open-ended interviews. Lastly, confirmability, the likelihood of possible outcomes, was verified through triangulation.

Informal and Formal Feedback

The first measure of verification, ensuring credibility, implemented in this research was feedback (informal and formal). In times when feedback occurred, the researcher and the participant/interviewee discussed what was said and/or written. Informal feedback occurred in casual conversation during the introductory phases of the interviews. The richness of the conversations determined how well the researcher knew the interviewee. Nevertheless, rich or superficial, all conversation was valuable data in this study.

Informal feedback occurred also during the interview as the researcher verified what was said. The interviewee appreciated the feedback as it provided opportunity to clarify and rectify thoughts and ideas. This type of interactive verbal exchange of thoughts and words was a time when both researcher and interviewee clarified and verified what each other was communicating. For example, during the interview, as researcher, I conversed with the participant about his or her assumptions, ideas, and thoughts regarding Mexican American college degree attainment and issues of persistence. Then, I proceeded to ask follow up questions to clarify what the participant said. Sometimes it was difficult for the interviewee to articulate answers to open-ended questions. Therefore, times of feedback and questions were randomly interjected throughout the interviews. Patton (2002) has this to say about informal feedback, "Giving feedback can be part of the verification process in fieldwork. My own preference is to provide the participants and staff with descriptions and analysis verbally and informally and to include their reactions as part of the data" (p.324). Thus, informal feedback in this study was crucial for ensuring trustworthiness in the research findings.

Formal feedback was exchanged after the interview was transcribed and findings had been established and reviewed. In general, in qualitative research, formal feedback is a written summary of what the researcher has interpreted from the collected data. Applying this to a narrative study meant giving the written story of the participant's lived experiences back to the participant to see if he or she wanted to add or subtract something from the story. This ensured that the interview has been transcribed properly and gave the participant a chance to think about what he or she has said. This transaction of written text served as a form of member checking (Patton, 2002), and was a way of uncovering

misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Credibility and trustworthiness was confirmed when findings were checked, revised and rechecked by both interviewee and researcher. Feedback took a dual effort on the part of the researcher and the interviewee. Together communicating, summarizing, revising and finally establishing authentic findings, verification strategies were successfully implemented.

Forms of Triangulation

To increase confirmability and compensate for potential bias rooted in the researcher's point-of-view, forms of triangulation were used to increase the credibility of the findings. For instance, this study used more than one data source to study the phenomenon and also implemented investigator triangulation, which is using more than one researcher to analyze the data (Patton, 2002). In this research I used data triangulation. Sources were in the form of interviews, recollected field notes and artifacts. While technically there's not a second researcher on the project for investigator triangulation, my advisor assisted in the data analysis, which serves as a form of investigator triangulation.

The triangular facet of verification was originally implemented in quantitative studies. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explain:

When triangulation made its way into qualitative research it carried its old meaning—verification of the facts—but picked up another. It came to mean that many sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena you were studying. Others expanded its use to include using multiple subjects, multiple researchers,

different theoretical approaches in addition to different data-collecting techniques.
(p. 107).

Likewise, in this research, triangulation provided a sense of authenticity and genuineness to the data analysis.

Regardless of what types of triangulation were selected in this qualitative analysis, what was most important was that the triangulation approach guarded the researcher against inadvertently projecting his or her own views into the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Otherwise, it would have been very easy for me, as the researcher, to inaccurately portray certain points of the participant's stories.

Summary: Verification

In summary, research efforts incorporated methods of verification curtailing researcher bias, misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Methods, such as feedback, use of source and investigator triangulation, and a researcher background synopsis ensure that efforts were implemented enabling readers and participants to trust findings and believe outcomes. Efforts in verification were implemented throughout the study. In cross-examining the findings, the study was presented as authentic and beneficial to the field of adult education

Part Two: Participant Narratives

Chapter 4 Jane

Jane, a 55 year old Mexican American woman, residing in the mid northwest, is happily married, mother of three daughters and a proud grandmother of a baby girl. At the age of 28, Jane enrolled in a technical college. She then went on to attend a prominent north-west state university receiving her bachelor's degree in economics at age 35. Her story is one of adventure and challenge as she perseveres through racial and academic injustices as a child as well as the loss of a special loved one as an adult. The agony and ecstasy of Jane's lived experiences as a Mexican American women celebrate her inspiring spirit of tenacity, perseverance and determination to accomplish rigorous academic requirements and succeed in degree completion.

Background

Jane's parents are Mexican American. Her mother was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, a state of northern Mexico. Her father was born in Texas. Her parents were married in Texas and raised their family in a southern Texas city that borders Mexico.

One of eight children, Jane is the oldest of her five brothers and two sisters. She is the only one in the family that has attained a college degree.

Raised in a migrant farm workers family, Jane shared during the interview the hardships of migratory life. She explained:

Before the age of nine my family would travel anywhere from Texas to Oklahoma, from California to Washington. Then they went from Texas to Minnesota to Wisconsin. So, there was a different stream of migrant farm workers back in the day, back in my time.

I asked if her parents home-schooled her and her siblings while they traveled five months of the year. There was a pause in our conversation and I quickly realized that Jane's parents most likely did not have time to home-school. Jane explained that although her mother was very intelligent she had only an eighth grade education. Her father had a third grade education. Although not home-schooled, Jane was able to attend public school from October through April. She expounds on her years of migration saying:

What we would do is that we would go to school, but we would leave early in the year...around April. We would need to look for housing for where we would live. Then we would arrive back in Texas around October. So, we would miss a lot of school.

At this point in the interview, Jane shared the first of several vignettes about her mother. Not satisfied with farm work migration, Jane's mother made a decision to move their family of ten to the north. They moved to a city where once they had worked as migrant farm laborers. A very difficult move as Jane explains:

When I was nine my mother decided we were not going to follow the life of the migrants any more. So, what she did was she loaded the kids up and we traveled to Wisconsin. She had a Godmother and her husband (living in Wisconsin). And my father went to work for a foundry.

I wondered about the role that Jane's father played in this move. Jane said that it was her mother who was the initiator in this transition. As Jane explained, "*What she said kind of went.*"

It was a brave and complex move for two reasons. First, finding a home large enough for a family of ten was complex in and of itself. However, the complexity went one step further. Not only were they a family with eight children, they were Latino in a predominantly white populated city in the north. Jane's voice indicates to me that she is reliving the move as she shares about her move to the mid northwest:

We rented a farm house... That is a whole story in itself because nobody wanted to rent to us. But we had a very hard time renting a house because we had such a large family and because we were Latinos and nobody wanted to rent to us. We had a very, very hard time.

Sensing in our interview that Jane did not feel welcomed in her new environment, I asked if there were many Latino's in the school she attended. Jane's response was:

I was the only Latina that would stay the whole year. There would be migrants that would come in during the summer and they would come into school and stay a couple of weeks. They would come in August. Then once school started they would leave in October. I would be the only one... But the whole other story behind that is that when I was

accepted in that school, me and my brother, they put us with the retarded ... They didn't call it special needs. They just called it retardation.

Jane eventually tested out of the class for those with special needs, but she then had other obstacles to contend with during high school. She often had to work until three o'clock in the morning at the family owned restaurant. With tenacity, drive and ambition Jane's mother opened a restaurant when Jane was in ninth grade. Jane talked candidly about her mother saying:

She was ambitious. Even though she only had an eighth grade education she was very smart... So, she opened a Mexican restaurant. It was one of the first Mexican restaurants in Wisconsin in 1969 or 1970. We lived above the restaurant. I would work in the kitchen. My brothers would help in the kitchen.

The restaurant did very well. It was a college town which helped business.

When I asked Jane about what effect the late night hours working had on her school grades she responded without hesitancy saying:

I passed. I would work until like three in the morning because that was like bar time. We would stay open because we would make a lot of money during bar time... So by the time I would walk home, get to bed and then get up I would only get about three hours of sleep! So, my grades were not that good.

Despite the long working hours at the restaurant and her struggle with grades, Jane earned enough credits to graduate early. She graduated in the middle of December. She was then off to college in January. Again, Jane's mother's energy, ambition and effort came into play in helping Jane with the application process to get into college. With a warmth in her voice, and a touch of gratitude, Jane gave further details about her mother's efforts to see that Jane was accepted into the college. Jane shares:

The one year my mom got very involved in the whole educational system. She started a study program (at the college) ... She got to know a couple of Latino students and they

actually helped her to get all my paper work done. So, I did not even know this was happening in the background. So I was able to go to college the second semester in January.

Those first few weeks of college were overwhelming for Jane. She dropped out after only a couple of months. Jane said, "I wasn't prepared. I didn't know anybody there. It was in the middle of semesters...I felt completely overwhelmed... It just didn't feel right. So, I got married."

Jane then married a Mexican American migrant worker who had also moved to the mid northwest. He had the opportunity to go to college right out of high school, but had turned down the idea. He did not have the confidence, at that particular time, to believe he could succeed academically. Later on, with encouragement and persuasion from Jane, he received an Associate's degree in business management in his thirties. Jane truly believed her husband could do it and he did!

When first married, Jane was working for an agency which built homes. When asked if she wanted to finish college, she quickly responded saying, "*I wanted to finish. I always had it in the back of my mind. Someday I am going to graduate.*"

Significant Factors in Degree Completion

Significant people in Jane's life pertaining to her success in degree completion are her mother, husband, a professor, and her fifth grade teacher. Jane's mother's ambitious, vivacious Mexican American spirit spilled over into Jane's life. Jane found herself with that same spirit and an intense desire to persevere through the ups and downs of earning a degree. Although Jane indicated that her mother was more of a business woman than a maternal figure. Jane had acquired some of her mother's tenacity. Going the second mile to open another restaurant, Jane

spoke apprehensively about her mother's business success because Jane's mother committed suicide at that second restaurant at the age of 42. Jane expounds on that sorrowful incident saying:

I have three daughters...When my second daughter was two my mother, Maria (Jane's mother), committed suicide. I never ever would have thought she would have done it. She committed suicide in another restaurant that she had opened. She was 42 at the time.

The death of Jane's mother was a pivotal turning point in Jane's life causing her to want to redefine herself as a person. Jane explained the transition that took place following her mother's tragic death saying:

I had another job at that time working as a book keeper. It was a nonprofit agency. It seemed to me that I was getting jobs that were very clerical... I knew that I wanted to do something else. I knew that I was not very happy there. And I knew that my mom had committed suicide. I decided I needed to change my thought process. I knew I needed to do something different with my life for myself and for my children.

With her daughters ages three and eight, Jane enrolled in a technical school in the city where she resided. Thus, her journey through the diverse terrain of higher education began as an adult learner. She enrolled in the courses that she would need to eventually transfer to the university.

When enrolling in a pre-algebra course a professor ask her sarcastically what made her think if she barely passed this math course in high school she would pass the course now? Jane's response was short and abrupt. However, her answer to him defined a "new" Jane. She explained the scenario this way:

So, I said, "It's because I don't work in my parent's restaurant until three in the morning anymore!" His eyes lit up and from then on he never questioned me again...He never questioned me again. He opened his eyes and saw that society is not all that he thinks it

is...I feel like I opened his eyes. It is not like everyone that comes through gets everything handed to them.

Thus, by challenging Jane's abilities in college math, the professor with his crude remarks became the catalyst of Jane's new determination to pursue her dreams in higher education.

Recognizing other significant people in Jane's life, her husband was identified as one who cheered her on every step of the way. However, in reciprocity, Jane cheered him on as well in an academic journey. Jane explains how she allocated encouragement and was the recipient of encouragement in her marriage saying:

At the time I actually talked my husband into going back to school...I registered him and I said, "Well, this coming semester you are going to be going to school." He was so sick. Every bathroom, he'd try to throw up... He was thirty at the time... I took him to the technical college. And he got his two year degree in management!

Lastly, pertaining to people of significance in Jane's lived experiences as a Mexican American degree achiever, a fifth grade teacher impacted her performance years later as an adult learner. Jane explained that because she was good in math, this particular elementary school teacher looked at her differently. Other than this one teacher, Jane said that no other person impacted her academically. When asked if she felt that she was treated with equity in the university she responded this way:

You know, I would not have known any different. My teachers told me that because I was Mexican and bilingual that I was ignorant. Therefore, I always had this feeling I'm going to prove them wrong, prove them wrong, prove them wrong. I would do the best I could. So, if I got a B, I would blame myself.

On Being Bicultural

When asked about her biculturality, Jane indicated that she perceived herself as Caucasian meaning she saw herself as more American than Mexican. She defines her biculturality this way:

I think being bicultural is very different for me because I was raised in the north with no family. The people that were actually raised in Texas or California have a different perspective... For me being bicultural means that I always have my foot in the Caucasian. I mean that is really my background...That is all I really knew. My mother would always remind me of tradition. She would say, 'Now, don't forget you are still Latina. Be proud of it.' You know, those kinds of things. We didn't have all the family, like aunts and uncles. So, Caucasian was all I knew.

Jane continued to describe her biculturality with heaviness in her voice. She reminisced how being bicultural was used against her in the formative years of education. She quickly and abruptly responded:

When I started school they put us in that retardation class...I had to actually test out of those classes so that I could go into regular classrooms. Being bilingual they thought of me as being ignorant...You were only allowed to speak English. So, several times we were taken off the bus because I was actually speaking to my brothers in Spanish. Then we would be corrected. My mom would have to go to school. It always worked against me.

It is, perhaps, appropriate for me to insert here why the pseudonym for this participant is “Jane.” I have made it a practice to ask my study participants what name they would like me to use in the analysis of the study. Most participants have asked to be called names that are of Latino/a origin. Yet, without hesitancy, this particular participant asked to be called Jane. She explained that she

chose that name because her teachers gave her the name Jane in elementary school. They forbid her to use her Latina name. As this participant was explaining her reasoning for asking to be called Jane, I could hear frustration in her voice. However, her frustrations were never clarified in our conversation. Yet, one thing is clear. She persevered through seven more years of public schooling as “Jane” and received a high school diploma. No longer as Jane, she went on to succeed in the university attaining a degree in the Sciences.

On Being an Adult Learner

In our interview, I asked Jane to reflect on the difference between being a college student who enrolled in community college immediately after high school graduation. Being a college student as an adult learner in her thirties, Jane shares her personal thoughts saying:

I think the difference was in my own psychology. I think when I made up my mind that was it! ...I was going to do it! I did it with sheer will power!... I was doing laundry, I was trying to figure out what everyone was going to eat, I was up until three in the morning! ...I was very determined! And that was not all! We actually qualified (because I was not working and my husband was the only one working) because of his salary we qualified to go into a housing program to build a new home!

Jane’s determination and perseverance to raise a family, build a new home and simultaneously complete a college degree enabled her to overcome obstacles that have often distracted other adult learners. Adding to Jane’s plate of responsibilities, Jane was pregnant with their third daughter during the last two semesters of her senior year in higher education. Jane was healthy and strong in mind and body during those nine months! The icing on the cake for Jane was that she received university recognition for her accomplishments as an adult learner. She was

honored with the “Returning Adult Award!” Jane was elated with this honor and spoke joyously about this recognition.

Closing

An exploration of the link between identity and language is significant in research data analysis involving participants who have straddled two cultures in order to survive and thrive in a dominant society. The participant, Jane, in this particular research, alludes to this link as she reflected on identity and language as a Mexican American living in the mid Northwest. Forbidden to keep her Latina name and chastised for speaking her native language, Jane’s identity was threatened when her language was shunned by dominant society. Through a Borderland framework lens, perhaps Jane encountered what here Anzaldua (1999) describes as linguistic terrorism:

We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your burla. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically somos huerfanos—we speak an orphan tongue (p. 80).

Jane’s identity is akin to her linguistic identity. As a young child Jane found it difficult to take pride in her ethnicity because she could not take pride in her language. It was not until she accepted the legitimacy of her language that she accepted the legitimacy of herself. Anzaldua said these exact words of herself. Putting this correlation of identity and language into a literary context Anzaldua speaks four very profound words, namely “I am my language” (Anzaldua, p. 81, 1999). This statement could easily apply to Jane’s lived experiences as a Mexican American who wanted to speak Spanish as a young Mexican American child, but was not allowed. I am not Mexican American, but I, too, am my language. If someone would take my language away from

me they would be taking away something very precious to me. Thus, there is a compelling connection between identity and language that becomes clearly evident when we relate it to ourselves.

In regards to Jane's biculturalism, a consistent ability to cross ethnic boundaries was demonstrated throughout Jane's life. While enduring the hardships of migration and discrimination, resilience and perseverance flooded Jane's life. Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) claim this resilience is characteristic of people who are bicultural because they have "the ability to shift their socio-cognitive perceptual schemas to fit situational demands" (p.168).

It was obvious from what Jane shared about her mother's pursuits, that Jane was nurtured in the protective effects of biculturalism where cultural frame switching was a way of living. From the time Jane was a little girl until the day she was honored with the university's Returning Adult Award, she not only coped with a broad range of culturally troubling situations, she thrived in those situations! At the age of 35, Jane was a wife, mother of two children, building a new home, pregnant and a senior in college. Her biculturalism gave way to the tenacity, ambition, confidence and joy Jane needed in order to succeed in higher education.

It is Jane's amazing perseverance that never gave into difficult circumstances. I once heard it said, "Don't wait for the storm to pass. Learn to dance in the rain." Jane danced under dark clouds of disparity and through torrential storms of social inequalities finding the rhythm of her lived experiences in opportunities of success. Jane has inspired me to dance when in the rain of my own life and for this I say, "Thank you so very much, Jane. I am forever changed."

Chapter 5

Lorenza

Lorenza, a dark haired, petite fifty-three year old Mexican American woman, is a south central Pennsylvania community college professor. She is the wife of a geologist and mother of two teenagers, a seventeen year old son and a fifteen year old daughter. Upon contacting Lorenza, she immediately demonstrated enthusiasm to participate in an interview that would afford opportunity to tell her story of degree attainment in higher education.

During our interview, Lorenza spoke openly about her life, family and future aspirations. She often referred to her hunger for knowledge and that such hunger was the lantern that lit the way into university doors of higher education. This is Lorenza's story of how she navigated the university experience, negotiated belonging and ultimately achieved her bachelor's degree.

Background

In telling of her formative years of education, Lorenza expounded on the role her mother played in her life. Her mother's passion for learning ignited zeal to study. Lorenza explained:

I went to an elementary school in Mexico. I finished sixth grade and then my mother wanted us to move to the United States. My mother wanted us to do our studies in the United States. It was not a dramatic difference. My family always felt the same. We did not have anything in Mexico like material things, like running water, but we did not care much about it...to me, I wish my kids had that life. Unfortunately, that is not possible.

Lorenza moved to New Mexico. In the middle school she attended she was among many Latinos and was considered an ESL student (English as a Second Language). She smiled at me as

she reminisced on those classes and those friends because it was during those years that she had a sense of belonging. She even remembered how much fun they had in their physical education class.

That sense of belonging soon dissipated as she entered high school. The ESL classes were now a thing of the past. The high school years were difficult for her because of the language barrier. She shared with me that she became very shy. She disclosed:

The difficult thing was in, like biology, I did not speak much English. In high school there was no ESL. So the little English I knew, I had to survive with that. I understood, but it was the communicating. So, I went through a very quiet, quiet stage. I didn't have my group from my middle school and the Anglos spoke only English. But that ESL group would meet in the Spanish club. And we would always meet, but in the reality of the classroom... The barrier was the language.

Some of that shyness still lingers in Lorenza. As we spoke her gentle, quiet spirit is somewhat still shy. However, as we talked she radiated with such joy and passion for her culture, nationality, history and present endeavors.

After struggling, somewhat, through the background information, Lorenza was hesitant to say that she enrolled in college upon high school graduation through the financial help of a Pell Grant, but she soon dropped out and began to work in a factory that manufactured panty hose. Eventually, Lorenza did return to the university with gusto and passion to graduate with a degree.

Significant Factors in Degree Completions

Significant people, events over time and specific places were influential in Lorenza's journey toward degree completion. For instance, there was a university professor who Lorenza distinctly remembered telling her to stay away from certain friends because they were trying to

deter her from completing her degree. Lorenza shared that her friends wanted to travel, enjoy life and be merry. They were not interested in long term careers. Lorenza, however, had aspirations of a future career.

When Lorenza learned that the factory where she and her friends worked would pay for her education, she enrolled in a local university with the financial support of the factory that employed her. Nevertheless, despite the factory's willingness to pay for the education, Lorenza's work friends attempted to lure her away from college. Her friends were successful, and Lorenza repeatedly dropped out of school, until at last she persisted. In the end, it took Lorenza seven years to finish her degree. With a concerned voice Lorenza reflected back to those years when her friends' influence took priority over college aspirations and she said, *"I remember a professor in college...he told me to move away from my friends. He gave me that advice. But I was loyal to my friends."*

Lorenza's work friends wanted her to believe that she did not need to go to college. As she was speaking, Lorenza smiled at me as though she was reliving those conversations with friends of the past, and was grateful for being able to complete her degree in spite of their pressure to do otherwise. She noted, *"I am making money...I am having a good life....I am not earning a lot of money, but I am earning enough to have a life...I have friends, a car... why should I go to college?"*

Yet, now speaking from hindsight, Lorenza admits she is very grateful she persevered and completed her degree. She spoke from her heart declaring:

From that group of friends from the factory, I am the only one that came out with a bachelor's degree. I still meet with these friends because I am loyal to these friends. But they are already grandparents....grandmas....but I am living the more comfortable life.

Other than the professor who was leery of Lorenza's friends, there were relatively few significant people who positively impacted Lorenza's academic efforts. As a matter of fact, Lorenza

specifically says that she wished someone had mentored her. With eyes of disappointment and a voice somewhat strained, Lorenza expounded on her somewhat uncharted road in higher education. More than anything she really wanted to study law enforcement. She had always dreamed of working for the F.B.I. However, without a college counselor or advisor, Lorenza never attempted this professional avenue.

