

THE LATINA DOCTORAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE:
A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY

by

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DEDICATION

To Cameron, for being my sunshine. Always remember that you are my greatest blessing and I have been honored that you have been by my side throughout this journey. I could not have done it without your hugs and kisses. I love you to the moon and back.

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ABSTRACT

Latinas continue to be underrepresented in doctoral studies, and there are many barriers that they encounter while pursuing a doctoral degree. This qualitative phenomenological study documents the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. The primary research question guiding the dissertation is: What are the experiences faced by Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, what supports and strategies do they report needing? This study is unique because there is very limited research on Latina doctoral students and no research on this population was located that utilizes a conceptual framework integrating Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model.

Data sources included interviews and critical incident analysis for nine participants enrolled in doctoral studies. Findings are organized under each sub research question through a discussion of themes that were identified from the interviews. Study findings add to the body of literature on how life events affect progress and completion as well as understanding the supports and strategies surrounding the Latina doctoral student. This study makes significant contributions to the research on the Latina doctoral student and more generally, on women participating in doctoral education. By adding to such understanding, this study draws recommendations for higher education institutions to identify areas where they may need to plan and implement educational resources and other support programs that address the needs of the Latina student.

I. INTRODUCTION

In my pursuit of the doctorate, I have learned through life events and experiences. I have learned about who I am, where I have been, and how I will prepare myself for the future of practicing adult and community education. The goal of striving to earn a doctorate has allowed me to learn and understand myself through examining experiences that influence my life, teaching, and learning. Through the process of self-reflection, I am able to explore how my perspectives shape my actions in the various contexts that intersect my life (Plakhotnik et al., 2015). There is no doubt that doctoral education can be challenging for students in countless ways. It has been an overwhelming amount of work while I balance working a full-time job and the responsibilities of being a single mother. I didn't realize the amount of stress that would be placed on me as I shifted from courses to dissertation writing. I have struggled to write the dissertation primarily because of personal matters and transitioning employment. In addition, I lacked motivation and purpose, which caused me to fear the process of seeking help and being open about my feelings.

I have changed positions in my employment in the last few years looking for the best opportunity for financial stability. It was important as I am the sole parent to care for my young son. During the last few years, my son went through some personal concerns which required many hours of my time. There were times he had an appointment at least two times per week to accommodate his physical and emotional needs. At the