A college friend, however, did point Lorenza to bilingual education as a career track and college major. Lorenza jumped at the opportunity. Her love for her native language and her desire for others to learn Spanish would both thrive in bilingual education. So, this friend who had pointed Lorenza toward bilingual education did indeed play a significant role in Lorenza's degree attainment. Nevertheless, at this point in the interview, Lorenza mumbled under her breath that she still would have loved majoring in law enforcement had she had a college advisor that offered her such direction. She somewhat wistfully noted:

"I never had any mentors...that would have made a difference."

A second significant factor in her degree completion seemed to be her involvement in Latino clubs during her college experience. She spoke about this when asked how her biculturality affected her persistence in college. Participation in Latino clubs played a significant role in Lorenza's degree attainment because it was a time for her to join together with others who had similar backgrounds, bilingual assets and like interests. Lorenza shared openly about her appreciation for those clubs saying,

Maybe because while I was in high school and in college, I always associated with Latino clubs... the Spanish club...I always found a club to belong to. We had that belonging....that pride... So, it was those groups that would give me the push to keep studying.

Lorenza not only recognized the importance of Latino Clubs during her university years, today she is the faculty advisor for the Latino club today at the community college where she is a

professor. Lorenza offers a smile at this interval of our conversation because she knows her calling in life is to encourage college students to persevere in their studies. She appreciates the energy generated when the Hispanic students come together. She claims that it was that same energy that spurred her on to graduation noting:

“Yes, I am an advisor to the Latino Club. We are there to mentor them, encourage them...there is that Latino power!”

Cultural Artifacts

Lorenza is proud of her Mexican heritage. Despite the lack of material things, such as running water, her formative years in Mexico were rich in culture. The artifacts that Lorenza brought with her to the interview spoke of her deep love for her native home. She brought a doll dressed in a colorful dress. It reminded Lorenza of her elementary school years when in the month of May her school would have an event that honored mothers. Lorenza said,

It represents my heritage...the music. . .when I was in Mexico every May 10th on Mothers' day everybody had to present a talent show. So, every year we would go for our dancing classes to have a performance to honor our mothers. I remember wearing several dresses and one of them was very patriotic...the colors, the music, just my heritage.

The second artifact Lorenza showed me was the figure of a Mexican American man sleeping under a sombrero. Lorenza told me that although some Mexican Americans find this artifact offensive she wanted to talk about it in the interview because it depicts a stereotyped Mexican American laziness. Lorenza wanted me to know that Mexican Americans are not lazy, but rather they are very ambitious. Lorenza clearly indicated that she has not bought into the stereotyped message of this artifact.

Lorenza also showed me a picture of the first civilization constructed under her ancestors, the Mayans. Such pride filled Lorenza's eyes as she shared her interpretation of this picture which was representative of her heritage. The picture depicts how the Mayas lived before they were conquered by the Spaniards and how the Mayas were treated under Spanish conquistadors. Recognizing the richness of her history, Lorenza prides herself in this civilization of architects, astronomers and scientists.

On Being an Adult Learner

Lorenza saw herself as an adult learner first through a financial lens whereby she prided in being completely independent of her parents or any family members for that matter during those academic years in higher education. She expounded on working a full time job in a factory and paying the rent on an apartment. These were facets of adulthood that Lorenza prided herself in as a student. She said,

Well, looking at the financial side... when I got my bachelor's degree, I was working eight hours a day to pay for my apartment, for my car, for everything for me.... I was single. I lived in dorms for one year...then, in an apartment. I always had roommates from different countries.

During the interview, Lorenza also looked at herself as an adult learner through a cultural lens as one who learned about life through the roommates that she had during her years of study.

She explained that these roommates were people who brought new knowledge to the doorstep of her life. She reveled in the richness of having lived with several people from several different nations over various intervals of school semesters. Discussing the facets of adult learning during the interview turned out to be a most delightful time for us because Lorenza had

so much appreciation for social and cultural bond created among these friends. She shared about this rich cultural experience saying,

I lived with a lady from Brazil...then she moved out and I lived with a lady from Bangladesh. Then a lady from the Philippines...then I would move...or they would move...They would enrich me...I could look at the world through them! I wanted to learn...a hunger for knowledge. I still believe that...I tell my students to get that hunger for knowledge. To learn is so beautiful.

Closing

In analyzing Lorenza's story through a borderland lens, I can hardly ignore Lorenza's determination to expound on the hard working nature of Mexican Americans. With a serious expression on her face, she held a small ceramic figurine of a man sleeping under a sombrero emphasizing that the figurine represents a stereotype of Mexican Americans as lazy. However, she explained that Mexican Americans are not lazy; rather, they are hard working from sun up until sun down.

Of all the participants, Lorenza spoke far more about her heritage than her citizenship as an American. The opportunities afforded her as an American was not discussed at any length. What she brought to the U.S. culturally was far more the focus of our conversation than what she attained since being in the US. Thus, in light being bicultural as described earlier in the context of this study, Lorenza was far more taken up with being fully Mexican rather than being fully American.

Also, three times in our conversation, Lorenza demonstrated a pride in her ethnicity. First, she referenced pride in the context of struggle; she had not been discouraged by language barriers when she first moved to the US and was proud of her determination to succeed

linguistically. Secondly, she prided in overseeing a Latino club on the campus where she is employed today discussing her role in encouraging Latino students to be proud of their accomplishments. Thirdly, Lorenza radiated with pride as she showed me pictures of the Aztec and Mayan civilizations. Perhaps Lorenza's pride was what Abolas (2007) identified as a positive way of reclaiming ancestral and cultural roots as she prided in her ancestral successes as those successes were her own.

Her rich ancestral history feeds Lorenza's spirit and soul and affirms her own cultural wealth. According to Abolas (2007), this type of reclaiming transforms negative effects of internalized oppression and moves a person toward a more equitable and just future. Lorenza talked about moving toward a more equitable future by encouraging her present day students to reclaim their rich histories. Lorenza's Mexican American spirit is not only thriving, it is contagious.

Chapter 6

Marta

Marta is 41 years old living in Texas where she was born and raised. She is one of seven children. Her parents were born in Mexico. Marta currently is employed at a community college in Texas and feels it is the place she is to be at this time in her life. She and her husband have three sons, two of their own and one they adopted when he was age 15.

Throughout the interview, Marta intermittingly shared about the people in her life that played significant roles in her journey toward degree attainment, namely her mother, husband, boss, and a friend. Marta also expounded on events over time that impacted her bachelor degree completion. For example, her involvement in Y.O.U. (Youth Opportunities Unlimited) and Job Core both uniquely affected her initiative in pursuing and completing her bachelor's degree. Significant places in Marta's life never took her much beyond the city limits where she was born and raised. Yet, the pride in her voice as she talked about her home town indicated how much she loves her native home and is proud to be a Mexican American Texan.

Background

Marta begins our interview time together by sharing about her childhood, and noted:

"I didn't like to get up in the morning..."

She reminisced first about her family and then about her schooling. She began with a loving description of her parents:

I remember going to kindergarten and I am a first generation US citizen. My parents were born in Mexico...My mom and dad went through sixth grade...and you know that is not considered very much of an education...They always supported us in our education. I

remember them always helping us...like with our alphabet and all of that. The only thing is that I have always been a very lazy person for morning. I don't like to get up in the morning...My poor mom... my mom was always trying to wake me up to go to school.

Marta then goes on to describe her family of seven siblings as though she had a special and unique bond with each one that she named:

There are six girls and one boy...My mother wanted a boy so bad she kept trying...I am the second to the youngest and my brother is the youngest...the first one, her name is Esther. She is ten years older than I am. She is 51. Norma is 46. No, she is 50. Then Ruth is 49. So, those first three were like a year apart. Then three years later, there is Anna. She is 46. Then Rosa, she is 45. Then myself, I am 41 and my brother is three years, I mean four years, younger than I am.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

Marta is the only one in her family that has attained a bachelor's degree. She attributes her ability to completing her degree to a number of factors. Encouragement from her parents during her young academic years and outreach programs significantly impacted her initiative toward successful degree attainment. Marta describes two particular programs:

I went through a program. It was sort of like outreach programs for students going into high school. It was held at a university and it was for the whole summer. And this happened when I was in 8th grade. So, about that time I sort of knew I wanted to be a teacher or a coach. It was an outreach program. It was called...it has the acronym of Y.O.U. But it was called Youth Opportunities Unlimited....That was an encouragement. But then again, I had some issues at home. So, I dropped out at sixteen...I knew

education was important. So, what I did was I joined a program called Job Corps. And I got my G.E.D. within a year. Then I enrolled in college right away. I was seventeen.

Marta was enrolled in a community college in Texas for about a year. During that year, at age 18 she married and dropped out of college. At age 24 she and her husband had two children. She reminisces on those years as times of contentment in her life. After working several years at a community college in Texas, her boss began to encourage her to consider continuing her education and work toward a degree. So, at 29 years old, with two young sons ages 5 and 7, Marta enrolled in a community college in Texas. This was a difficult decision because, as Marta indicates, degree attainment was not high on the list of priorities for Mexican American women. Marta expounded on the cultural nature of Mexican tradition through her parents' eyes saying:

My parents, even though they were born and raised in Mexico and live most of their adult life in Mexico up until they got married, they still are very, very Mexican. I mean the way they think...everything. My mom always has dinner for my father... my mother expected me to follow that tradition...that tradition where women do everything in the house.

Marta's mother thought that Marta would embrace Mexican tradition where the wife takes on all the domestic chores of the home and that Marta would have a hot meal on the table for her husband each night of the week. Marta explained to me, however, that with her and her husband both working forty hours a week her husband chooses to do many of the household chores. In the same breath, Marta depicts her Mexican American husband as a non-traditionalist. She describes his non-traditional ways saying,

Thank God my husband is very understanding. He is actually the one who would go grocery shopping...and typically Mexican men do not do that....He cleans. He cooks. He does the grocery shopping. He actually hates for me to go grocery shopping.

With much hard work invested in her studies, Marta graduated in 1999 from a community college in Texas with an Associate degree in Applied Science. She then enrolled in a large university in Texas. Those years of study were not easy either. She shares her story in these words:

I graduated in 1999. That was an Associate. Then right after that I enrolled for the fall semester at the university...about 69 of the hours transferred which was pretty good. So, I had to take all the English and all the histories. But, by then I was already a recruiter for the university. So, I would travel a lot. I would always tell my instructors, "Look, I am not going to be here. Can you send me my assignment and I will have everything ready?"

I asked Marta how she managed to keep going as far as parenting, housekeeping, working and studying. In her jolly voice she responded with giggles and laughs:

What would happen was I would brew a pot of coffee around ten o'clock and I would stay doing my papers until like three o'clock in the morning. Not only that, I had to be at work at eight o'clock in the morning. I was always sleepy and tired...My husband had to be at work earlier than I did...God bless my mom because my mom was taking care of my little one at that time. So, I only had to take my oldest. He was in elementary (school) and that was near (our house). The only thing is that I would always forget about them after school...So much on my mind and so much work...and before I knew it my mom would be calling (and asking) "Where's the boys!"

On Being Bicultural

When asked about her biculturality, Marta sounded enthused and delighted. I could almost see her smiling through the phone as she explained to me that being a Hispanic she can relate to people both from the US and from Mexico. However, she felt that when she goes to visit in Mexico, Mexicans do not look on her as Mexican. She explained that there is a breach in her

culture that Mexicans detect. Chuckling she told me that when she is in Mexico the Mexicans regard her as Spanish... “*or something.*”

I thought it was interesting that when she was talking about her biculturality she talked about the values she has instilled in her sons pertaining to the way Mexican American women like to be treated. She explains:

Like I say to my son, “Look, Mexican ladies like to get flowers. When you have a girlfriend you better treat her with respect. Open the door for her. Give her flowers.” And he is like that with his girlfriend. It’s strange because, like I said, we’re on the border. So, does this come from the Mexican side of me or is this an American side?

I had asked the participants to consider bringing an artifact or a metaphor that would represent their bicultural experiences in degree attainment. Although the interview with Marta was a phone conversation, we did talk about an artifact symbolic of her experiences in a bicultural context. She was quick to explain that had this been a face to face interview, the artifact that she would have shown me would be her plants. Marta explained that plants celebrate life and Marta truly is a celebrator of life. Marta tells me:

Mexican Americans have all kinds of plants and we have a huge container garden with all sorts of plants. We planted those plants. When we go to a friend’s house we say, “Oh, can we have a piece of this plant.” Then it will grow. We have a huge Aloe Vera outside our house. Now in Mexican culture that is supposed to mean “life” you know... in the front of the house. The kind we have...you can just open it up and if you have a cut you can just use a dab. Then it heals really well and whatever...

Another artifact that Marta said she would have shown me were photographs that she recently retrieved from her grandfather’s home. I could see her smiling through the phone as she described those precious pictures of years gone by, pictures that defined who she was as a Mexican American. Marta explains:

But one thing that I recently just found out was when I went to Mexico last year, right across the border, my uncle, he lives in the house that use to belong to my grandfather. I have a bunch of pictures of my grandparents when they got married. And my grandfather was an engineer, a train engineer, and my great grandfather was a mayor of one of the bigger cities in Mexico. And so if it weren't for my uncle, I would have never known that I had a great grandparent with such a prestigious job...I have some pride...because they were educated.

On Being an Adult Learner

The last question I asked Marta was in reference to her studies as an adult learner. From age 29 to age 35 Marta invested hours upon hours of study in her bachelor's degree program. I was curious if those years were different for her as a student from the teenage years when she was enrolled in a community college in Texas before being married. Marta shared her thoughts saying:

I think it was way different because you are more mature. And you already know, hey, if I don't do this...this awaits me. You're not a kid. They (kids) don't really see the future, but when you are older you are already in the future...And you relate a lot more to your instructors. I got very close to my instructors. I didn't think anything of going to visit them during office hours. Whereas, when I was young, it was... "Oh, my God, no way." But when you are older you talk about whatever. You invest more time in your studies...at least I did...And another thing is we are paying for our classes. We pay out of our own pocket and we say, "Oh, man, I am not going to spend \$1,000 and not do well."

Marta recognized the uniqueness of her situation as far as graduating at thirty-five years old and she was very proud, in a humble way of her persistence to finish her college degree. Yet, more

important to Marta was what she was doing with that degree now. Marta wanted to close this interview with words and thoughts not necessarily about her, but rather about the Mexican American students she has worked with and works with presently. She highlights the importance of mentoring and explained how she worked with a program called C.A.M.P. (College Assistance Migrant Program). Marta's heart is very passionate to see Mexican American students succeed in academia. She knows they can succeed because of her experiences as a director of CAMP:

I was the director and coordinator for that program...that is where you actually get to meet the college students. They will tell you, "Look, I am in college because I had to work the fields. I have seen my parents work the fields and I don't want that for my family, for my future. I don't ever want to go back to the fields because it is a lot of hard work." A lot of them live in cleaned out chicken coops. It's a lot of hard work, but nobody else is going to do it. These people are coming here and they do a lot of the work. You know a lot of people here in the US think that a lot of that work is done by machines or that a lot of the migrants are undocumented, but they are not. They are US citizens...I work with a lot of them and I always give them a graduation dinner. I always say, "Look, I want you guys to be very proud of yourselves...this is one of the milestones of life that very few people are able to attain. And lot of Mexican American parents, Janet, are not...they have not been through the college system or the educational system here. So, they don't understand why it is taking three years or four years to go to college. "Get working and start making money for your family!" So, they have a lot of worries and issues from their parents.

As a Mexican American graduate, Marta's lived experiences are a conglomerate of transformative ways of thinking and living. If she has any regrets they're never mentioned in the interview. Perhaps the "unsaid" is what makes this narrative research unique. Marta was free to omit the temporal, personal and situational spaces of her life that fall outside words.

Closing

In some ways, Marta's ambitions resemble those described in David Abalos' theory of transformation whereby the personal, political, historical and sacred faces rise above the cynicism of yesterday's pain and a new consciousness dispels amazing intrinsic energy. Marta moved beyond Mexican traditions of subservience and paved a road for herself aspiring to complete her bachelor's degree. Ironically, her mother also let go of any ridged traditional values pertaining to *stay at home moms* and supported Marta throughout the journey.

It was also evident that Marta, her husband and her mother embraced what Anzaldua (1999) described as a "new consciousness" based on the nontraditional roles each played during the years that Marta was working on her degree. For example, Marta's husband took the traditionally feminine roll of grocery shopping, her mother supported, rather than rebuked, Marta's academic efforts by babysitting, and Marta was an adult student, a nontraditional vocation for a person of Mexican descent. Thus, they embraced new ways of thinking, acting and living which is what Anzaldua alludes to in reframing life through a new consciousness.

Marta's new consciousness, her new way of perceiving herself, was evidenced in the steps she took to enroll in college. She believed degree attainment would not only benefit herself, but her family and her community at large. Her academic effort affirmed the traditional notion that Latinos are responsible to each other. In 2005, after five years of intense study, Marta, at 35 years old, graduated from a university which ranks as one of Texas' top colleges.

Regarding the cultural artifacts, for Marta, plants are symbolic of what Abalos (2007) refers to as freeing the sacred face. The sacred face has the instinctive ability to create "new" histories, traditions, stories that will better the lives of Latinos. As Marta expounded on the healing balm of the Aloe Vera plant I could not help but think about how her sacred face has been freed, an act of transformation, whereby she has recreated the past by discerning those elements

that have now led her to a future. As she reminded me... seven siblings and she is the only one who has received her bachelor's degree. Marta has pioneered new territory that her siblings have, not as yet, ventured to explore.

Several factors contributed to Marta's biculturality. The first factor was her birth in the United States. Marta's birth and upbringing as a US citizen initiated the bicultural processes for her at an early age. This early processing was advantageous in a socio-cultural context as several of the other participants in this study were much older when they moved to the US. Thus, the process of becoming bicultural began later in their lives and, in some respects, the process was more challenging than it was for Marta.

A second contributing factor to Marta's biculturality was her place of employment as a married adult, namely a Texas community college. It was there Marta's boss challenged her to go to college to earn a degree. At this juncture, however, Marta had to work through the notion that Latino women do not need a college degree. Working through the traditionalism was a significant part of the bicultural process as it was the decision to embrace a dominant cultural view. Without much hesitation, Marta gave way to a focus on higher education. However, she continued to hold tightly to her Mexican cultural values, beliefs and norms. Over time Marta became fully bicultural equipped to cope successfully with a wide range of academic expectations. In the end, she succeeded in degree completion.

Recently Marta became a grandmother. Her first grandchild, a little girl, and my first granddaughter, were born the same week. Although Marta lives in Texas and I am in Pennsylvania we congenially emailed back and forth often about our new little granddaughters. Marta has become a special friend teaching me what it means to embrace a transformative consciousness that frees the personal, historical, political and sacred faces of our lives. Every Saturday Marta has an eight year old child stay at her home whose father is in prison. Marta spends time with this youngster mentoring in whatever ways seem important to do so. This act of

kindness speaks volumes because, in this fractured age of cynicism, Marta's new consciousness is spilling over into this little eight year old life. Needless to say, some of Marta's new consciousness has even spilled over into my own life and for that I will ever be grateful.

Chapter 7

Mía

I first met Mía at an educational event where cultural diversity was the focus of the day. Mía was tending to a friend's display of unique Mexican artifacts. In those first few moments of introduction, I knew Mía had much passion and love for her native country of Mexico. I asked her some questions about her past and her university experiences. She had been in her thirties while working on her bachelor's degree so I extended to her the opportunity to allow me to interview her so that she could tell her story. She accepted my invitation and shared about the rich history of her life as a Mexican American in higher education.

Today Mía teaches at two different branches of community college in central Pennsylvania. The lived experiences of attaining a bachelors' degree in Spanish education is still clearly vivid in her thoughts. As an adult learner with a full time job, internships, a husband and two children, attaining her bachelor's degree was no easy task. This is Mía's story beginning with reflections of her bilingual education in Mexico as a young child and how that shaped her future in higher education.

Background

At the opening of the interview I asked Mía about her family. She shared about parents and grandparents noting:

My father was an accountant with mining companies throughout Mexico, my mother was a homemaker and never worked outside the home. My grandparents on my mother's side: my mother's father was a 5 star general in the Mexican army (he is mentioned in the history books of Mexico), her mother was a homemaker with 12 children, so she worked

at home!!! My grandparents on my father's side: my father's father had silver mines and cattle in the state of Chihuahua and an "exchange house" which was the early form of banks, and his mother had 8 children, so she worked at home..

Mía was also concerned that I understood Mexican American cultural history as well.

Distinguishing the differences between immigrants from Europe and immigrants from Latin America, she disclosed a cultural interpretation of the conquests of the 1500's noting:

What happened to the Latin Americans was very different. There was a culture there. Then a dominant, conquering culture came over and dominated them (Mexican inhabitants)...their only source of support was their family unit and so there is a resentment against authority. There is a distrust against authority because authority is the oppressor. So, the family has always been the extended family, not the nuclear family. So, that includes the godfather and the godmother that become part of the family. So, within that family structure there is no room for the child to leave that parent and become independent with his life. They have a responsibility toward whoever is left in that family. Therefore, if the family unit here is in financial difficulty and the child is old enough to find work, he needs to do that.

Mía is sensitive to the distrust that some Mexican Americans may have toward authority. She understands why work is a priority over a college education and explains that this is her history, but her story is just a bit different because her father, although of Mexican descent, grew up in California, and returned to Mexico, and met and married the woman who later became Mía's mother. Mía explains:

Okay, so, I have a slightly different history in that my father grew up in California because of the Mexican Revolution. So, my father had a different upbringing and so in my household my father spoke to us in English all the time. So, English was a first language for me right from the beginning. And I grew up going to schools in Mexico...they were

bilingual schools. ...You have half of the day in English and half of the day in Spanish. That was in Mexico. My father had grown up in California and then went back to Mexico, married my mother and lived the rest of his life in Mexico. So, I was born in Mexico, but raised bilingually.

Mía spoke highly of her formative years of education indicating that she gained a wealth of understanding culturally in going to school with students who were of many different nationalities. She paints a verbal picture of her experience saying:

Schools in Mexico that are bilingual spend half of the day in whatever the culture of the school is French, German, Jewish, Italian...whatever...and we take half of the day and you learn all the subjects and all the topics that you would as if you were living in that country. And the other half of the day we take subjects in Spanish that you would in a Mexican school. So, I grew up bilingual. I am the youngest of four. My three older brothers all went to college in Mexico.

When Mía was in seventh grade her father died and her brothers supported the household. Upon finishing high school, Mía's mom encouraged her to marry. She did marry. She and her husband moved to California. There they had two children and then sometime later returned to Mexico to live by her mother. While the children were young Mía went to college in Mexico and received a teaching certificate. However, she did not stay in Mexico because as Mía explains,

There was a devaluation of the Mexican Peso that affected the businesses that we had in Mexico. My husband decided enough of this and he went to live in New York. So we moved to New York. I didn't want to do teaching in New York City. I did not quite like the school system there. So, then again, I went back to square one. I didn't want to teach there and went to work at a hospital. The children were seven and eleven.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

Perhaps the most significant place that impacted Mía's success in degree attainment was the hospital where she worked in the field of social medicine promoting health education. Mía, expounding on her boss' positive influence, states,

It started as a part time job. I was working there with a student from Chili who wanted me to help him with his English and his writing. I started to get involved in more and more projects...creative projects. Before I knew it I was doing a full time job. Well, a lot of it was health education because that was part of the projects that we did. Social medicine ... got involved with projects that were a lot about health education and health promotion. We would train women that were 'health promoters.' It was taken from a pattern of a program from South America where younger women who had kids and couldn't go off to work would be trained as health promoters would take care of a number of people in their community. Then, that got translated into taking care of people in their buildings.

Being involved in social medicine, Mía was responsible to make sure the women in training spoke enough Spanish to communicate well with those who were elderly and perhaps also sick. It was while Mía was working in the hospital, in her early thirties, that her boss recommend she go back to school for a degree. Her boss wanted Mía to have some type of credibility behind her name to justify all that she was doing by way of training, coaching, and teaching Spanish. Mía was open-minded to the suggestion of going back to school. She reflects back on her boss' requests and says with a smile,

So, my boss at that time said that I needed to get some kind of degree. What I was doing and what I was saying made a lot of sense, but there was a credibility thing. Once I wrote

a whole curriculum for a history of health care for Columbia, for the country of Columbia, and it was fine, but I did not have the credibility.

To Mía's disappointment, the university where she wanted to attend would not accept the credits she had earned while in Mexico. She was, however, accepted into a university that did accept her credits. She went on from there to earn her degree in Spanish education. At this juncture, in regards to significant people in Mía's journey toward degree attainment, other than her boss at the hospital, Mía's father had tremendous influence upon Mía's life. Mía reflects back to the early influence he had upon her life saying:

My father was a very supportive man. My father encouraged me even though I grew up in a culture where women have a role, a particular role, a submissive role...my father always encouraged me to be strong to go out and look for things and try new things...to not be discouraged easily...and to be strong.

When I asked Mía about her grades in the university, since she was multitasking as a wife, mother and full time employee, she reminisced again back to her childhood saying,

My father was always very supportive and very encouraging. But my father was always very demanding. It was always an "A" or an occasional "B." A "C" was out of the question. "B's" were always questioned...like 'What happened here?' Why do you have a 'B.' Why isn't this an 'A.' I am very thankful. I am very grateful that he did that. He set up a standard...and I didn't always get an 'A' because I also learned that getting A's all the way in life doesn't guarantee happiness. . . happiness or success or anything. In fact, very often the straight 'A' student finds himself or herself in a very uncomfortable situation because he usually doesn't know how to negotiate life. Because when you are perfect you do not belong to the human race.

In reviewing the significant factors in degree completion, both Mía's boss and father significantly impacted her success. Secondly, the metropolis city where Mía resided contributed

to her success in that the location was a place of opportunity. Thirdly, her employment at the hospital impacted her academic achievements as she was making a difference in social medicine by utilizing her bilingual assets.

On Being Bicultural

When I asked Mía about being bicultural Mía was anxious to talk about straddling two cultures in a most way. Coming from a home where English was the first language gave Mía an advantage when she moved from Mexico to New York City as a young wife and mother of two. Regarding her biculturality Mía notes:

It has always been an asset. It has been an asset because I don't get bogged down with one culture. I can always look at it from a different perspective. It is like looking at a coin from the other side. And I have always had that ability to do that whether I am here or whether I am in that culture. So, when I am in Mexico, I can see the Mexican culture and look at the American culture from a different perspective. And use that to my advantage. And when I am here in the American culture I can look at the Mexican culture from a different perspective and use that to my advantage.

When I asked Mía about her children and their biculturality she somewhat abruptly argued:

My kids are not bicultural. They are Americans. My oldest son is fluent in Spanish, but he sees it as a different language and he is happy to have a different language that he can use. He would never see himself as bicultural. He was in the Air Force. He sees himself more on the American side of himself. He only lived for a few years in Mexico when I got my teaching certification. So, he was young....and when he was eleven he came to live in New York...and he has lived in this country all of his life.

Mía's youngest son is also fluent in Spanish and remembers even less because he was young when he lived in Mexico. Indicating that both boys have had to deal with a certain amount of discrimination, Mía rested in the idea that neither of her sons was inhibited by their Hispanic national origin. It was somewhat of a sensitive issue to discuss in the interview in that discrimination is a difficult issue to contend with in regards to one's own children.

On Being an Adult Learner

Mía was in her thirties when she began a the bachelor degree program. When asked about her experiences as an adult learner, Maria reflected upon the challenges of juggling many responsibilities. However, she talked as though the challenges were purposeful and rewarding. She sound as though she somewhat missed the stress of working toward such a challenging goal. It almost seemed as though she would return to those hectic days in the snap of a finger. Smiling she said,

There was a point in my life when I had a full course... Writing papers...reading...and what have you. I had two kids...one husband that was very supportive. Very wonderful man, but I had to do internships too. I had a twenty hour a week job ... doing interviews. I would do interviews for women who had had a miscarriage. So, I would do them six days after the miscarriage, and I would do them six weeks after, and six months. These were two hour interviews, sometimes, on the phone.

Mía went on to explain that while she was working she was also doing an internship in a hospital emergency room in this metropolitan area. Chuckling she said,

...the emergency room is constantly busy....and I was there from eleven to seven. Sometimes I'd say, "Oh, my God it is seven o'clock I didn't even eaten lunch" ... because I was on my feet all day long. I not only had to do reports for my work, but I had to do

reports for school about my internship. There was a point in my life when I took 3 x 5 cards and divided them into seven columns because every minute of seven days a week I was either on the phone doing an interview or I was doing a paper or I was doing something for the kids or with the kids. I was doing something in the house....the laundry... it was either something for work, or for the internship, or for school or trying to live a life.

As an adult learner, Mía was persistent to accomplish every expectation her bachelor program required. She prided herself in her persistence. She prided in the support that her husband gave her as well. Mía attributes her persistence to the diligence and determination it took to transition from Mexico to the United States. She confidently states, *“In order for me to come and live in this country I had to be very persistent...to adapt to this culture...to survive in it...and then to be successful.”*

Closing

Mía’s story brings to my recollection Abalos’ (2003) theory of transformation whereby lived experiences are historically, politically, sacredly and personally contextually relevant. During the interview, I heard joy in her voice as she described her involvement in social medicine informing, perhaps, her sacred and political faces. I also saw her historical face in the opening of the interview when she sensitively discussed a colonized past. Mía is life-long learner living in the Borderlands metaphorically equally embracing Mexican and American cultures. The tone in Mía’s voice as she informed me that her sons were not bicultural, but rather fully American, indicated that Mía was keenly sensitive to the discrimination her sons encountered in their younger lives and that a historical past is still very much part of her present. She didn’t discuss the discrimination in any length; she only mentioned that her sons were victims.

Therefore, to make presumptions about her historical perspectives as they pertain to injustice would not be fair. However, the overall tone of her comments regarding biculturalism was somewhat ambiguous alluding to pride as well as distrust. Mía, like Anzaldua, has inhabited, and continues to inhabit, dual realities while shifting cultural frames as an adult student of yesterday and as an adjunct professor today. This component of Mía's cultural adeptness illuminates her fully bicultural nature proving to be useful in the professional world of higher education.

Chapter 8

Susana

Susana, a thirty-one year old Mexican American, achieved a Bachelor of Science degree in Family and Consumer Sciences. Graduating in 2005, Susana fulfilled a life-long dream of succeeding in the study of human nutrition and food science technology. Bringing to the forefront of this research the many terrains of learning encountered in the pursuit of a degree as a Mexican American, found learning in the higher education classroom to be her joy and her security. Susana's story is one of notable perseverance as her educational experiences span geographically from Mexico to Wisconsin.

Daughter of Mexican immigrants, Susana lived in Mexico as a child and remained there until her sophomore year in high school. Every day she traveled a stretch of about three miles across the Mexican US border into Texas to attend a privately owned elementary school. Then as a young adult, she attended community college in her home town in Texas. Later she traveled approximately 50 miles north into the state of New Mexico to attend a four year university. At the age of twenty-five, Susana then situated herself 1400 miles north in an academic program in the state of Wisconsin where she resides today. These travels credit Susana with a most unique story of success as her accomplishments were many. Here is Susana's story.

Background

Confidently speaking about her personal history, Susana begins her story by telling me of her grandparents' birthplace in Mexico and her grandmother's life as a teenage bride. Married at the young age of thirteen years old, Susana's grandmother was remarried two more times having a total of three husbands and seven sons. Susana's father was one of the last three boys born. As a

youngster, he and the family moved from Mexico across the border into the western region of Texas. There in Texas, Susana's father completed his education and received a high school diploma.

In speaking about her personal, historical background, Susana indicated that the academic experiences of her father's education in the 1970's were an important vein of her own personal history. So, she proceeded to speak from her heart about the politically challenging road of her father's attempts in degree attainment. Susana said that upon her father returned to Mexico to attend a university just south of the US Mexican border. It was a university that Susana would have liked to have attended herself. Yet, repercussions following her father's early exit from the university made it difficult for Susana to attend that particular university. These repercussions came as a result of her father's involvement in student strikes, politically driven vigils and underlying communist agitation.

Susana shared that the 1970's were an interim of violent insurgence of student revolts throughout Mexico. Communism was taking its toll on student vulnerability. As Susana explained, communistic brainwashing initiated student defiance and political unrest on many a campus in Mexico. Susana's father was caught up in the rush of activism calling students to unite and organizing politically oriented vigils. He also participated in a hostage detainment of a university director which perhaps flawed his university reputation despite his sincere efforts for a better tomorrow for the campus community.

During this season of political unrest, or what Susana calls a revolution, university archives were ignited into a blaze of fire. Authorities were suspicious of all student activists. Susana conveyed confidently that her father had nothing to do with the fire. Nevertheless, because university and government officials considered the fire a criminal act, Susana's father was intimidated by possible criminal accusations and left the university. The culminating consequence was that her father never completed his degree.

Wanting to briefly talk about her mother's hardships at the time of the student insurgency, Susana explained that her mother was also a student at the campus where political unrest was ravaging the community. Speaking compassionately, Susana expressed her mother's stress when she would hear Susana's father voice on the loud speaker shouting, "Unite!" Susana explains the scenario in this way:

My mom was shy and she said sometimes she would hear a voice saying 'Students Unite' and that was my dad! ... It wasn't like they would fight or anything like that. They would do strikes. My mom hated it especially when she would hear my dad's voice because then she knew there was going to be a strike. So, then what would usually happen at night they wouldn't let people come into the school. So, they would stay there at night and they would not let people come into the school. It had sort of become like a vigil, but they were protesting.

Susana's mother was upset by the political insurgency because she perceived it as an opportunity for the men to party and get drunk from too much alcohol. Susana explains:

My mom was hurt. She was hurt because they would bring alcohol... My mom did not like it because it really wasn't protesting. It really became a party... So, it would always be that all the guys, the males, would keep the vigil at night and be drinking. All the girls would keep it in the morning.

When Susana was done sharing about her parents' experiences at the university in northern Mexico she went on to tell of her own academic experiences.

Moving three miles north of the US Mexican border to a bustling Texas metropolis in her sophomore year of high school, Susana graduated high school from a public school. She then ventured to a community college. Her grades were good and she did well. From there she went on to complete her degree in nutrition and food sciences at a university in New Mexico.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

There are a number of significant factors that contributed to Susana's degree attainment in higher education. Mexico's severe recession in the 1990's, influenced Susana's parents to make a move from a struggling Mexican city just south of the U.S. Mexican border to a busy Texas metropolis just three miles north of the border. The move was important in the big picture of Susana's academic success in that she was now eligible for a Pell grant. The grant paid Susana's college tuition throughout much of her undergraduate years of study.

Another significant factor was simply the dream in her heart to be a nutritionist. She said the dream was born there when she was only twelve or thirteen years old. Dreams and successes go together. Susana said it this way:

Well, I always knew I wanted to be a nutritionist when I was little like twelve or thirteen. So I was always college bound. My sister, she really didn't like school. I enrolled in a community college immediately following high school graduation. ...I enrolled in 1998 in the advance track option and I finished in December of 2000... Then I transferred to a four year university in New Mexico.

Another significant factor that contributed to Susana's success in higher education was her academic counselor at the community college. Although the community college did not have a nutrition track, the counselor guided and advised Susana in enrolling in general course work that would transfer to the nutrition track at a nearby university in New Mexico. Proud of her community college accomplishments and the smooth transition to the university, Susana said,

I went and talked to my counselor at the community college and I told him what I wanted and he gave me a list of courses... Then I went and talked to a counselor at the university in New Mexico. So I had a check list of courses from either school. So, I just had to make

sure which ones would transfer... I never took courses that I didn't need or would not transfer.

Susana did well at the university, graduating in 2005 with a degree in Family and Consumer Science. However, this particular degree requires an internship in order for a person to be hired in the field of family and consumer science. Susana knew it was absolutely imperative to do an internship either at a local hospital or at the university. She knew there would be no employment in her field without the additional hours of study found only in an internship in nutrition science.

Listening to the beckoning call of a Mexican American friend, Susana went 1,400 miles north to seek an internship. To her dismay, Susana found very difficult circumstances facing her in the north. She describes her dilemma in terms of a vicious cycle of rejection on the part of employers and internship organizations:

I ended up applying for the internship, but I never got accepted because I didn't have enough work experience... So when I moved here I had a really hard time finding a job even though I had graduated... Well, I couldn't find a job because I didn't have the internship. I didn't have a master's. I couldn't get into the internship program because I didn't have enough work hours.

With this snag in her efforts to find work in the field of nutritional science, Susana's perseverance and determination led her to enroll in a program for certification as a nutritional educator. She succeeded in completing the required credit hours in a year and a half rather than the projected two years. Proudly Susana received her educator certification in that northern Great Lake region of Wisconsin where being bicultural/bilingual was not always to one's advantage.

On Being Bicultural

Susana's perceptions on being bicultural are influenced by her lived experiences as a Mexican American who once resided on the southern tip of west Texas and now is residing on one of the Great Lakes of North America. Believing that a person's perspectives on biculturality are shaped by where they live, Susana indicated that biculturality was not in her favor once she moved away from southern USA.

Susana also believes that a person's biculturality is informed by those who are within the social community whereby they interact and live their everyday lives. Finding some northerners to have misconceptions regarding the educational achievements of Mexican Americans, Susana felt Mexican Americans were misjudged as uneducated.

Moving to Wisconsin with the notion that her bilingual tongue would be an asset in her effort to be accepted into a university or hospital internship program, Susana found the notion to be only a delusion. She said, "I speak Spanish and because of the competition, I thought that would help. But that was not the case, not here."

On Being an Adult Learner

Susana differentiated academic lived experiences between her young adult/teenage years and those years as an adult learner in her twenties. Educational expectations were clear while in community college. She knew exactly what was expected of her and she demonstrated performance proficiency without much ado. Susana describes her learning experiences in community college this way:

When I was at Community college you have to do the homework and you basically want to

pass. If you don't do the homework then you feel like you have to cram or you really have to study for this... So, as long as you went to classes and did your homework you would get a good grade.

The years following her experiences in community college proved to be somewhat different. Expectations were less clear at the university level and labs were time consuming and sometimes difficult. Susana found that good study habits became the key to success and the key to degree completion. She describes the differences she found as she was older and in a more rigorous program saying:

But when I went to the university you really have to have good study habits. There were more classes and with my classes there were a lot of labs... There was a lot of homework. I think it just depends on the course. It was a gradual change.

Susana indicated that because the incline in course expectations was gradual she was able to grow with the changes. She never wavered under the academic pressures of the arduous science program.

Cultural Artifact

When asked about an artifact that would be representative of her culture, history or her identity, Susana described her somewhat unique, rather abstract, artifact. She said that her university experience was her non-tangible artifact. Voicing her thoughts in an apologetic way, Susana said that although her university experience is not something you can hold in your hand, it is something that defines who she is today. She explained it this way saying:

You know, to me going to school was always like my salvation. It was always a good thing. Obviously, because of the economic situation my parents struggled a lot. Then, there are always a lot of family issues that were going on when I was going to college. ... It is not the

kind of visual thing I could pick up and take with me wherever I want, but it is like an idea of going to school...Going to college was my security. That would be my artifact although it is not something you can hold.

Although Susana's artifact was not clay pottery or a Mexican piece of art, it was colorful reflecting the many terrains she occupied until she attained the prize, her four year university degree.

Closing

Susana's experiences in higher education are examples of a persevering spirit never wavering under pressure. Was this spirit conceived in her heart as a youth when her mother took her across the Mexican US border every day to school? Or, perhaps, it was nurtured listening to her father's chronicles regarding the revolution on his university campus. Be it maternal, paternal influence Susana captured the vision of a college degree and one day in 2005 that dream came to fruition.

The process of becoming bicultural began early in Susana's life when her parents enrolled her in a US private elementary school while they were residents in Mexico. The parents had captured the notion of double consciousness whereby they embraced white dominant cultural values while still valuing Mexican culture. Susana's parents were bicultural in wanting the best of both worlds. Susana reaped the benefits of her parents' initiatives and she too became bicultural. However, life was strikingly more difficult when she moved to Wisconsin. She was not near family or familiar surroundings. She was now living metaphorically in the borderlands and her bicultural identity was being tried by the fire of discrimination. In some ways, for a season, Susana merged into a survival mode when the internship she had hoped for was not on the

horizon, when a job was not landed, when family were far away and her bilingualism was not the asset she thought it would be.

Anzaldua (1999) references surviving at the crossroads. She refers to herself as an ear of corn, tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. She says, "Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong braced roots, she holds tight to the earth..." (p.103). So, too, Susana is like the indigenous ear of corn designed for preservation despite the conditions of the environment. Susana is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. However, she did more than survive the crossroads; she found a new place for herself in nutritional education. She succeeded one more time when odds were stacked against her. Susana will continue to thrive, because, she, like Anzaldua (1999) believes "lo Mexicana is in my system. I am a turtle. Wherever I go, I carry 'home' on my back (p.43)."

Chapter 9

Veda

Thirty-eight year old Veda, a Mexican American university graduate, completed her Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. Veda is one of seven children, all of whom did not graduate from high school. Her story is one of extraordinary perseverance and determination in the face of financial, cultural and religious obstacles.

Submissive to her parents' stringent stipulations forbidding her to enroll in higher education, Veda heeded to their convictions until she was age 29. At age 31 she set out on her journey to earn a four year university degree. With humble pride and exceeding joy, Veda graduated in May 2011 Summa Cum Laude.

Background

Veda's parents were born in northern Mexico. The third child, with two older brothers, Veda's mother died of a brain aneurysm when she was four years old. Her father remarried and the family of five lived in Texas. Father was a successful contractor, but when Veda was 17 her devastation struck the family as father lost his job. She speaks of the situation in these words:

He was a contractor. He knew a little English. He understood a lot of English. To this day, he understands a lot of English, but never ever studied it and never really has been able to express himself. My father had lost his job. He always worked. But at one point he lost his job, and not being an English speaker, it was hard for him to get another job. There was work in Michigan. So, that's what happened.

By this time, Veda's step mother had given birth to three children and was pregnant with the fourth. As she mentioned, her father knew of migrant work in Michigan. So, he moved his family

north. Veda's two other brothers stayed in Texas, but Veda, now in 10th grade, dropped out of high school to work the migrant fields with her father picking tomatoes.

Both father and step mother were fine with Veda dropping out of high school because they were deeply indoctrinated in the beliefs of the Jehovah Witness faith. Such doctrine forbids higher education for both males and females. Veda, however, never fully embraced the doctrines and always had a yearning for more education. Therefore, right before moving to Michigan, Veda earned her General Education Diploma (GED). She knew that somewhere in life's journey the GED would be very important.

Now living in Michigan, Veda picked tomatoes from sun up to sun down and also helped her step-mother with the new born baby as well as with the other children. She also gave much of her earnings to her father to help with financial responsibilities.

In our conversation, a very unselfish Veda praises her parents for instilling in her a deep love for literacy and for learning. She states:

I wanted to mention that because of my parents' involvement in the Jehovah Witnesses, I wasn't even in kindergarten and they taught me how to read. I learned to read Spanish because that was my language at home. But apart from that I learned Spanish because my parents would read to me and I learned even before I started kindergarten. So, they valued literacy, but not higher education. My father always said you're very intelligent. So, I was always receiving positive feedback.

A positive, intelligent Veda did not follow her dreams after marrying either. At age 19, Veda, married to a Mexican American Jehovah Witness, was again discouraged from considering earning a university degree. She described her husband as very traditional and wanted her to stay home. For many reasons the marriage did not last. Good, however,

came from it. When she had married she left Michigan and moved back to the south with a university right at her door step.

Now divorced, decisions had to be made. The first decision was whether or not to leave the Watch Tower Bible Society, namely the Jehovah Witnesses. The second decision was whether or not to enroll in the university. At 29 years old, Veda chose to leave the Watch Tower. She ventured on her own spiritual journey to a path filled with new and exciting liberties in academia.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

Several significant factors led to Veda's completion of her bachelor's degree. The first factor was her ability to walk away from parental, religious influence that had immobilized her academically for over twenty years. A yearning for academia had been stirring in her from as early as 11 or 12 years of age. It was in those preteen years she questioned the legitimacy of the Jehovah Witness stringent doctrine. Not only was she forbidden to go to college, but she never celebrated holidays such as Christmas, Easter or her birthday.

Veda's doubt in doctrine was rooted in things she knew about her birth mother. She tells why she somehow knew she was meant to go to college saying:

As an adult, I like to imagine that my mother would have hesitated to become a Jehovah's Witness had she known that they would strongly discourage college. In fact, I was told that before their conversion to the Jehovah Witnesses, my parents had already started to save a couple of thousand dollars intended for our college education. Unfortunately, that money was used for funeral expenses when my mother suddenly died of a brain aneurysm. On my mother's side of the family academics were always encouraged. My maternal aunts and uncles include attorneys and teacher in Mexico. One aunt, my

mother's youngest sister, was honored with a top award after 21 years as an ESL/Civics teacher who has taught more than 20,000 students. I can see now where my yearning for education and my love of learning originates from.

At 31 years of age, Veda, divorced from her husband, enrolled in general education courses at a nearby community college. She was thriving in an academic setting. Finally, as an undergraduate student, Veda won the affirmation of her professor. Yet, once again, the deep rooted cultural sense of responsibility to parents crept into this academic scene and Veda withdrew from school without finishing the semester. In sharing with me the significance of this experience Veda said, "...my step-mother had kidney failure. She needed dialysis... which is why I had to wait and I withdrew." Yet the impact that community college professor had upon Veda was priceless when the time came again to reenroll in a higher education. A year later, at age 32, Veda was enrolled in a university striving for a four year degree. She was never to be detoured again.

On Being Bicultural

Veda describes her biculturality as unique from other Mexican Americans because the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, as a religious sect, played a large role in who she was as a person. Veda explains her biculturality as a personal connectedness to some Mexican Americans and a disconnectedness to others. For example, she says:

I want to express another thing with you pertaining to my feelings and thoughts about being a bi-cultural Mexican-American. ...In the midst of a college campus with increasing cultural and ethnic diversity, I could relate to other Texas-Born Mexican Americans but not always as much when they were 2nd or 3rd generation. ...On top of that, ...I grew up in a traditional Mexican home minus the holidays (i.e., Christmas,

Easter, birthdays...etc.). A lot of the Mexican culture I can relate to, but there is much that I was denied.

Veda also shared about a disconnection with international students that attended the university with her. She explained that she felt she could often identify with Mexican American classmates and colleagues, but not with the foreign students. She did not offer an explanation regarding the disconnection with international students. However, she did say that those particular students were very different from those of Mexican American descent.

Cultural Artifact

When asked about a cultural artifact that would be symbolic of her life or academic endeavors, Veda had no hesitancy to share. She shared with me about a graded paper that she received back from a professor while attending community college. At a time in Veda's life when she was very unsure of her academic future, the comments on her paper coming from this particular professor spoke volumes to her confidence and encouragement to her spirit.

Not only were his written comments an inspiration to Veda, but his verbal affirmation was also priceless. Veda tells the scenario of how she found the strength and courage to pursue a degree in higher education after receiving academic feedback. She stated:

Basically something that would be symbolic in my personal education, I think that it was probably the comments and the feedback that I received in community college. Not only that...Then what happened was he started reading from the paper before giving it to us without mentioning names. Then I realized within the first two sentences that was my paper he was reading to the class! What he did was, he told the class ... "I want everyone to listen to this. This is what college writing should sound like." ...So, later, of course, he

didn't read the whole thing, he was so encouraging when I got my paper, I actually read his note and that encouraged me.

Veda expressed her gratefulness for that experience as it was a light to her academic journey for the next seven years.

On Being an Adult Learner

In a course entitled *Adult Instruction and the Community*, Veda, as an adult learner herself, found enlightenment in the readings assigned by the instructor. Such works from authors such as Steven Brookfield and Paulo Freire opened new worlds of critical pedagogy as Veda had never known. She raved about the instructor's gifted ability to ignite discussion that, as an adult learner, made Veda take a deeper look at life and learning for the adult student.

As far as Veda being an adult learner, she contended that she did not, nor does not today, take her education for granted. She stated:

...the fact is that I longed and yearned for education all those years. So, my willingness to continue was actually reinforced. It was a lot stronger (as an adult learner). Even my study habits were more serious and I was more dedicated.

Today, Veda is involved in language acquisition whereby she teaches English to refugee families. She talked particularly about an Iranian family with whom she loves the teaching experience. She is working for a school district that promotes adult and community education.

Closing

I walked away from this interview with so many questions as to how Veda was able to demonstrate such extraordinary perseverance in degree completion. I wondered where the

incredible determination came from throughout years of time. Then I reflected on Anzaldua's (1990) introductory writing in the edited book *Making Face, Making Soul* indicating that perseverance and profound determination is characteristic of women-of-color who are intellectuals. In those introductory remarks, Anzaldua defined what it means to be intellectual as women-of-color. Veda fits that description. Intellectual women-of-color are, first, the able to walk away from parental expectations and, secondly, suspicious of laws and walls. Veda walked away from parental expectations and was suspicious of the religious sectarian walls and laws of the Jehovah Witnesses. With these two significant competencies, Veda seized opportunity to pursue a degree in higher education. In Anzaldua's (1990) definition of an intellectual woman-of-color, she says they are incredibly hard working, busy beavers (endangered species) who actualize their dreams. Veda, no doubt, is an intellectual of this sort. For instance, I reflect Veda talking about a time in her life when she attended community college. She was 32 years of age. She enrolled only to drop out before the end of the semester. Perhaps, she allowed others to choose the terms for which she lived. Her step mother was very sick with kidney failure and Veda felt she needed to be there for her. Anzaldua would have described Veda's interim as an example of adaptability. However, Veda only dropped out of school for a season; thus, adaptability was a temporary deferrer. Adaptability, according to Anzaldua (1990), is forgetting to stand firm on an issue or allowing others to choose terms and outcomes. Calling adaptability the Mexican American's biggest weakness, Anzaldua confided it can also be the Mexican American's greatest strength. In light of the Veda's lived experiences, adaptability was Veda's biggest weakness, but today it is her greatest strength working in the field of Adult Education.

Through a *Borderlands* lens, Veda is the intellectual woman-of-color who resists parental expectations. However, in resisting their expectations she actually exceeded them. For Veda's parents attended her graduation showing their support. Their daughter took great strides to reach a dream, conquering all odds and unexpectedly her parents celebrated in Veda's degree attainment.

Determined to persevere from the time she received her GED, age 17, to the moment she attained her Bachelor's degree, age 38, Veda was fully bicultural. Always Mexican and always American, shifting cultural frames when deemed necessary, Veda has inspired me to reach for my own dreams in degree attainment. For this life lesson I am most grateful. I will forever be indebted to Veda for sharing her amazing story of perseverance, determination, patience and hope in the midst of conflict, struggle and cultural disjuncture.

Chapter 10

Daniel

“We were honored at the White House in 2006 for Hispanic Heritage Month! ... We actually got on their mailing list and they invited us to all their Spanish events ... We met the Prince of Spain... and several celebrities!”

Honored at the White House in 2006, Daniel and his late wife were recognized for their involvement in an organization that has helped hundreds of Hispanics prepare for US naturalization and acquire citizenship. Daniel, who became a US citizen in 1999, is now 42 years old and deeply appreciative of his Mexican American heritage. He serves on the board of two universities and does everything within his realm to secure scholarships for students seeking funding. After losing his first wife to illness, Daniel is now remarried, the busy father of two teenagers and manages a successful bilingual weekly news publication. Here is Daniel’s story.

Background

Moving from Mexico to the US at the age of two, Daniel began his life in rural America. Both parents are native Mexicans who do not speak English even today. Intelligent and ambitious, Daniel’s father was an agricultural worker who has a first grade education. After World War II, Daniel’s father entered the US legally upon an invitation of the US government. He was invited as a bracero, namely an agricultural guest worker.

During the 2nd World War, the US agricultural market had a shortage of laborers. Mexican farm laborers were encouraged to join the US agricultural workforce. Thus, Daniel’s father was given a work permit to do farming in the northwest corner of the US where harvesting potatoes, onions, asparagus, apples, cherries and plums was a flourishing and thriving industry.

Soon after arriving in the US, Daniel's father was involved in recruiting guest workers for the bracero program. At a time when importation of labor was desperately needed, Daniel's father had opportunity to not only grow the agricultural labor market, but legally bring friends and relatives into the US through recruitment opportunities.

Daniel, one of four children, speaks well of his family. Referring specifically to his father in the opening line, Daniel goes on to reminisce in an amusing reflective tone of his siblings saying:

He was a migrant field worker...I have two older sisters. They left school to join the work force when they first started high school... They worked in a potato processing plant. (They didn't graduate from high school)... My younger brother, he graduated from the university. He did everything on time. I was the first one in my family to go to college.

Daniel then reflects on the difficulty his parents had with writing in English. He shares that he would often have to sign his father's name on important documents because his father could not write his own name in English. Daniel chuckled as he remembers using his own left hand to sign his father's name so that the signature would not look like Daniel's signature. Although, Daniel chuckles today, he also discusses the great responsibility on him as son and interpreter. Nevertheless, Daniel is proud of his father and mother believing they were both influential in his degree completion success.

Daniel, like mom and dad, had some academic struggles in grade school. In public elementary school, he had a devastating setback in fourth grade. He states:

But at one point they actually took me out of regular classes when I was in fourth grade and put me in special education... I don't know if they just didn't want to deal with me or what. But what happened was that year I got moved to another school. At the other school, I took the opportunity, well, it was more out of embarrassment, when they asked me what reading level I was in meaning what color book I was reading in because they

had different color coded books that determined your reading level, I was thoroughly embarrassed. I didn't even have a book! I was a special education kid! I just looked at one of the classmates and I said to the teacher "Oh I'm in the red book just like so and so is. Then, they treated me as if I was royalty because out of the sixty kids enrolled in the reading class there were only five kids that were in the red book!

Chuckling with amusement, Daniel told me that since he professed to be a high level reader, he would have to prove he was an excellent reader! Fortunately, Daniel was given the red level reading book on a Friday. He then spent the entire weekend learning to read! He taught himself to read aloud. Making the best of the weekend, Daniel read the book at least twenty times. Fully prepared on Monday morning, Daniel read in front of the class with ease and confidence. The teacher was impressed. He reflects saying:

We had to read multiple times and you never knew which paragraph you had to read. I sounded like I was brilliant at that point! So, there is one thing I learned about perseverance and that is there is no penalty. ...If you were in a race and you were to start before the clock you would get a penalty, but with reading a book there's no penalty for starting ahead of time.

This incident changed Daniel's life because Daniel was no longer a special needs student as he was in his former school. In the new school he was received as an accelerated learner! The former special education curriculum was chock full of busy work and memorization activities. Now, in accelerated education, Daniel was expected to develop higher level thinking skills, accomplish project based assignments, explore concepts and focus on content areas. Thriving in the new accelerated learning environment, Daniel far exceeded his own academic expectations. He went on to graduate from high school with high honors and then enrolled in community college with great gusto and enthusiasm believing to succeed in computer science.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

After attending community college for two semesters, Daniel then transferred to a state university. In the discipline of computer science, he did exceptionally well in his course work. However, to his dismay, Daniel found himself in financial difficulty during the third semester. The awarded financial aid was not sufficient to cover all the tuition expenses. Having need of employment, Daniel visited a local job fair. It was there he was offered an internship with Microsoft.

Understanding that the internship would take him away from his university studies for about nine months, Daniel took an academic sabbatical and withdrew from the university temporarily. However, the nine month experience turned into a two year practicum. At the close of two years, Microsoft offered Daniel a full time computer programming position. Daniel took the position and enjoyed the work immensely. He shared about those years with Microsoft with much enthusiasm saying:

After the internship they offered me a fulltime job and I just stayed. I loved it! I was working probably about twelve hours a day and commuting an hour each way. So, all I wanted to do when I got home was eat and sleep.

From 1991 to 2000, Daniel worked for Microsoft with no reservations about forfeiting his education. In 2000, Microsoft offered its employees college tuition reimbursement. The offer was appealing to Daniel. Nonetheless, by this time in his career, he was doing well in his position in the company and he had not been thinking about returning to school. Even so, there had been times through the years when Daniel, as an employee, wished he had a bachelor's degree. Validation issues would arise now and then on a corporate level prompting Daniel to reassess his need for a degree. Daniel explained it this way:

The place where I was working I was elevated to Director of Information Technology and I had a team of five programmers. I earned my spot there in terms of the quality work I was doing and my ability to work with costumers. I did business well... To have a degree behind me... (I was functioning fine)... became more of a validation issue.

Daniel made the decision in 2000 to return to school and take advantage of the tuition reimbursement opportunity. With three semesters of credits under his belt, Daniel was hoping to complete the degree program in a few short years. Unfortunately, those credits he had earned some eight years earlier did not all transfer. Daniel expresses disappointment as he reflects on his enrollment experiences.

I went in the evening because by then I had two kids and a wife...two kids ...so I went in the evening. I was still working full time. The depressing part is that because I didn't go back to school for eight years the really depressing part was that even though all my credits transferred the challenge was that there were a lot of requirements.... And my two years of college worked out to be less than one year... That was so discouraging because they were all counted as electives... Yeah, you're thinking in your head I've got this much in the bank, but then you're short-changed... So, I literally had to go four years. It is very difficult to finish a degree in four years. But I did it in four years!

On Being Bicultural

At the onset of our interview, Daniel's pride regarding his bicultural heritage was beaming. Daniel's voice had no reservations about the multiple advantages of being bicultural. He was quick to clarify, however, that although he is bicultural he is not the voice of all Hispanics. He explained, *"I always preface that my experience with the university is not the Hispanic experience because everyone's experiences are different. Some are from different countries. They each have their own experience."*

Perpetuating great enthusiasm regarding Hispanic diversity, Daniel told me about a bilingual news publication that he has been involved in from its conception. It is a paper that voices thoughts, experiences and opinions of a host of professionals and nonprofessionals of whom many are bicultural.

The newspaper's purpose is to serve as an informative resource to both Anglo and Hispanic communities. Explaining that he wants to print pertinent and relevant information, Daniel's publication addresses practical life issues such as how to succeed in undergraduate programs to issues about immigration health care. Daniel's Mexican American bicultural heritage finds homage, as well as a political platform, in bilingual journalism.

On Being an Adult Learner

"I was working full time and I graduated from the university top of my class! I graduated with a 3.99 GPA (grade point average). I was going to contest that but I didn't."

As an adult student in his thirties, Daniel graduated with high honors in 2004. He chuckled with me during the interview as he talked about contesting his 3.99 GPA. He thought maybe that final score should have been a 4.0. Nevertheless, he was pleased with his overall performance.

Daniel discussed the importance of developing friendships and rapport with professors in the course work programs. Unlike in his university semesters in his teens and early twenties, Daniel, eight years later, as an adult learner, made intentional effort to communicate with his professors. He allowed academic relationships to flourish. In hind sight, Daniel concludes that those student-to-teacher relationships were influential in his degree completion success. He stated that rapport is important because it can often opened doors of career opportunity. Daniel gives this example:

My professor took a lot of time to, not only build a relationship within the classroom, but he took a lot of effort to get me involved in things. He's the one who got me involved in the Honor Society. ...even afterwards, actually, I made it on to a management book that is used in the Management 201 class... My story got told... What was neat was that this publication called different professors throughout the country and they were asking for different stories. So, they called me up. ...what I'm finding is if you had a really good relationship with your professor, they are the ones who will give you opportunities before they are even public.

As there were eight years between Daniel's freshman and sophomore years, he clearly differentiated his experiences as a young undergraduate and as an adult graduate student. He is convinced that success comes to those who put forth effort. He stated, "You know, most people think you are either smart or you're average, but it really doesn't have anything to do with IQ level. ...It has to do with your effort!"

Closing

In light of Abalos' (1998) strategies of transformation pointing toward a new and better society and in view of Daniel's effort to educate through information technology, a connection of ideologies between the two men become apparent. For example, both men explored the means by which people establish justice without reverting to the use of violence. Abalos (2007) explored justice theoretically and Daniel explored it through journalism. They both expound on the importance of living in the Anglo community while holding true to their Mexican heritage. Daniel continues to cultivate a border straddle as a Mexican and as an American through continuously finding opportunities to voice the opinions of both Angos and Latinos through his

newspaper. Likewise, Abalos (1998) creatively penned a title for this bicultural straddle calling it *insiders/outsideers*. Abalos, in the phrase below, defines this strategy of transformation noting:

This means living in the midst of the story of capitalism but not be seduced by it. To live in the world, but not of it, to live in the belly of the story of power, but not be of it, is a strategy of using the resources of the system not as intended, that is, to join the powerful by pursuing self-interest and power, but rather to gain leverage by which to bring about a new and better society (p.172).

Distinctively, Abalos' (1998) descriptiveness is similar to Daniel's lived experiences in utilizing informational resources to touch and transform one life at a time. Be it through scholarships, or education or journalism, Daniel has found ways to utilize social resources to better his community.

Daniel actually lives the roles of both insider/outsider. Throughout Daniel's life there has always been evidence of leverage. From out-smarting the fourth grade public school system in his reading class to being honored at the White House for his bicultural accomplishments with the Hispanic community, Daniel is a leverage seeker! As a fourth grade student, he most likely was not thinking of a new and better society, but as he grew into adulthood he learned how to create opportunities guiding and informing better ways of living.

In Abalos' (1998) attempt to focus on strategies of transformation with intent of constructing new forms of justice he relates:

Our task is to create a parallel structure based on justice and love. In practical terms this involves our young people getting good educations, so that they can become excellent doctors, lawyers, accountants, teachers, carpenters, police officers, and administrators. Once they have these skills, they are free to make a personal and political decision to use their competence to bring about a new and better history for people who are another face of the deepest sacred depths

Freeing the sacred face for the purpose of liberation from the control of the wider society is Abalos' (1998) unique philosophy of how Mexican Americans can break from the past and generate a more loving and compassionate way. Likewise, it is evident from Daniel's lived experiences that he, too, believes in creating parallel structures empowering the Hispanic community for a better tomorrow.

In practical terms, Daniel moves Hispanics forward in the process of becoming bicultural. He finds ways to obtain access for them to pursue and attain US citizenship. He encourages his Hispanic community in higher educational pursuits and he inspires people, both Anglo and people of color, to write relevant information for his newspaper. He continues to open opportunities for people of all walks of life building on their competencies to impact a better tomorrow. Daniel has inspired me to look at the resources placed at my own doorstep and utilize them toward new and better tomorrow. Observing Daniel's biculturality, Daniel focuses on what he has attained through his American experience rather than what he has been lost. Even in losing his first wife to illness, a wife he spoke so highly of throughout the interview, he went on to expound on his new life remarried. Daniel has inspired me to negate some of my own pessimistic notions to create more purposeful perspectives on living...turning my personal face toward a better tomorrow.

Never seeming to be without hope, Daniel talked briefly about his religious background. He, like me, attends a church called the Assemblies of God. It is a global fellowship with churches all over the world. Having a good understanding of the faith principles of the Assemblies of God and knowing Daniel has been attending for the last twenty years, I made a connection between Daniel's faith and his zealous love for people. Daniel described himself as an advocate for ethnicities of all cultures with a special affection for Hispanic Americans. He has made a difference in so many lives and continues to do so today with extraordinary zeal, spontaneity and cultural sensitivity. I am deeply indebted for the inspiration that Daniel has spoken into my life. I will forever be changed.

Chapter 11

Jóse

I would like to say some of the work that I did with my father taught me a lot. Let me just say that the work was an indication of what I would be doing if I didn't get a degree.

Jóse, who will be 25 years old at the close of this year, made the above comment referring to the labor accompanying a vocation in agriculture. Jóse has worked long hours with his father in the orchards and harvest fields. He believes those experiences served as an incentive to seek a career outside of agriculture.

While in a US high school, it was a Spanish teacher who suggested an alternative to Jóse's future in agriculture. She planted a notion in Jóse's heart to be a Spanish educator. The notion was like a seed that began to flourish when Jóse was seventeen years of age. The seed grew into a dream and today that dream has come to fruition.

Now, with a bachelor's degree in teacher education, Jóse teaches in a bilingual charter school in rural south central Pennsylvania. He is proud to be a state certified teacher. Through the summers, he works in a remedial program for children of migrant farm workers. From a village in Mexico to the classrooms of America, here is Jóse's story. He tells how his bicultural experiences informed his degree attainment in higher education and gave him a future of promise and mobility.

Background

Both of my parents were born in (city), Mexico. ...My dad immigrated to the United States in the late 80's as a migrant worker. ...I believe in 1987 he became a legal resident. ...I grew up in Mexico up until the age of 16. Then my dad became a citizen in 2000. He filled out the papers and then called for us to

come to become legal residents of the US. ...My younger brother came first. Then I finished the school year (in Mexico) and then later I came (to the US).

Jóse spent his childhood and most of his teen years living with his mother and brothers in Mexico. His father traveled back and forth to the US as a migrating agricultural laborer. Nonetheless, a day finally came when the family transitioned to central Pennsylvania where both parents were hired to work at fruit packing plants. Jóse explained that the ultimate reason for the family move when he was 16 pertained to education. He states: “*Well, the main reason that we came to the United States was so that we could study. So, we could get a college education. So, that was pretty much the reason that we came.*”

Jóse’s father has a 6th grade education, while his mother has a 3rd grade education. Both parents are fluent in Spanish. However, his mother had to learn Spanish upon moving to the US because she only spoke the dialect of her native Mexican community. Jóse’s father understands English fairly well because of his years traveling from Mexico to the US as a migrant laborer. Nevertheless, he speaks very little English.

Thus, the family move to the US placed enormous responsibility on Jóse, and his brothers, to translate for their parents, even though at the beginning their own English was limited, and they learned quickly.] Jóse’s parents are dependent upon their sons’ language skills in legal municipalities, health facilities and educational institutions. Yet, even with grave linguistic responsibilities, Jóse never complains about having to continually offer bilingual assistance. On the day of our interview, Jóse was taking his mother to the doctor so that he could interpret for both the physician and his mother. A sense of loving and amazing commitment to family is evident throughout Jóse’s story.

Significant Factors in Degree Completion

When Jóse arrived in the US he was 16 years old. He knew only a few words of English. He settled comfortably as a new resident enrolled in a local public high school. Part of the reason for Jóse’s

sense of security was that there were other students in his class who were from migrant farm backgrounds. José explains:

The first year the transition was smooth because there were other students there that I could relate to because we had the same issues. ...We could not speak the language. So, we kind of helped each other. And I was taking English classes.

A year later, at 17 years old, José's family moved to a new community about forty-five minutes from where they were living. Enrolled now in a different high school, José began to grasp the paradigms of the English language. Taking a course in Spanish, José did exemplary. His Spanish teacher saw great potential in him and encouraged him to consider teaching Spanish professionally when he finished high school. José took his teacher's suggestion seriously. In our interview, José reflected back almost seven years to the conversation he had with that teacher. José commented to me saying:

I was thinking about seeking a profession, but I did not know, like, where to go as far as information or looking up colleges, or, the wherewithal... like the materials that I would need to gather. But, I remember my Spanish teacher saying to me, "Why don't you become a Spanish teacher? ... So, I guess I started there.

Not only was the Spanish teacher influential in encouraging José to seek out a professional career in education, but his guidance counselor was equally influential. Bringing news to José about a federally funded program for migrant and seasonal farm worker families, the guidance counselor gave the program information to José encouraging him to apply. The program was, and continues to be, designed specifically to assist first-year college bound children of agricultural workers. The program, CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program), provides support in specific areas such as tuition, social orientation and academic tutoring.

Jóse gave some consideration to applying for the funding. However, he negated the funding feeling unsure about engaging in a largely populated university campus. Thus, upon high school graduation, Jóse attended a local community college while working full time in an agricultural packing house not too far from home.

After two years at a community college, majoring in education, Jóse reconsidered the opportunities offered by CAMP. He then applied to the state university through CAMP and was accepted in 2007. Transferring from the community college to the university, Jóse became a recipient of CAMP funding. The following summer, CAMP organized a “Parent Weekend” which Jóse and his parents attended. They were warmly welcomed by the university CAMP staff. Jóse talked about CAMP in general saying:

We interview. Then in the summer they have CAMP for the families, for the parents, where they come and stay for a weekend.... It was an overview of the program. We had like a picnic. ...it was helpful because we got an overview. Before the other students arrived, we arrive a week earlier... and we have different workshops... They give us pretty much information about careers and ummm... Yeah, to get familiar with the campus. ...After that, we pretty much live in the same dorm. The boys all live in the same hall and the girls all live in the same hall. Then, we also went to the CAMP office where we met... like a lounge. We went there to get help and work on papers. They offered tutors for our classes.

Jóse went on to expound on the support he personally received from the CAMP coordinator. He explained that she went the extra mile to help him, and other CAMP recipients, to develop skills

necessary to encourage continued enrollment and ultimately graduate with a four year degree. {up to here]

In addition, the coordinator directed José toward support services to assist him with his educational and personal needs through tutors, weekly stipends and book purchases. The CAMP support services played a significant role in José's degree attainment because the services, as well as the people associated with the program, encouraged José to navigate the university experience with confidence, stability and, perhaps most important of all, a sense of belonging. With enthusiasm and expectancy, José organized a CAMP soccer team which he coached every semester until graduation.

When asked about facets of the CAMP program which were unimpressive, José expounded on the following:

Okay, there were a lot of students complaining about the hours we had to do. So, Sunday through Wednesday, between six and ten, we had to complete six hours. They were study sessions. We had to study and do our homework, but I guess it was for our own benefit. ...We were accountable and we were required to do that. We were getting twenty dollars per week to do that. ...We pretty much would get that in cash... An upper classmen would provide hours and she would have to put her signature on a piece of paper to show that we attended.

Although José talked about the accountability issue as being unimpressive due to hourly weekly requirements, the tone of his voice and the smile on his face indicated a sense of pride and accomplishment. Difficult as it was, he had complied with program expectations.

José also mentioned that some CAMP recipients did not like the idea that faculty and counselors chose the recipient's first year of classes. José explained that those first year classes were selected based on how well you would do academically. José commented saying, "Well, the program is funded so they pick the classes they know you will do well. They also give you your books."

Overall, José portrayed an immensely positive attitude regarding CAMP's tutorial support, financial assistance and social orientation. He felt as though CAMP was initially responsible for integrating him into the university community at large. José's brother is graduating in the spring of 2013 from the same university and has experienced many of the same amenities that José has appreciated.

On Being Bicultural

When discussing his bicultural heritage, José self-assuredly explained that being bicultural is to his advantage. He talked about various facets of his biculturality pertaining to his perspective on diversity. Biculturality is an asset enabling him to be sensitive to multiple cultures. José says it this way:

Well, for me I think I see it as an advantage because I have other ways of looking at things. I am able to look at one side then the other side. I am more sensitive to other cultures. So, I see it as an advantage.

José also was involved in campus clubs during his university years. More specifically he talked about a Mexican American club entitled MASA (Mexican American Student Association). José was enthused saying:

I was involved in MASA, Mexican American Student Association. Their purpose was, we made room for the Mexican-American on campus or Latinos, but they didn't have to be Latino. It was a club about diversity. But we were there mainly to serve the Mexicans. We would celebrate their traditions like Day of the Dead. We would usually meet weekly. The leaders would meet weekly, but the others would meet every two weeks. I was also in the Spanish club. And there were other clubs.

The camaraderie with other colleagues in the various clubs that José participated was important to him. He indicated that many club members demonstrated an interest in leadership. As José was interactive in

these clubs he stayed connected to his own Mexican culture. He mentioned in our interview that clubs were student led. José was impressed that faculty acted strictly as advisory supporters.

While thriving in his service to Mexican Americans through various bicultural initiatives, José went on an intercultural service trip to Mexico. There he developed a deep appreciation for leadership. He went to Tijuana, Mexico as a volunteer to help at a children's orphanage. I was privileged to see the photographs of that experience. The pictures depict José's interest and enthusiasm in bicultural volunteer work. José explained that on that particular trip to Mexico he acted as a translator for his university colleagues. Many of them did not speak Spanish. Thus, José supported his reasoning as to why being bicultural as a student in higher education was advantageous and culturally beneficial.

On Being an Adult Learner

It was after completing two years in a community college that José reached for an opportunity to attend a four-year university. Once he was enrolled he lived on campus in a dormitory and gave full attention to his studies. Nevertheless, the difficult side to the transition was that the work-load at the university was much more intense and challenging than the work load at the community college. Thus, in his early adult learning years, he found himself needing to be more responsible and seriously engaged academically regarding his scholastic performance. José commented saying:

I think the level of work at the community college was simpler because I was just going part time. But at the university they required more work and I had to be more committed and more responsible. I took it more serious. Also because of the CAMP program, I had to do well. I wanted to do well because it was going to be worth it and because I had a profession and career in mind. Because of the profession or the major that I had I wanted to do well.

As mentioned in an earlier section of José's story, José negated the opportunity to go to the university right out of high school because he did not feel ready to be involved in a large university community. The opportunity seemed overwhelming to him at the time. However, that sense of readiness arose later. In 2007, José believed he was ready to leave home, live in a dorm and become involved in campus academics, sports and clubs. He had acclimated himself to college expectations while he was in the community college and then transitioned with a sense of expectancy and assurance to a university. There was an element of maturity that came with the adult learning years that was void when José had first graduated from high school.

Closing

Jóse is the youngest of the participants, and that while he fits the criteria of being an adult student in that he graduated when he was 24, there are some elements that are reflective of traditional students, such as living in the residence hall. However, the significant factors that influenced Jóse's success in degree completion, namely his future aspirations to avoid a career in agriculture, funding, and support from university staff and family are similar to significant factors that influenced Mayo in his degree attainment and Mayo was 29 years old when he began a bachelor degree program. The seven years that Jóse worked on his bachelor's degree, these three factors guided his learning experiences and engaged him in culturally relevant experiences in higher education. Jóse thanked CAMP for his successes.

The first of the significant factors leading to degree completion, future career aspirations, was the initial reason Jóse set out to earn a college degree. The university then provided the an outstanding culturally relevant program initiating a positive beginning in Jóse's academic journey. The second factor in degree completion was funding. When it came time to enroll in the university, funds were in place. After two years at a community college and being a full time agricultural packing-house employee, Jóse was ready

for a rigorous university program experience. He would not, however, have done it without a federally supported program provided through the university.

Needless to say, in José's story there is a distinct connection between federal funding and timing. When José had the funding, as an 18 year-old high school graduate, he did not have the maturity to embrace a large university. Thus, he turned down the funding. However, as he matured socially and academically during his years at a community college, José reached a place where he was ready for a rigorous university experience. Fortunately, the federal funding was still available when José decided to enroll in a university. The social/academic maturity and available monies, at least for José, needed to go hand and hand in order to work toward a more prosperous academic future. José's readiness and the government's funds came together. José took full advantage of both in order to succeed in a higher educational environment.

The third factor that was influential in José's degree completion was the sense of community that was part of the CAMP program. The Latino friends provided a culturally relevant environment from which José's ethnic identity flourished. Thus, he was ambitious and productive in serving the campus community through various clubs, organizations, trips and sports.

Guy (1999) expounds on the importance of culturally relevant adult education for educators who work with traditionally marginalized social groups because cultural relevance can serve to combat discrimination. Guy expounds on the "*nature of the fit between learner's cultural backgrounds and their educational experiences*" (p. 12). The fit establishes criteria for success or failure. Thus, it was important during José's years in higher education that he faced minimal experiences of exclusion and marginalization. His particular university was aware of how cultural domination affects learners in the educational setting. So, the university developed CAMP to minimize the potential for exclusion.

José's university experience is an example of the minimization of marginalization. It was evident from our interview that José prided himself in experiences of inclusion, namely president of MASA, head coach of the CAMP soccer team and prominent translator for the trip abroad to

Mexico. Thus, the CAMP program is to be commended for its efforts to create a cultural democracy from which ethnic students thrive and succeed. Such a campus democracy enabled José to experience a mainstream society where cultures of diversity coexist! Bravo to CAMP! Bravo to José for discerning the good in opportunities of inclusion!

Chapter 12

Mayo

“How in the world could I go to the university if I can’t speak English? I don’t know how to read and I don’t know how to write!”

These are the words of Mayo, a 49 year old Professional Staff member at a university working as an Extension Agent. Today, he serves in the Extension Department of a western state university where he received both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in higher education. As a Mexican American university student back in the 1990’s, Mayo was a scholarship recipient of a program entitled CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program). This summer, he was honored as the 2012 graduation keynote speaker for that same university. Now a US citizen, Mayo owns sixteen acres and what he calls his “dream house.” He is happily married and has three daughters.

Holding a Bachelor’s degree in Liberal Studies and a Masters in Interdisciplinary Studies with a major in forestry and a minor in adult education, Mayo is grateful to those who impacted his life along the road to degree completion. Sharing in our interview about his bicultural experiences, which impacted his success in higher education, Mayo tells his story with undaunted enthusiasm. From migrant field worker to 4H coordinator at Oregon University, Mayo expounds on significant moments, people and places that copiously influenced his life. Here is Mayo’s story.

Background

Growing up in a simple Mexican village without running water, electricity or public facilities, Mayo and his seven brothers and seven sisters worked on the family

farm. Laboring long hours harvesting crops, Mayo found time to attend elementary school, grades first through sixth. Mayo also acknowledged that there were weeks he missed school because he could not be there as the agricultural responsibilities that went with each season had priority over school. Despite difficulties and interruptions, Mayo completed through third grade in his village's public school. After third grade, Mayo traveled daily to a nearby town in order to attend fourth through sixth grade. He explains his experience in these words:

The public school only offered elementary school up to 3rd grade...For anybody else that wanted to get an education they had to go to a different town that was about 10 kilometers (7 miles) away to the next town...So in order to go we had to go either on foot, horseback or bicycle...It was a dirt road so it was very difficult if it was rainy. I would go on bicycle...But I did finish. So, I did that for three years. But since I wanted more of an education the middle school was even further. It was about 25-30 miles... But me and my brothers actually had to help my father cultivate the land... So I didn't have any more education.

Working diligently for his father, Mayo spent many long hours in the fields. Often times, while working in the heat of the day, he would be extremely thirsty. Nonetheless, he could not break for a drink because the work was demanding. Fatigued from the hardships of migrant agricultural labor, in his twenties Mayo began dreaming of finding work in the city. Yet, at this point in his life he could not speak English. Therefore, a city job would be out of the question.

When his cousins encouraged him to cross the US border with them through illegal means, Mayo took the challenge and made several dangerous attempts to enter the

US undocumented. His cousins knew of work in the US and told him they could possibly get him a job. Mayo said he tried to cross the border more than once. He was caught several times and was returned to Mexico each time. Finally, one day Mayo entered the US and followed his cousins north along the western pacific shore. His cousins knew of work in an agricultural community in the farthest western corner of the United States. So, Mayo lived with his cousins and searched for work.

After about three months, Mayo was employed. Nevertheless, like the agricultural work of Mexico, US migrant work was difficult and physically taxing as well. With long laborious hours, Mayo began again to dream again of a city job. Eventually, he found work in a slaughter house and worked there for about three years. The story was the same as far as the demand of physical labor and the weight of responsibilities the job demanded.

Injured time and time again in the slaughter house, Mayo found that he had developed painful tendonitis in his hands. He was ready for a turn in his career when he heard about a general education diploma program offered in Spanish at a nearby university. He enrolled in the program and soon earned his GED (General Education Diploma). When I asked him if the program had been difficult as far as curriculum was concerned and if he struggled with assignments, he responded:

Nothing, nothing is hard compared to working in agriculture... Nothing is hard compared to agriculture. When I was working in agriculture I would work ten, fifteen, twenty hours a day in the heat... To sit in a chair with air conditioning or on a couch. So, sitting in a chair isn't hard or writing a paragraph here or there.

At this point Mayo was on a road to further education, though he was not aware of his academic potential. In Mayo's mind, his sole purpose in attaining his GED was to stay out of the arena of agriculture and to be situated in an occupation that would be less

physically grueling. He began the GED program with little ability to read or write in Spanish. When he finished the program, Mayo could read and write well in Spanish. More importantly, he had caught the attentive eye of one of the program counselors, who became one of his mentors.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

Mayo opens this segment of our interview with all smiles. Even though he received his GED twenty two years ago, at age of twenty-seven, he is still amazed at the encouragement he received from the counselor of the GED program. He shares his enthusiasm in these words:

I was driving a tractor and working on a farm and I got my GED so that I would not have to be in the fields. But the counselor said, "If you don't speak English it doesn't matter if you have a GED or not... How would you speak to the people about getting a job? If you knew English, then you could get a job... I know you have two girls...What do you want for those girls, for their future? ...if you want your daughters to become what you wish, you have to show them the road.

These were powerful words because the counselor touched a sensitive life chord, namely his love for his daughters. The counselor began to tell Mayo about an educational scholarship program entitled C.A.M.P. that could assist Mayo financially in his studies at a university. The particular university that was offering the scholarship was situated about five hours away in a neighboring state. Mayo explained to me that he could not believe what he was hearing, and recounted his conversation with his counselor:

Mayo asked, "How would you want me to go to college?" And he said "Mayo, when you came here you couldn't read or write in Spanish, but now you have made so much progress!"

...You know, sometimes we are naive of our potential or the talents that we have, but this guy was able to see the potential!

Mayo expressed gratitude toward this counselor who saw potential in him. At this point in our interview, the tone in Mayo's voice indicated that he continues to be amazed that someone believed in him enough to encourage him in taking a giant step toward higher education. The enthusiasm I heard was as if this all occurred yesterday. Yet, in reality, it was many years ago.

So, Mayo and the counselor did all the paper work entailed in the application process for enrollment in the university through C.A.M.P. Mayo went home that day to his job and family and never thought anymore about the conversation or the application. Then six or more months later, Mayo received a phone call from the neighboring university where he had applied for enrollment. The woman on the phone informed him that he was accepted to the university. His decision as to whether or not to attend had to be immediate or the opportunity would go to someone else.

Explaining to me that the decision to attend the university was difficult, Mayo expounded on deterring factors such as: his job was secure, his home was nice, his family was happy and he had just purchased a new car. Then Mayo said that he looked at his hands, arms and much of his body which had been badly burned from welding required at the mechanic shop. He said looked at those burns thinking the educational opportunity is, perhaps, what he and his family needed. In thinking about his social and family context, I asked him what his wife thought of him going to the university. He

smiled and somewhat chuckled saying, “You know this lady believes so much in me that she said, “Well, it is up to you. If you want to get an education then you should do it.”

So, together, he and his wife discussed all the changes that would occur if he became a C.A.M.P. recipient as a university student. In the midst of this difficult decision they received a phone call from Mayo’s GED counselor. Mayo remembers the phone conversation:

Mayo, I heard you were accepted at the university. I was checking to see what the situation was? ...Mayo, this is the opportunity you have been waiting for... I wish when the university calls you that you will say yes and take the opportunity because this might be your last chance.

So, with the timely encouragement of Mayo’s counselor, the decision was made to enroll in the university and to work toward a bachelor’s degree in Liberal Arts. With many things to do before leaving for the university, Mayo decided the first priority was to return the new car to the bank. He shares that experience with me saying:

After that decision I went to the bank because I wanted to return my car because I was making payments...They (the bank) were complaining about it. They wanted to lower the payments. But I just dropped the keys and walked out of the bank...

Walking away from his car was one of many sacrifices Mayo made to prepare himself and his family for the long haul toward academic achievement. Fortunately, enrolled as a freshman, Mayo did well in the university. After six months succeeding in his course work and learning English, Mayo moved his family to be near the university.

Before graduating, Mayo was required to enroll in a professional semester internship. He interned in a 4H program, and given his extensive background in

agriculture, it was a perfect fit for him. One thing, however, that bothered Mayo was that there were few Latino youth involved in 4H. Mayo shared that concern with the Dean of Forestry who was the overseer of the department. Mayo reflects on the conversation he had with the Dean:

So, I said I would like to do something in the program that would attract Latino kids into 4H... So, he said, "Mayo there are many ways for you to start thinking about working with 4H. But whether or not you are thinking about doing that work that you want to do you have to have the education to do what you want to do. If you only have a bachelor's degree, that you have now, you do not have enough power to change anything in the Extension Program. He advised me to get a master's degree.

So, Mayo graduated with his bachelor's degree at age thirty-three with a new understanding of the impact 4H could have on the youth of the Latino community. Upon graduation, Mayo returned to the university to earn his Master's degree and was then soon hired by the university as the coordinator of the 4H extension program. As we conversed during the interview in the summer of 2012, Mayo was awaiting the arrival of about 450 youth to come to the university to take part in the university's summer 4H program. As Mayo shares, "Today, many of those youth are Latino. "

On Being Bicultural

Mayo was not fully bicultural as a university student. He had been in the process of becoming bicultural while in the university. Initially, he did not see his Mexican background as an advantage. He was not proficient in reading and writing in English, but

was working very hard at becoming proficient. So, in a competitive state university, Mayo felt disadvantaged. He sensed discrimination at times also. He explains it this way:

I feel the colleges have a long ways to go in regards to discrimination ...color, diversity...I don't think I was at any advantage. There were times when I was doing exams, you know, my English was not enough to finish exams on time. So, regardless of how much I knew about the subject most of the time I never finished the exam. Sometimes I would ask professors for extra time...Then they would say I am sorry this is a university. We could give you a special exam if you had a disability, but you do not have a disability. Not speaking English is not a disability... It is a disadvantage. But the white student has an advantage... So, I don't see being bicultural as any advantage.

Mayo was determined, however, to overcome his challenges with the English language. He was determined to overcome the hurdles that arose in his studies regarding the need to be proficient in English. So, upon arrival at the university for at least the first year, Mayo translated every course textbook from English to Spanish verbatim. He spent hours using his English/Spanish dictionary. He shares in a humorous way how tattered and torn that dictionary was at the close of his first year of higher education.

I would translate almost every book from English to Spanish regardless if it was math or science.I translated it into a paper version... Yes. And I would translate using an English/Spanish dictionary... After a year I wasn't able to close it! (Laughing) ...I wish I had kept that dictionary.

Mayo's thoughts regarding his biculturalism varied. Sometimes he felt discrimination regarding university assessments. At other times he was so appreciative of the scholarships offered to him through C.A.M.P. Today Mayo does see being Mexican American as an asset. He is keenly aware that he is able to reach out to other Latino youth because of his own biculturality. He is touching the lives of many Latino young people who may never have had the opportunity to participate in 4H had Mayo not been bicultural.

On Being an Adult Learner

Mayo was a dedicated adult learner focused on not only changing the future for himself, but for his family as well. When making the decision to attend the university, it was extremely difficult because so much came into play as far as those factors in his life that were already established and set in place—namely domestic possessions such as car, a home and a job. Also, Mayo was clearly aware of the differences in life styles, learning skills and responsibilities between him and many of his younger peers in the classroom, and explained:

When I got my GED I was 27. I was 28 when I started at the university. I graduated when I was 33 and then 35 with my masters...I am sure there is a lot of difference (for the adult learner).

When you are young, people care more about being with other students, parties...they are more interested in a social life and we are more interested in preparing for the future...I feel that I have an advantage over my peers because they were always attracted for

movies, or dance or activities in the night. And I would usually stay in and do reading, writing or my homework.

As an adult learner, Mayo took transition seriously before settling himself into the rigors of higher education. The support given to him, be it from family or from within the academic arena, was just enough to encourage him through the challenges that often weary adult learners in the face of change. Mayo expresses gratefulness that others cared about his success and rallied him on during times when he could have so easily quit and walked away from opportunity.

Closing Reflections

In reflecting on Mayo's hardships as a migrant worker, both in Mexico and in the United States, I can't help but think of colonizer/colonized relationships Frantz Fanon (1952) describes in his book *Black Skin, White Mask*, a postcolonial study of the black man in white French society. Fanon believes racism produces harmful constructs blinding the black man from seeing subjection. Although not black, Mayo too lived for years under harmful constructs of manual labor subjection. I perceived that in some ways Mayo was bound in servitude as the property of a landholder or business organizer.

More so than any of my other participants, Mayo talked about physical pain. He anguished over factors such as lack of water, tendon pain and burns on his body. He did not use the term "colonized" or "colonizer." Yet, the terrain he trekked on the road to degree completion clearly mirrors Fanon's description of the black man's colonization and the repercussions that surround subordination.

Despite whatever colonized experiences took place in Mayo's past, he moved forward to spy opportunity. Determined to receive whatever good might come from life,

Mayo's set out to seize opportunity. His story is a bit analogous to an incident I experienced the day I was writing up Mayo's story. I saw a robin pecking on what appeared to be a red ball. The ball was so small, yet larger than the bird's beak could grasp. The robin pecked at the ball with persistence.

Curiosity got the best of me. So I moved closer to the bird only to realize the little ball was a juicy cherry tomato. I guess my movement scared the bird. She flew to a nearby pine. When I walked back toward my house, the robin bounded back to her opportunity. Within moments, the bird ate the entire tomato. After the incident I knew I needed to get back to my computer to finish Mayo's story when it dawned on me that Mayo is much like the robin. Unwittingly, Mayo has persevered to gain all he could possibly gain from the opportunities of life. Never baulking, flinching or resigning in the face of difficulty, Mayo indulged in the succulent juices of opportunity and as a result has significantly impacted the Latino community at large and will continue to do so in years to come. I will forever be grateful for Mayo's story because it has taught me that opportunity should never be feared, but rather embraced; we never know how we may impact others through our own endeavors to succeed.

Chapter 13

Pablo

Pablo, thirty-two years old, is living in south central Pennsylvania. Pablo drives an hour and a half to Virginia four days a week where he works ten hour days as an office manager in a mental health facility. He holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Public Administration. Deciding to stay with the organization after moving out of Virginia, he makes the three hour a day commute with no regrets. Pablo and his family are happy living in Pennsylvania and he continues to find his career in the field of public administration gratifying.

Background

Pablo's parents were born and raised in Mexico. They illegally crossed the US border into California as teenagers. They later received amnesty through President Reagan under the Immigration Reform and Control Act. When they first arrived in the US Pablo's father worked in a textile mill and his mother had a sewing business. Remnants from his father's work in the mill served to be a blessing in his mother business in dress making.

Both parents took pride in raising their Mexican American family of seven in southern California where Pablo's formative years of education were spent in public school. Pablo was the oldest of his three brothers and one sister. During our interview, he reflected on the importance of his early years of public education saying, *"I think everyone was Mexican American. I don't remember any American or white kids. There may have been one black kid...no Asians. The whole (elementary) school was made up of all Mexican Americans."*

Feeling privileged that he was able to have a bilingual education, Pablo shared that was, unfortunately, not the case for his four younger siblings. He gingerly stated,

What really helped me through was that first through fifth grade they still had bilingual education. So, all of my classes were in Spanish...from first through fifth. Then I think it got controversial and they got rid of it. Everybody was (saying) 'Like English only. This is America.'

Regarding his parents, Pablo smiled as he shared how well he is able to communicate with them even now. He stated, *"My parents... I communicate well with them in Spanish because I learned Spanish well. My brothers, they didn't all get to have bilingual education. They were 'English only.'* So, *their Spanish isn't the best."*

Pablo's early years of education were significant to his achievements in higher education in that his bilingual experiences provided him with a special sense of confidence in both Spanish and English. He indicated that such confidence carried him through his university experience and, even now, carries him in his professional career as an office manager in the field of mental health. With a sparkle in his eyes, he shared how he oversees eight psychiatrists and fifty therapists and clinical therapists in his office. He had been hired originally to work with the insurance end of the agency. He took the office manager position temporarily until the agency was able to find someone. The agency never replaced him and he enjoys his work today.

Significant Factors Leading to Degree Completion

Significant people, important events over time and noteworthy places were also influential in spurring Pablo on toward his degree completion. Reflecting on people who specifically influenced his academic achievements, Pablo talks about Dave his Chinese friend. Dave was the college friend who was always there for Pablo. Tough times in academia were eased by this friend who wanted to succeed in degree attainment as much as Pablo wanted to and

so together they braided their strengths and stood by each other until graduation day. Pablo insists that he depended on Dave and, perhaps, would not have completed his degree without this friend.

Also, a Professor Eldridge, a black instructor from the university was influential in spurring Pablo on to degree attainment. Pablo's enthusiasm rises during the interview as he reflects on Professor Eldridge' teaching which ultimately situated Pablo on the road to a degree in public administration.

Pablo also talked about his father. He told several stories about his father's avid love for books, especially Christian books and the Bible. Pablo reflected on the hundreds of books his father bought through the years...all in Spanish. Attributing some academic achievement to his father's influence, it seemed Pablo was entertained by the idea that his father's influence had, perhaps, impacted his educational success more than he realized. As we talked Pablo was smiling, nodding his head and gesturing as though he was amused by his father's inspiration upon his life. Pablo informed me that his father was his Sunday school teacher for many years and conceded that it was his father's biblical practical lessons on persevering in Christ's strength that were "huge" in Pablo's success in higher education.

Aside from the Chinese friend, the professor Eldridge and his dad, Pablo also reflected on a Hispanic woman who gave him his first breakthrough in real estate sales and was a great encouragement to him. Pablo also talked, in some length, about a real estate coach who taught him the value of consistent discipline, hard work, and perseverance. Pablo credits these five people as more than just encouragers in his journey toward degree attainment, they were pivotal in orchestrating his ambitions to persevere through financial difficulties, academic challenges and intimidating university experiences.

Pablo's story is all the more inspiring as he reflected on, not only people who impacted his success, but also on circumstances that led him to achieve his bachelor's degree at a southern California university as a Mexican American student. With limited funds and responsibilities to

fulfill at home, Pablo applied to a community college. In many ways, when Pablo was accepted into the community college he crossed a border which, Pablo indicated, many of his Mexican American friends and even cousins ignored or avoided. Many of his friends and some relatives negated to attend college even when opportunity beckoned at their door. Pablo saw those friends in what he called “short term careers” and decided that was not for him.

As we continued to speak together about the significant factors that influenced his degree completion, I could see in Pablo’s eyes and hear in his voice an innovation that was, perhaps, intrinsically prompted by some type of drive to resist short term careers and reach for something different. However, Pablo distinctly mentioned, more than once, that he did not know what the ‘something different’ was that he was reaching for in his life. Pablo said that he intentionally left behind friends who were entangled in what he considered mundane and ordinary careers, but for what dream of his own he really did not have a clue.

I didn't have a clue as to what I wanted to do. But I knew that I didn't want to go to high school and that was it. My biggest motivator was my friends, people I knew, who just kept ending up in meaningless jobs doing stuff that I knew I did not want to do. That was a big motivator....more than my parents. Doing a boring, repetitive job everyday...it made me want to do something. A lot of people my age...friends that I knew... a lot of them ended up getting married really early...having kids...I knew I wanted to do that sometime, but I knew I didn't want to fall in their footsteps.

Grounded in his pursuit for a degree, Pablo radiates practicality. Rather he consistently shared that he intentionally positioned himself in the most practical of places of academic life and succeeded one small step at a time. Pablo puts it this way,

My thought was always, it doesn't matter if I get C's. What's going to matter I that you have a diploma, the degree. People see you have it. They don't ask what your GPA was. So, I just wanted the degree. I didn't care about the GPA.

It is important to note that at the close of the interview, Pablo was smiling as he told me his GPA was a 3.8 when he completed his master's degree. Clearly, his GPA didn't matter to him during his community college years, but I had to chuckle as he spouted out his 3.8 GPA while in his master's program. I think for just a few short moments in this interview Pablo was proud of himself ...in a selfless sort of way.

On Being Bicultural

Throughout all his years in higher education, Pablo carried a linguistic and financial responsibility to his family, namely parents, siblings, and extended family. In his effort to maintain a close bond with them, Pablo explained that such responsibility was strictly expected:

They (my family) depended on me a lot! They still do. My grandmother, uncles, whoever doesn't understand English well in the family...I'm usually the official interpreter. Tax bills, legal documents, insurance...it all comes to me. They tell me what they think it says. They try to read it. So, I clarify what it says.

Along with linguistic responsibilities, Pablo also shared about financial contributions he had to make to his parents. He talked about these financial responsibilities as an added stress to his college endeavors in that, he indicated that he thought many non-Mexican American students were not under the same obligations he was under. He states,

My parents had a rule that if you were going to school or working you could stay there. But, if you weren't doing anything they'd say, 'Go get a job or get out.'
...Oh, but I was still expected to help with the bills. Every month they would put on my bed a couple of utility bills. I was expected to contribute every month. If not with utilities, then maybe buy groceries. It wasn't a free ride.

Being bicultural, however, was not a topic during the interview that Pablo expounded on very much. I do not think he wanted to put it in the mix of our conversation for reasons of his own. If anything, he mentioned that he did not want to be negative regarding biculturality and indicated this topic leaned toward negativism. Nevertheless, he did have professors that gave him a hard time when he was at the university. He indicated that he never felt the racial stress at the community college level because there were Hispanic professors on staff. However, it was very different at the university. Several professors gave him a stress. For example, he specifically struggled with writing essays and some assignments. He stated, *“I did have issues with the bachelor’s and the master’s with English and writing. My written work wasn’t the best. Some (professors) would say, ‘If you can’t write a decent paper with (correct) grammar, then you shouldn’t be here.’”*

On Being an Adult Learner

For Pablo, being an adult learner meant never being able to give 100% to higher education because he always had to work full time while attending college. Willing to make sacrifices, Pablo did whatever he could to make his financial ends meet. Unlike many traditional students where parents provide a car, clothing or sometimes college tuition, Pablo never had those privileges. His parents did not have the finances to help. Pablo was a nontraditional student as early as his freshman year in community college. In his mind, he considered himself an adult learner simply because he was responsible to fend for himself and consider the welfare of his family. Pablo expounded on some of those thoughts saying,

I think for me it was never an option to focus on school 100% because I had to work. Not just to help out my folks, but to help myself out. If I needed anything or wanted anything, it was coming out of my pocket! If I wanted anything, I had to work for it! There was no

such thing as (my parents saying to me,) 'Here's some money. Or, (here's) an allowance. You need a car to go to school? You need money for tuition?' It just never happened. So, I just learned that whatever you need or want you had to work for it. Period.

As Pablo talked about his financial independence, I sensed there had been some difficult times in his educational career. In times of financial desperation, Pablo's optimistically persevered to make things work. For instance, Pablo mentions,

On weekends, I forgot to mention that I had a little black book of ten, maybe twelve old ladies that usually needed a ride to the supermarket, or their yard mowed, or special work done. Like one lady would take care of dogs and she would have me go buy 20, 30 bags of dog food. Little odd jobs...I'd get \$20.00 or \$30.00. They paid well. So, I kept going back.

As an adult learner, Pablo had a lot more struggles academically after transferring from community college to the university. He felt as though community college was his own little comfortable world that embraced him as a Hispanic. On the other hand, after transferring from the community college to the university, things were different. There was no tolerance of academic shortcomings. Pablo struggled to keep afloat with his grades. He stated,

There was a lot more variety (at the university) than at the community college...I was not in my own little world anymore. I was exposed to different cultures and different viewpoints. Different ways of thinking...and I knew it was going to be impossible to get an A.

Closing

Abalos (2003) would describe Pablo's sense of responsibility to his family as a showing of his personal face. If there was a face that Pablo needed to show during his

pursuit of a degree, it was this 'personal' face which impacts all other faces, namely the historical, political and sacred faces of life.

Pablo's sacred face was turned toward degree attainment as well. Spiritual inspiration, fostered by his father's love for the Holy Scriptures, ignited perseverance during seasons of discouragement when Pablo had considered quitting school. Pablo's political face, which was demonstrated through his thesis, was entitled 'Affordable Housing for Minorities.' His parents did not own a home of their own until they were in their forties. This financial hardship was always a concern for Pablo. So, perhaps, Abalos' (2003) definition of the political face aligns with Pablo's political voice as he wrote about the hardships of minorities owning homes stemming from his own personal experiences as the son of renters.

What about Pablo's historical face? Throughout the interview, Pablo actually is cautious not to discuss history, namely a colonized history of Mexican Americans. He intentionally does not acknowledge or give voice to a colonized past. Does he acknowledge discrimination? Some, but overall he steers clear of any conversation with me that might be discriminatory/racial in context. Such choice is Pablo's prerogative and I deeply respect his perspectives.

Reflecting back to the personal face, Pablo expressed that there would have been no way to fulfill his dream of degree attainment without fulfilling personal responsibilities to his family. In acting as the principal of all faces, the personal face ultimately expresses transformation. Perhaps it could be conceded that Pablo allowed his personal face to create what Abalos (2003) calls 'loving and just stories' that ultimately became the guiding light of Pablo's academic success in higher education. For, at this point in Pablo's life, he does not have a wife nor children. Nonetheless, he has family. His personal face is always turned toward them.

What about Pablo's burst of innovation to do something outside the status quo of his friends pertaining to attending a local community college? Anzaldua (1999) describes this type of innovation as a 'new consciousness.' Abalos (2003) calls it transformative. Both Anzaldua (1999)

and Abalos (2003) describe transforming consciousness as a notion to move beyond a colonized past and embrace un-colonized liberties. In many ways, Pablo was determined to experience liberties that his friends had forfeited. He did just that in attaining his higher education degrees.

In some ways, Pablo grasped a border theory and framed his own future. It was a border theory unlike Anzaldua's (1999) theory where bitterness rose when she was taken less than seriously, or as Anzaldua calls it...tokenized. If Pablo was tokenized, and at some points in the interview he expressed that he was taken less than seriously in the university classroom, Pablo never let that tokenization become a stumbling block.

Pablo closed our chat with thoughts about his father as his Sunday school teacher. His father did not preach on persevering through college per se, but his father often spoke from the Scriptures on perseverance in general terms. It was those biblical practical lessons in persevering on in Christ's strength that Pablo insists were "huge" in his successes in higher education.

PART THREE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 14

El Que Persevere Alcanza: Those Who Persevere Succeed

The purpose of this narrative research is to hear the stories of Mexican American graduates and explore their bicultural experiences pertaining to degree attainment as adult learners. In the selection process, the participants identified themselves as adult learners who had attained an undergraduate degree. They also attested to having at least one parent who was born in Mexico. The intent of this research was that through the telling of stories, Mexican American graduates make known those bicultural experiences which significantly impacted their degree attainment.

The research in the latter part of the twentieth century often focused on why Mexican Americans left or dropped out of college before completing a degree. The focus was largely through a deficit lens regarding Mexican Americans in higher education. By contrast, the focus of this narrative research study gave voice to why Mexican Americans succeed in college. Through a border-crossing theoretical framework (Anzuldúa, 1999), the participants' experiences of living between borders, metaphorically and geographically, are brought to light through the narratives of the 10 participants. Each one tells their story relative to their historical past, language experiences and aspirations in higher education as adult learners.

This final chapter explores themes relating to theory and the literature which guided the study. The chapter begins with a thematic summary in light of a cross-case analysis of the 10 narratives, in accord with the theory informing the study. Secondly, consideration is given to the implications regarding theory and practice. Thirdly, suggestions are offered for further research.

Lastly, personal reflections regarding inspiration afforded to me from the last 10 years of study and from the actual interviews which touched and changed my life forever.

Thematic Summary: Informing Mexican American Degree Attainment

The cross-case analysis of the narratives is presented in light of a thematic summary. This cross-case analysis yielded four themes relating to the importance of: understanding background cultural context; seizing educational opportunities within a collectivist mindset; living the metaphoric borderland; and managing life as an adult learner.

The first theme, understanding background cultural context, is an overview of the participants' experiences as youth and how those experiences impacted adult learning in higher education. Disclosing factors concerning agricultural life, family/ancestry and the k-12 schooling experience, this portion of the summary relates to how the participant's background informs adult learning in a cultural context.

The second theme, seizing educational opportunities within a collectivist mindset, is twofold in context. First, the analysis views collectivity as a frame of mind whereby a person projects more concern for others than for self (Benmayor, 2002). In other words, an ideology of individualism is disregarded. Many of the participants attained a college degree with a collective sense of intention meaning through degree attainment they were intent on meeting the needs of others.

In the research analysis, a third focus emerges relative to a cultural crossroads. Being American Mexican in a metaphoric borderland forced the participants to discern exactly where to straddle Mexican and American cultures. As we discussed cultural straddling, meaning they talked about what mores, customs, traditions they would embrace and which they would release, participants displayed a dual sense of pride for both the United States and their native homeland

of Mexico. Nonetheless, despite the pride, participants also conferred about problematic experiences where disparity tainted their boasting.

This final topic, managing life as an adult learner, focuses on participants as adult learners. Whether these participants were describing feelings of inadequacy as found in Johnson-Bailey's (2001) research or talking about moving between borders as researched by Sheared/Sissel (2001), they share a plethora of good and bad notions regarding adult learning and positionality. As adult learners they have had to negotiate, navigate and whistle while they work to keep the dream of degree attainment alive. This final theme focuses on multiple guiding factors speaking hope, strength and courage into these achievers as adult learners.

Understanding Background Cultural Context

In analyzing participant background, certain factors became evident in understanding Mexican Americans as adult learners, namely the influence of agricultural work, educational persistence in spite of hardship; the role of family support and responsibility, and the importance of ancestry in keeping the family legacy alive. These four factors are significant to degree attainment as they impacted participant achievement in higher education.

The influence of agricultural work. It became evident that although no extensive generalizations can be drawn to all Mexican Americans, agriculture was a relevant subject discussed in six of the 10 interviews, given that all six of them had worked in the agricultural industry. Further, of these six, only Albert discussed agricultural labor in primarily a positive way. He indicated that migrant work was an exclusive entry for his family to legally leave Mexico and come to work in the US. The other five participants talked about the more problematic side of the agricultural labor market, while recognizing what it offered them. They told stories about demanding work conditions, long hours of physically exhausting labor, feelings

of isolationism and poor housing conditions. Three of these five participants specified that they lived like indentured laborers toiling in the harvest fields from sun up to sun down. Mayo described his experience saying, “*Nothing is hard compared to agriculture. When I was working in agriculture I would work 10, 15, 20 hours a day in the heat.*”

Despite these difficult conditions, participants said these experiences served as motivational reasons to pursue an education. They spoke of no regrets of the physical pain they had been subjected to nor the mental and emotional anguish suffered. The stories revealed the good that came from the hardships. The heat of the sun upon them as they worked gave way to day dreams about a better future. The perseverance they acquired in making it through a grueling day in the fields resurged in the classroom when times were academically or socially difficult in higher education.

Some participants mentioned that the hardships their parents experienced created a desire in the parents for better working conditions with better wages for their offspring. As a vehicle of dialog, the participants used the research interview as an opportunity to relive past experiences. They depicted a deep sense of gratefulness in their freedom to choose a professional career. They are no longer living the life their parents lived and both parents and participants are at peace with that transition.

As discussed in Chapter Two, similar responses to agricultural hardships and the culture of poverty have been cited in other studies (Gandara, 1993; Attinasi 1989; Huber, 2009). In a qualitative study where 10 college students participated in in-depth interviews, Sanchez, Reyes and Singh (2005) found agricultural hardships suffered by parents of the participants were factored into the participant’s motivation to complete a degree program. Sanchez, Reyes and Singh (2005) state: “Some individuals, particularly parents, told stories about their experiences in Mexico or in the United States and the struggles and hardships they faced. Hearing about these experiences influenced students to attend college” (p. 58).

Benmayor (2002) also found Mexican American participants to have similar optimism regarding hardships in agricultural labor. For example, Benmayor's (2002) study pointed out that college students from farm workers and working class families have a strong sense of mission to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of their community. The study established that memories of the hardships served to shape a student's advocacy encouraging them to construct new funds of knowledge and ultimately new histories.

Five of the 10 participants in my study talked with eagerness and enthusiasm about transitioning from grueling labor to scholarly attentiveness. They expressed a sense of accomplishment in their efforts to create a new future for themselves. Abalos (1998) would contend that these participants rewrote their past resolving to turn their historical face forward. Getting out from under the burden of domination and oppressive situations by rewriting their past was important to these participants. Abalos (1998) would argue that this type of transition, leaving a subordinating vocation and immersing in education, is the deepest source of transformation. This transformation defines these participants as hard working over-comers who have set new sights in higher education.

Such life transitions do not come easy because of economic risks and personal hurdles. For example, when participants José and Mayo had opportunity to go a university through a government grant program, both men were reluctant to do so. José was so reluctant to make the transition he waited two years before taking the opportunity. Mayo, even though seeped in the hardships of his vocation, was not sure he wanted to make the changes necessary to go to the university. He would have to leave his job, sell his home and move to another state with his family. After contemplation, Mayo decided to take the risks and work through the transitional adjustments. Mayo made the decision to take the federal grant through CAMP after his GED counselor encouraged him to do so.

Today, his daughters thank him. They each have gratifying lives fulfilling their own dreams. As Abalos (1998) points out, this is the deepest source of transformation. Several of the 10 participants spoke highly of their children's aspirations and accomplishments. The participants believe that they rewrote their own histories by attaining a degree in higher education, as well as rewriting the histories of their beloved children. They turned their historical face toward a brighter tomorrow and ultimately turned the historical faces of their offspring as well.

Educational persistence in spite of hardship. All 10 of the participants indicated that education was important to them when they were youngsters in grade school. Prior to achieving their high school diplomas, four of the 10 participants completed some schooling in Mexico. Three of those four participants lived in Mexico during their elementary school years. Each of them talked about missing days of school due to family's responsibilities in harvesting crops or having to travel to other states where the migrant labor market beckoned their help. These three participants expounded extensively on the academic and social hardships experienced in missing days and even months of schooling at a time due to migrant farm labor.

Pertaining to completing high school, all 10 participants acquired a high school diploma. Three of the 10 dropped out of high school earning their diplomas through a General Education Diploma (GED) program. Two of those three earned their GED as teenagers in the state of Texas while the third waited until he was 27 years old to acquire his GED in Washington state. Only one participant graduated from a high school in Mexico while the remaining five graduated from various high schools across America, namely from California, Washington, Texas, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

In discussing the bicultural experiences of the participants as Mexican American students in US public schools, language was a barrier for five of them. Language issues were paramount for two of the participants while they were in fourth grade. Both participants, with English language challenges, were placed in special education with mentally retarded students. These two

incidents happened in the state of Washington and in the state of Wisconsin. The two students, Daniel and Jane, eventually worked their way out of the special needs track and went on to succeed in high school because persistence acquired through hardship is the formula for success.

The hardship that Jane experienced was emotionally upsetting then and continues to be a source of pain today. However, through that season of academic misplacement, Jane developed an “I will prove you wrong” attitude. This attitude powerfully contributed to her perseverance in high school as well as in college. For example, Jane was boldly confident when a professor challenged her ability to succeed academically in community college. She had developed a fighting spirit which she testifies contributed to her academic success in degree attainment.

Family support and responsibility. The family as a unit is important in the broader picture of Mexican culture. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) point out that traditional Latino culture is described as family-oriented and is a source of emotional security and support. The family as a unit varies as far as members. Some Latino families are single households while others include extended relatives. With such a priority placed on family, all 10 of the participants in this study were anxious to talk about the impact family members had on their achievements as college graduates.

Six of the 10 participants were from migratory agricultural backgrounds and indicated that family income was low because their parents were not bilingual. Only four of the participants had parents who were bilingual. Participants indicated that family incomes were also low because their parents' educational levels were low. Eight of the 10 participants had parents who had not graduated from high school. Of those eight, none had attended school after the 8th grade. Some had only completed up through 3rd grade.

Nevertheless, despite low levels of education, all but one participant said their parents were supportive of them while they were enrolled in a degree program in higher education. Parents offered encouragement in many ways. Some parents allowed the participant to live at

home. Other parents offered themselves as baby sitters for their grandchildren while the participants were in classes. Eight of the 10 participants had parents who verbally motivated them with praise and admiration. One of the participants, Veda, whose parents were strongly uncooperative, unsupportive and disobliging during her years enrolled in higher education because of religious reasons, surprised her by attending her graduation ceremony. Thus, of the 10 participants nine discussed some form of parental encouragement in their endeavors to complete a bachelor's degree in higher education.

Torres' (2004) study of 83 Latino college students in seven institutions found that family influence affects a Latino college student's identity development. Torres (2004) indicates that family members are often the principal conveyers of cultural heritage within any ethnic group, but even more significantly so within the Latino community. Sanchez, Reyes and Singh (2005) also found similar reports in regards to parents of Mexican American college students. Their study indicates that in viewing the social support offered by parents, peers, siblings and extended family, parents provided support in regards to influencing the student to go to college and finish college. Parents were also influential in helping the student choose a major and a career.

Similar to the reports of participants regarding parental support with this author, Sanchez, Reyes and Singh (2005) found that parents were only able to help their participants during the elementary school years reporting that "parents indicated that they could not tutor and teach their children because student participants had surpassed parents' academic knowledge" (p.61). However, parents did offer cognitive guidance by asking questions and giving advice.

Four participants elaborated on parental expectations regarding the importance of combining family member incomes in order to economically survive. There was no option for these four participants. Money was given to the parents for the purpose of financial support. They gave a portion of their earned income or all their wages to their parents. For example, Veda quit high school in 10th grade to pick tomatoes because her father had lost his job in construction. Jane

worked until 3:00 AM every morning in the family restaurant as a server helping the family business. These participants gave of their earnings expecting no remuneration in return. They described their giving as an act of identification with their Mexican cultural heritage. Torres (2004) describes this type of cultural benevolence as “an attachment of individuals with their nuclear and extended families, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the family” (p.457).

Participants revealed a sense of commitment to help their families financially that superseded their aspirations to acquire a college degree. For example, Jane, at 29 years old, dropped out of community college for two years in order to help her family because her step mother needed kidney dialysis. Pablo, while enrolled in college, supported his parents financially by paying household bills that his parents would lay on his bed. Mayo did not finish grade school because he worked full time on the family farm as a youth, as a teen and into his twenties. Nevertheless, none of the participants gave indications of regret or remorse because of the financial expectations parents placed on them. They were grateful for the tight closeness they had gained in their selfless giving. Hernandez (2002) pointed out that participants in his study cited a reason for going to college was a desire to financially assist their families after they graduated. This citing indicates that the giving factor is not just present while the student is in college, but will carry on in the years that follow degree completion.

Ancestry: Keeping the legacy alive. Family stories were equally important to four of the 10 participants in this study. For example, Susana was told by her parents about their own educational experiences in college. Marta described photographs of her grandfather as a train engineer and her great grandfather as the mayor of a large city in Mexico. Veda was told that her aunt on her mother’s side was a civics teacher of 21 years. Rosalina showed me a picture of Mayan civilization while expounding on her Mayan ancestors as architects, astronomers and scientists. These stories of family successes serve as stepping stones in the participant’s journey

of degree completion. Gandara (1993) contends that the Mexican American student can imagine a similar future as their ancestors.

Gandara (1993) found that despite serious economic difficulties, parents of Mexican American students wanted to keep the family legacy alive so they supported their children's educational goals, set high performance standards and help in any way that they could. She described the parents' encouragement as an ethic of hard-work and a philosophy of education—as-mobility. She expounded on the tradition of Mexican American parents telling their children family stories of wealth and prestige keeping alive a hope for a better future.

Similar to this study's finding regarding supportive parents in their child's journey toward degree completion, Sanchez, Reyes and Singh (2005) also found parents to be overwhelmingly supportive. Their study observed that parents were the most dominant, inspiring support in a college student's life with regards to academics. Their findings indicate that parents were the most significant, moving force when it came to their children's education. With little or no academic resources to offer pertaining to curriculum, they gave strong verbal support and encouragement informing a future of success in education. "These parents wanted to provide their children with academic opportunities that had not been available to them" (p. 51).

Nine of the 10 participants discussed having intervals of parental encouragement in their endeavors to complete a bachelor's degree in higher education. The one participant, Mayo, who did not mention having parental support, may have had encouragement from his parents. However, he did not discuss it. He left his parents' farm in Mexico in his early 20's to live in the United States as a migrant worker. He does not talk about ever returning home or his relationship with his mother or father.

Gender and the cultural experience. Regarding participant experiences as males and females, in general, the female participants were more forthcoming than the male participants in discussing the background of their lives. Thus, to some extent gender differences were apparent

from the beginning of the study. Whether the conversation regarded their relationships with mother, father, siblings or school teachers, the women shared more intimate information encompassing some of their emotions. The women touched on the differences that governed their lives as women of color in a White dominant world and how those differences had a bearing on their shyness, boldness, resentments and pride. Nevertheless, both men and women equally discussed the hardships that language barriers brought upon them in an educational environment. Yet, the men spoke of mentors, encouragers and advocates who were helpful in degree attainment. On the contrary, many of the women talked about feeling isolated and lonely on the academic journey, which ultimately made the journey in higher education somewhat more challenging for the females than the males. While gender was not the focus of this particular study, some of these differences were apparent in the interviews. However, this would need to be the focus of further study.

Seizing Educational Opportunity through a Collectivist Mindset

The participants in this study stayed in college believing that upon graduation they would support their families with a far better income than had they quit school. They attained their degrees by seizing opportunities afforded to them through faculty, friends, clubs, programs, etc. Not only did they aspire to succeed in higher education for the sake of the welfare of their families, but they interpreted the higher education as a collective experience whereby others jointly partnered with them to encourage, guide and direct. Participants in this study were involved in mankind. They never acted as islands. They relished being part of the main. Because of this collective mindset whereby they welcomed the resources and encouragement of others they were richly rewarded in the degree completion process.

In listening to participant stories, it became evident that the collectivist mindset empowered these participants to aspire a future for their families and communities first, and then for themselves. One of the first places that participants engaged their collectivism was on the community college level. It was there that many of them found social networks that provided emotional and financial support encouraging them in their educational endeavors.

Community college. One of the first places that participants engaged their collective mindset was on the community college level. It was there that many of them found social networks that provided emotional and financial support encouraging them in their educational endeavors. Eight of the 10 participants attended community college at some point in their academic endeavors. Young (1992) points out that in looking at student profiles an overwhelming number of Mexican Americans enroll in community college as compared to the university. Of the 10 participants in this study only two enrolled in a university without previously having a community college experience.

For those who attended a community college their enrollment period varied from six weeks to two years. Only two participants discussed earning an Associate's degree, while the remaining six participants transferred before actually completing a full program of coursework. All eight participants found the community college experience beneficial as it was an opportunity to begin a new level of scholarship.

However, with a collectivist mindset a struggle emerged for many of the participants in the community college years. It was then that they had to decide if they were going to support their families with needed immediate financial assistance through employment or would they support the family through a professional career that would only come after years of education. For some participants it was between the community college years and the years following, prior to enrolling in a four year program, the collectivist mindset was under the deepest of all scrutiny.

These ten participants chose fields of profession above fields of harvest and none of them regret it today.

Young (1992) points out that often Mexican Americans who attend the university take a full course load and those who attend community college are enrolled for fewer than 12 hours. This was true for José who worked full time during the day while attending community college in the evening. When he transferred to the university he took a full course load. José, like several of the other participants in this study, found the transition from the community college to the university difficult and at times threatening to the dream of degree attainment. MacDonald, Botti, & Clark (2007) found this threat to be common among Latinos and among minorities in general.

Although eight of the 10 participants attended community college prior to transferring to a university, only one of those eight participants transferred directly from community college to a university program, namely Arturo. The other seven participants spent years in a vocational career without being enrolled in any college courses. It was then in their adult learning years they made a commitment to a four year university program which in many cases took many years to complete. However, Albert does boast in completing his degree in four years!

Motivated by aspiring change. Children of all cultures will say to themselves, “When I grow up I want to be...” Some aspire to be doctors, nurses, firemen, police officers, etc. Mexican American children aspire professions as well. They do this through a collectivist mindset because they want a better future for their community. Eighty percent of the participants in this study had career aspirations at a young age or while in their teen years. For example, Marta wanted to be a coach or a teacher. Deeply appreciative of a junior high program entitled Y.O.U (Youth Opportunities Unlimited), Marta developed a desire to either teach or coach. Susana dreamed of being a nutritionist from the young age of 13. Lorenza aspired to be an FBI agent or to work in some area of law enforcement. Marlene, knowing that some of her relatives were in education,

aspired to be a teacher. Albert aspired to go into the field of mathematics. He did exceptionally well in math throughout grade school and high school. Mía aspired to be a teacher.

Now, not all of these participants received their bachelor's degrees in the fields they aspired as young people and children, but all attained a degree in higher education. According to Huber (2009) aspirations create a resilient ability to maintain optimism for the future in the face of hardship. Huber further explains that aspiration is a capital that can be developed through cultural lessons such as stories and advice. Such capital allows a person to dream of possibilities beyond their present situation. Huber's (2009) study of 10 undocumented Mexican American undergraduate women points out *that* "women aspired to one day become medical doctors, lawyers, professors, and college counselors. All of the women aspired to attend graduate school and attain an advanced degree" (p. 715). Likewise, I found the participants I interviewed to be equally aspiring in their dreams of professionalism. Eight of the ten participants had aspirations as youth to be in the professional world. The remaining two participants also had aspirations of a professional career as well, but not until they were older, namely in their late twenties. Jane aspired to have a college education when the suicide death of her mother occurred. The crisis caused Jane to evaluate the trajectory of her future. Mayo did not desire a professional career until he was enrolled in a university and realized he was capable of succeeding in the course work. He was a late dreamer. Nevertheless, he dreamt as an adult learner and those dreams came true!

Collective resources in degree attainment. In different ways and in varying times of the interviews, the 10 participants talked about resources and social support that impacted their journey in degree completion. In regards to social support, Lorenza shared about her appreciation for the Latino clubs at her university. Susana talked about a community college advisor who helped her in scheduling her courses so that the transition to a university was an easy one. Marta and Mía gave acknowledged their bosses at the colleges where they worked for inspiring them to

fulfill their dreams of an education. Rosalina was appreciative of a friend who pointed the way to the world of Spanish education. José expressed indebtedness to his twelfth grade Spanish teacher for believing in him and encouraging him to pursue a career in Spanish education. Mayo is thankful for his General Education Diploma (GED) counselor who persuaded him to pursue a degree in liberal arts. Then, there is Pablo who talked extensively about his Chinese friend, Dave. Dave stayed by Pablo's side all through the university years as not only a friend, but an academic mentor. Pablo says he could not have made it without his friend. Peer support has been shown to be a crucial factor in other studies as well (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales (2005) and Hernandez (2000) and Benmayor, 2002).

Sanchez, Reyes and Singh (2005) also reported that relationships, be it with family, peers or faculty, provided resources for higher education success. The 10 Mexican American participants in their study indicated that they received social support in seven areas, namely classes, the decision to go/finish college, major/career decisions, college application processes, motivation toward school, scholarships/financial aid, and in dealing with teachers. Huber (2009) also attests that seizing resources were a critical factor in participant success in college. It was what she called social capital that provided the motivation to hurdle the barriers that undocumented students encountered.

Pertaining to seizing financial opportunities in regard to tuition expenses, Daniel and Rosalina are grateful to the corporations they worked for who provided college reimbursement for courses taken in a degree program. José and Mayo are grateful to CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program) for providing not only funds, but multiple social and academic networks to help them negotiate the university experience.

Jóse was a recipient of CAMP through Penn State University while Mayo was a recipient of Oregon State University. Both men discussed the advantages of CAMP as an outstanding resource provided for them. Not only Jóse and Mayo, but all the participants seized educational

opportunities through a collectivist mindset. In turn, that collectivism served as a connection in providing them with essential resources to succeed. Countless relationships developed between the participants and those who offered rich resources in degree completion, relationships that continue to be meaningful even today.

Living the Metaphorical Borderland

Living on the border, for example, of Texas and Mexico is a geographical borderland experience. However, living between two cultures is a metaphorical borderland experience. In this context, a metaphorical borderland experience means to negotiate and manage daily life relative to the norms and customs of two cultures. Throughout the 10 interviews there were hints of the participants' perspectives about what it was like to live between these metaphoric borders and what it was like to be bicultural as a college student, meaning what it was like to be both American and Mexican. While participants did discuss living in two cultures, when specifically asked to reflect on bicultural experiences some were hesitant to share their thoughts. Hesitancy could have been due to the way I asked the question, as I used the term "bicultural" without previously elaborating. Specifically, I asked, "What were your experiences at the university in regards to being bicultural?"

One participant refrained from discussing the subject in any depth. Others pondered in silence before speaking and I found it was important to repeat and rephrase the question so participants were clear as to what they were being asked. Once the question was rephrased meaning I asked specifically what it was like living between two cultures, most of them clearly discussed their experiences. Some talked more about bicultural pride while others talked more about the difficulties of living in two worlds. In the end, they embraced the borderlands, becoming more comfortable over time.

Bicultural pride. Five of the 10 participants were anxious and enthused to openly share their views and opinions on being a bicultural university student. Three of these five participants travel back and forth to Mexico regularly to visit friends and family. It was these three who talked about their deep appreciation for cultural diversity. They have had opportunities to straddle cultural life styles and enjoy the festivities of both nations.

These five participants proudly spoke of their dual cultural backgrounds stating that they are taking in the best of both worlds. For example, Marta chuckled about her visits to Mexico where her Mexican friends see her as Anglo. When in the US, Marta's Anglo friends see her as Mexican. She also laughed about the values that she has instilled in her sons as far as dating and respect. She is confused as to whether she has taught them American values or Mexican values. Some place on the border of family values Marta has found virtues to overlap and she is humorously pleased with the cross over.

Daniel, who is also enthralled with being both Mexican and American, clarified his appreciation arguing that although he is Mexican American he is not the voice of all Hispanics. Reveling in the idea that there is much diversity among Hispanics, Daniel was careful to not generalize the experiences of Mexican Americans as a populace. Lorenza, too, was enthused during the interview to discuss what it means to live between cultures as she is deeply appreciative of her Mayan heritage and her American citizenship. Likewise, Lorenza and José spoke enthusiastically about the importance of fellow Latino/as coming together through clubs and organizations celebrating cultural heritage and encouraging one another in academic endeavors.

Jóse was one of the most enthused participants regarding his dual cultural experiences as he has always been involved in language translation. During his college years he traveled to Mexico with a team of English speaking students. These students appreciated Jóse's willingness and his ability to translate during the excursion. Jóse enjoys the opportunity to straddle the two

cultures while being fully Mexican and fully American. Daniel, José and Marta were actually amused by a sense of fulfillment that they have experienced as citizens of the US with a Mexican origin of birth.

Difficulties in the borderlands. Five participants did not speak about living between cultures in positive terms. They were grateful for their American citizenship, but discussed experiences and moments of discrimination, alienation and/or subordination during their college years. For example, Susana had much difficulty acquiring an internship needed in her university program in Family and Consumer Science. She believed difficulty arose because she was a Mexican American living in the far North of the US. She thought her bilingual abilities would have been an asset and would have secured her an internship, but instead realized her ethnicity worked against her. Both Susana and Jane, who also went to college in the North, felt as though northerners looked at Mexican Americans as ignorant and incapable of succeeding in a career. Mayo, Susana and Jane did not see being Mexican American as necessarily an advantage while in college. These three tended to focus on the deficits of being Mexican American while being college students.

Mía, though truly grateful for her dual cultural background, clearly maintains that although she is bicultural, her sons are not. She said that if they were asked about being bicultural they would say that they are not bicultural. Although Mía and her husband are from Mexico, Mía considers her sons to be only Americans. She holds to that idea because the boys have lived in the US most of their lives. Although Mía did not say that she or her sons were resistant to self-identify as Mexican Americans, Mía alluded to moments of discrimination while her boys were growing up. In light of the Torres' (2003) study regarding self identification amongst Latinos, Mexican Americans avoid misjudgment regarding legal issues of documentation in not self-identifying. Avoiding misjudgment may or may not be the case with Mía's sons, but this portion of Mía's story is significant because it was important to her.

Embracing the borderlands as more comfortable over time. Becoming fully competent in two cultures was a process that, not surprisingly, emerged over time for several of these participants. For example, Pablo hesitated to freely discuss the topic of living between cultures except pointing out that the university professors were less tolerant of his lack of proficiency in grammar/writing than those professors at the community college level. Pablo struggled academically, but never let his grades upset him. As long as he was passing, he was satisfied. However as time moved on, Pablo embraced the English language more proficiently and became more comfortable in his borderland environment.

Mayo, Susana and Jane also became more comfortable over time with living in two cultures, and hence embraced the borderlands. With hard work, perseverance in language proficiency and with greater academic success in higher education, today these four participants relish their dual cultural background. They seemed to trust the academic processes of higher education, and that in the end it would lead to their economic and social benefit. Ogbu (1987) talks about how important trust is in the academic realm because it contributes to social adjustment and academic performance. Eventually, each participant began to not only trust the university they were attending, but they began to trust his own ability and worth. As opportunities arose, they eventually overcame language barriers, adjusted socially and achieved long ranged goals in employment. Today their cultural pride is exhilarated through their character and presence. They are now comfortable in their citizenship and in their Mexican ways

Eight of the 10 participants discussed utilizing their cultural skills to make a difference in the communities where they live. Albert is part of a team that produces a weekly bilingual newspaper voicing the views and opinions of the Hispanic and Anglo communities. Mayo is recruiting Mexican American youth into a 4H program hosted by the university from where he graduated. Marta is involved in opening opportunities for Mexican American young people to enroll in the university where she works through funded programs. Mía and Lorenza both teach

Spanish in a community college in central Pennsylvania. Veda is teaching English to refugee families. José has begun his first year of teaching in a bilingual charter school.

The trajectory of these participants' lives coincide with findings from Benmayor (2002) study indicating that Mexican American undergraduates and graduates want to return to their communities to be make a difference by offering professional culturally related assistance and skills. Benmayor's (2002) participants returned to be teachers, principals, social workers and other community agents. Her study showed that for the Mexican American, college often represents an opportunity for "Mexican-origin students to gain a new cultural capital to "capitalize" on their cultural funds of knowledge and apply them professionally" (p. 18).

As with Benmayor's (2002) participants, the participants in this research endeavored to display a collective commitment in attaining a college degree. Upward mobility was often not the primary thrust of their efforts. Building a collective wealth was in the scheme of things as participants utilized their experiences and abilities to maneuver through mainstream U.S. culture, making incredible contributions to such fields as that of health, education, science, forestry and technology.

Managing Life as an Adult Learner

As adult learners, the participants did not discuss a particular person who solely informed their degree attainment. Each narrative focused on a number of guiding factors. Success came through a synergy of people, programs, networks, clubs and organizations working together empowering the participant to succeed. Synergy speaks to the notion that adult learners achieve their academic and professional goals relative to the emotional, social or financial support afforded to them. Since life's obstacles can often be unbearably discouraging leading to academic failure, support was crucial to degree attainment for the adult learners in this study.

Juggling: more than a circus act. A prominent factor in critiquing Mexican American adult learning is that of juggling time, namely the time involved in a career, completing college assignments, caring for a home, satisfying spouse expectations and meeting children's needs. This balancing act was not described by the participants as circus fun. Juggling demanded focus, organization and perseverance superseding that of a three ring show. Practice makes perfect, or almost perfect, as participants tossed balls of expectations, dropping some and catching others.

Six of the 10 participants worked full time while going to college. As Pablo said, "I could never give 100% of myself to school." Pablo was not married at that time, but he was working two jobs while attending college. Mía, on the other hand, went to college, worked full time in an emergency room and was a wife and mother of two young boys. Marta also worked full time while going to college. She has a husband and three daughters. Marta explained that as a 29 year old adult student her perspectives on degree completion were one of seriousness and commitment. She indicated there was a level of maturity in her character that was not present when she was younger in community college.

Gender in adulthood. The discourse was different in the interviews for men and women with regard to degree attainment in higher education. The women discussed wearing multiple hats as far as studying, parenting, working full or part time, shopping and doing housework while the men primarily discussed two responsibilities, namely studying and their career employment. This is not to say that the men were not involved in parenting or helping with household chores; however, they simply did not discuss those responsibilities in the bigger picture in degree attainment. Women were also more emotional in voice tone and with facial expressions than the men when discussing racial experiences in the classroom. The men came across as though they were expecting inequalities in higher education. For example, both Pablo and Susana talked about professors being rude to them. Susana was very emotional during that phase of the interview while Pablo sounded very matter-of-fact about his ordeal. Not that the injustices didn't bother

him, because he looked disappointed as he shared his scenario. However, emotionally he did not come across as affected as Susana. For both the males and the females overall, being adult learners in higher education was challenging. However, each participant overcame barriers and difficulties by being persistent: by improving their academic English, engaging in academic opportunities and immersing themselves in dominant cultural campus life with a sense of expectancy, enthusiasm and confidence.

Negotiating relationships with professors. In regards to positionality among Mexican Americans, this research points to relationships between participants and their professors. Some students, while in community college, had academic confidence approaching professors with their questions. Yet, they indicated that they did not have that same confidence on the university level feeling more intimidated in the rigorous environment. While other participants talked about gaining boldness on the university level regarding building relationships with their professors.

Of the 10 participants, eight attended community college. Thus, when discussing community college some said they found professors less demanding and more forgiving of their lack in language proficiency as compared to the expectations placed on them by the university professors. Others talked about a sense of invisibility as both community college and university professors intimidated them. Mayo explained that he did not have a disability which would have made him eligible for extra help or academic assistance. However, he did have a disadvantage because of his lack in English language proficiency. Unlike a disability, a disadvantage did not afford Mayo eligibility for academic flexibility and this made his life most miserable when it came time to take an exam. He said he would have done so much better on all his exams if he had only been given more time.

Five of the participants dropped out of community college as young adults. They re-entered through a university program years later. When they re-entered, four of the participants said they brought with them a sense of confidence and commitment. When once afraid to ask

questions, they now boldly asked questions and waited for answers. These four talked about how important it was to build relationships with professors. Where once they felt invisible, in the community college setting, they now felt visible and voiced their presence in the university setting. Johnson-Bailey (2001) describes adult women of color who reenter the university have a distinct appreciation for their professors. Johnson-Bailey explained those non-traditional women students are hardworking, driven, “serious-minded students who are their teachers’ age peers, they often approach their professors with surprising deference, but with high expectations” (p.11). Clearly, Marta, Daniel, José and Veda connected on academic and social levels with professors appreciating their expertise and expecting help and assistance. Each received more than they had ever hoped for from professors who were committed to go the extra mile in academia for them personally.

On the other side of the coin, some participants didn’t feel their Mexican-American status was always viewed positively in the academy. Five of the 10 participants saw themselves as either invisible or visibly disadvantaged. Their stories describe strained relationships with professors and a disconnection with curriculum, programs and policies. Jane dealt with whims of sarcasm. Mayo faced trials of discrimination pertaining to assessment policies. Pablo tolerated degrading comments and a general disconnect with professors. Lorenza had no administrative counsel in the enrollment process. Likewise, in search for a needed internship, Susana had little to no university support. These findings correlate with Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm’s (2001) study of how neglected some adult learners are in higher education and how, as they say, that adult learners “face institutional neglect, prejudice, and denial of opportunities”(p.18).

Despite the disparities, all the participants found support in degree completion. To mention a few, Albert’s work place, family and community encouraged him to return to school after being away for 8 years. The CAMP program supported Mayo and José in numerous ways.

Marta's boss, mother and husband served as her inspiration. Veda, although had no family support, had professors that guided her efforts to successful degree completion.

Implications for Theory, Practice and Future Research

Offering insight for theory, practice and future research, this study is largely beneficial to the field of Adult Education heralding the success of Mexican American adult learners in degree attainment. Along with exploring possibilities for change regarding theory and practice, this section acknowledges limitations to the study and offers suggestions for future research.

Implications for Theory

Regarding theoretical notions of Mexican American adult learners in higher education, the *Borderlands* framework advanced adult educational theory uncovering new ways Mexican Americans negotiate life between two cultural worlds. Although a number of theoretical notions emerged from the research, three aspects are discussed in this closing segment, in light of the narratives.

In general, a *Borderlands* discourse is oppositional by nature, in that Anzaldua (1999) focused more on the conflicts and difficulties of living the Borderlands, and how to oppose oppression and negotiate the difficulties of living in the Borderlands. However, participants' stories seem to call for a re-theorizing of the discourse on somewhat less oppositional grounds, in light of participants' experiences. This less oppositional lens, what Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) term a bicultural theory of cultural acquisition, has many similarities with the Borderlands framework, but some differences as well. Much like a *Borderlands* discourse, a cultural acquisition discourse denounces assimilative ways of living between two distinct environments.

However, unlike the *Borderlands* discourse, which suggests resistive measures towards Anglo-American economic domination, Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) assert that “individuals who are becoming bicultural maintain a positive relationship with both cultures without having to choose one over the other, which precludes feelings of guilt over preferring one culture” (p.165).

Hence, Mexican American adult learners who are successful in higher education appear to understand and make use of the dominant culture to some degree by learning the codes that would help them navigate it successfully; however, they also maintain their strong connections and cultural ways of being with their Mexican traditions and home cultures of origin. A *Borderlands* framework theorizing marginality focuses more on past and present oppression, while it appears that a bicultural theory of cultural acquisition focuses less on oppression and more on mutuality with host and heritage cultures while recognizing opportunity.

Perhaps some quick examples from the data will clarify how this point played out in the study. Anzaldua (1999) discusses the *Borderlands* concept both from a geographical and a metaphorical perspective. Geographically, she portrays the physical border of Texas-US Southwest/Mexico, a place where “hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape” (p. 16). However, Susana had less oppositional experiences regarding the US-Mexican border. Susana, seeking opportunity, wanted to cross the border daily to attend school in Texas and described aspects of her experiences as positive stating:

We moved to El Paso because the Mexico situation was very severe. Mexico was in a recession. It was very severe in the 90's. That was the worst... Okay, so in Mexico what he (my father) would do was he would go to the restaurants and get what they needed...like toiletries....he had his own business. Then, eventually, when he was doing really good he opened another extension of the company in El Paso.

Thus, the border provided opportunity and mobility, though to be sure there was some sense of oppression which she also discussed, such as having to get clearance every day. Marta also discussed aspects of opportunity on the border as well as its oppression. To be sure, the border is a place of opposition as Anzaldua (1999) contends. But for these two women, it was also a place to access skills and resources from two cultural systems while tailoring behaviors pluralistically.

Anzaldua (1999) also discusses the metaphorical borderlands, and contends there is “the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and a spiritual borderlands” (p. 16). Participants of this study attested to encounters with White dominant cultural exploitation indicating there is a metaphoric *Borderland* of subordination and marginalization. For example, Mayo’s description of migrant life in the state of Washington, not a geographical border state, was a place of physical and psychological discomfort and exploitation. Jane described a similar environment in her migrant work in Wisconsin. Thus, exploring the *Borderlands* metaphorically became increasingly critical to this research offering new insight into adult learner success across terrains of hardship. What is important to note from Mayo’s and Jane’s metaphoric experiences of the *Borderlands* are strong work ethic gained through hardship informing their success in degree attainment. A bicultural theory of cultural acquisition hypothesizes that oppression and abuse can at times generate resiliency and cultural knowledge, in spite of its oppression, which is crucial in succeeding in a host culture.

It’s also important to note that part of both the *Borderlands* theoretical framework and the bicultural theory of cultural acquisition is their attention to issues of language. With the understanding that language and identity are twin skin (Anzaldua, 1999), identity was threatened when the heritage language was forbidden as in the example of Jane. However, in reviewing other narratives of this study, such as José’s,

Mayo's and Lorenza's a consideration to re-theorize the notion of language and identity emerged because in these narrative their identities do not appear to be threatened or stolen when they began to speak English fluently. For example, José, with reasons to feel threatened as a junior in a mostly all White populated high school speaking only Spanish, saw beyond threats to his identity and enthusiastically mastered the English language. Mayo, at 29 years old, a freshman in a White populated university speaking only Spanish, invested hours of unyielding hard work and after six months was able speak English relatively fluently. Lorenza, with little resistance, persevered in English language studies and did well going on to earn a degree in Spanish Teacher Education. Thus, the notion of the Borderlands as it pertains to Anzaldúa's phrase "I am my language" in regards to the participants in the studies who embraced more of a bicultural identity over time could be reframed to "I am my languages."

Unlike a Borderlands discourse, the narratives disclose notions of greater visibility, rather than invisibility, as participants were recognized for their competencies. While participants did talk to some degree about resisting boundaries and multiple types of oppression that Mexican Americans suffer, the narratives were also full of experiences where participants chronicled crossing racial and ethnic barriers and mastering the English language while demonstrating wide repertoires of behaviors that led to degree attainment. Participants also expressed appreciation for government grants, employer tuition reimbursements and faculty intervention. Tutorial services, Latino clubs, state funded programs such as C.A.M.P (College Assistance Migrant Program) and extraordinary internships informed Mexican American success in degree attainment. These participants who were successful in higher education seemed then to identify and live out a more bicultural identity where they focused a bit more on the positive and its

opportunity, and less on the obstacles of oppression, while acknowledging that such obstacles are there. This clearly has implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

This section makes recommendations for college and university systems to enhance retention and degree attainment for Mexican American adult learners. Organized in two groupings, recommendations are made for institutions as well as for educators. The findings from this study point first to the need for institutions of higher learning to recruit and retain Latina/o faculty and staff to serve as role models affecting the college's demography. According to Gonzales and Mejorado (2010) Mexican American faculty facilitate learning for all students, but especially for low-income students and students of color by mentoring them socially and academically. Together, contends Gonzales and Mejorado (2010), they build responsible, respectful relationships. Several of the participants from this study are now faculty at institutions of higher education and are actively engaged in mentoring Mexican American students encouraging them in degree attainment as they were once encouraged by faculty of color. Given the limited number of Latino faculty in higher education, it is also necessary for faculty and staff to understand issues relating to Mexican American students and to find ways to include particular issues related to them in the curriculum and pedagogy of their classes, and services that will lead to their success. As suggested by Gandara (1993) higher educational institutions are recommended to "direct their schools of education to train teachers with a focus on discarding their stereotypical ideas about Mexican American families" (p. 40). Some of the participants in this study indicated they had experiences that were discriminatory in nature which could have led to them withdrawing from college. Therefore, as suggested by Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez and

Rosales (2005), academic and educational cultures should “not tolerate or allow prejudicial actions by faculty, staff or students” (p.218).

Institutions of higher education should encouraged creating a sense of family by implementing peer-mentoring programs in connection with student organizations. Mentoring programs that are Latina/o specific assist students in developing “strong internal and external university connections thereby enhancing their sense of familismo, self, and educational efficacy” (p. 216). Peer mentoring programs were significantly effective for participants who were involved in the College Assistance Migrant Program, namely CAMP. Findings indicated that first generation Mexican-origin students thrived when peer, mentor and role model support was provided offering a sense of family on campus. Considering that family is of primary importance to Mexican American culture (Benmayor, 2002), structural support systems positively impacted the adult experience in higher education for the participants of this study.

With these recommendations there are also recommendations for educators. For instance, educators are encouraged to understand the needs and goals of their Mexican American students. As they begin to understand what their students aspirations are and what commitments they hold, and draw on these hopes and aspirations in their teaching, classroom environments can become more culturally conducive to learning. This study found that culturally conducive learning environments are forged as educators connect academic success with the learner’s historical past. Fanon (1961), Anzaldua (1999), Ogbu (1992) Johnson-Bailey (2001), and Abalos (2007) suggest that dealing with a colonized past on a psychological and community level can be catalyst creating ethics of hard work and perseverance in people of color, if they develop strategies to overcome oppression. Thus, educators need to recognize the colonized past, draw on learners’ backgrounds in their stories in teaching, and in who is represented in the curriculum, and help learners navigate the academic realities of higher education. Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) suggest “The mastery of different languages, the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and

a general resiliency associated with the ability to endure hardships and overcome obstacles will clearly be recognized as a new cultural capital that will be crucial for success in a modern, diversified society, not a handicap” (p. 166). This is true, however, only if educators recognize and help learners navigate the obstacles of a colonized history.

Lastly, educators are encouraged to explore what it means to be bicultural. It is not a label signifying Mexican Americanism. Rather it is a progression of experiences leading up to becoming fully bicultural. For most of the participants in this study, the process began with learning the English language and culminated with degree attainment. However, there were many experiences in between acquiring a language and attaining a degree that could be seized by creative educators enhancing the learning experience for the Mexican American adult. Thus, it is recommended that educators facilitate culturally relevant instruction by engaging their adult learners in listening to each other’s stories, allowing them to learn from each other, engaging them in readings that initiate discussion about negotiating multiple allegiances and guiding discussions that are educationally and ethnically affirming; it is important to recognize that a colonized past affects learners in negative ways, but with recognition of the oppression that comes with colonization, and empathy and encouragement, it is possible to help learners overcome obstacles and use their abilities to do so as a source of strength .

In summary, the following recommendations are suggested to institutions of higher education enhance retention and degree attainment for Mexican American adult learners: recruit and retain Latina/o faculty, train faculty to discard stereotypical ideas, and develop peer-mentoring programs creating a sense of family on campus. Recommendations offered to educators are: first, know their student’s aspirations, goals and commitments; secondly, recognize their colonized past, the oppression in that past, but also the cultural strengths in learning to overcome adversity, thirdly, implement responsive curriculum serving to enhance the process of becoming bicultural as Mexican American adult learners.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As this study offers awareness into the experiences of Mexican American adult learners in higher education, some limitations in the research became evident as the study unfolded. For instance, given that the participant sample is small, the results of the study are perhaps not generalizable to all Mexican American adult learners. But it is up to educators and learners to see if they see themselves or their students represented in the stories of these learners. Secondly, within the interview process participants may have only told me part of their story, perhaps only sharing part of their background and experiences as they related to higher education and degree attainment. This could be due to time limitations, the fact that I'm an Anglo researcher, or a host of other factors, as well as the fact that data were collected primarily in that one interview segment, although member checks were conducted with most of the participants. However, it was difficult to reconnect with a few of the participants when verification and explanations were needed during the analysis component of the research. This "non-response" from certain participants left room for research error pertaining to the person's story.

As far as suggestions for future research, given that Mexican American representation in US colleges is very low as it pertains to not only adults, but to Mexican Americans in general, future research is called to "listen" to the lived experiences more specifically of Mexican American adult learners. This study offers a beginning look at Mexican American adult learners, but more research needs to be done. Such research could be quantitative in nature exploring and operationalizing some of the themes that came up in this research. Other qualitative and narrative research studies could be conducted as well, such as ethnography of the CAMP program and its participants, given the successful nature of the program. While CAMP tends to focus on traditional age learners, and not as much on adult learners, there could be aspects that could be modified to more directly address the needs of adult learners.

EPILOGUE

When I began this research I aspired to understand Mexican Americans through an adult learner lens. Early on, I had been perplexed why Mexican American adults in our community were not serving professionally as teachers, doctors, social workers, etc. Most were serving in agricultural vocations. Thus, I set out on a mission to talk with Mexican Americans outside our community who were engaged in professions. I learned that their academic journeys were long, socially the roads they walked were lonely, the rest stops were few, but the destination reachable. Their stories touched my life more than any other aspect of this research inspiring me in my own journey in degree attainment.

With all that I have learned about Mexican Americans and degree attainment, I have learned much more about myself as an adult learner. I experienced the invisibleness that Johnson-Bailey (2001) discusses in talking about adult learners of color. I took Statistics with a class full of very young Public Administration majors. At 56 years old, I wanted desperately to make a friend who could re-explain to me what the professor already explained. This course work was difficult. I wanted to be accepted as a peer among my classmates. I had a sense of cultural disjuncture that I referenced Mexican American adult learners experiencing. I plodded on finally making a friend, Abby. I will forever be grateful to her because she made me feel visible. While this doesn't exactly compare to being a Mexican American adult learner in higher education in terms of cultural disjuncture, the sense of isolation and marginalization that I experienced in the land of statistics as an older learner helped me empathize with the way my participants felt invisible and marginalized.

As an adult learner I also learned to juggle the responsibilities of being mother, grandmother, daughter, sister, teacher, pastor's wife and student. Like my participants, the journey has been long (ten years long), the road has been lonely (no one quite understood my

passion to learn), the rest stops were few (one course after another), but the destination doable. I struggled with guilt along the way. Johnson-Bailey (2001) says this goes with the territory for adult learners. She contends that adult women learners can sometimes have a sense of responsibility to everyone; so, when studies are put before family guilt can follow suit. Sometimes the guilt made it difficult for me to accomplish academic tasks or meet deadlines on time. Yet, a sense of determination, also characteristic of adult learners, over-rode feelings of guilt and assignments were done, papers turned in and grades maintained.

I am grateful I had the opportunity to study through Penn State University's Adult Education program. Taking what I have learned about Mexican American degree attainment and about myself, I continue to listen to stories of not only Mexican Americans, but adult learners in general, piecing together the cultural squares of their experiences that make each quilted life so unique. My research efforts have taught me to appreciate diversity rather than ignore it. And if, for some reason, a time comes when my historical face is paralyzed, my political face is threatened or my personal face discouraged, my sacred face will seek grace in the loving arms of the God of my youth spurring me on in all my ways. For I have learned from the participants in this study that there is good in hardship, hope in a persistence and immense beauty in biculturalism.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Opening Statement

I am very interested in the experiences of Mexican American students in higher education. I would like to ask you questions about your bicultural experiences as an adult learner while you were working on your degree. Although I will be asking questions and seeking answers from you, I want you to know you are free to take your time in answering the questions and that you can refuse to answer any question that you wish. My intention is to learn about your story. Although I am not Mexican American, I love to listen to stories that tell about bicultural experiences in education. It is my hope that this will be an enjoy time together.

Sample Questions

Questions about the Overall Experience

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how you grew up in relationship to developing your identity as Mexican American?
2. What does it mean to you to be bicultural and how did that develop?
3. What were your most significant experiences growing up or as an adult that led you to pursue a bachelor's degree in higher education?

Questions about the Higher Education Experience as an Adult Learner

1. Why was it important to you to earn a higher education degree?
2. Who were your most import influences while you were working on your degree?
3. Who or what were your negative influences while in higher education?
4. If you were asked to explain your bicultural experiences as a student could you compare them to something else?
5. What professor impacted your experience significantly?
6. What was a typical day like as far as study, socializing and employment endeavors?
7. In reflecting back do you think your professors were fair in their assessment of your performance and work as a student?
8. What impact has your educational endeavors had on your personal life?
9. Has degree attainment been prevalent in your family and in your extended family?
10. Is there anything else you might share concerning your biculturalism as a student in higher education?

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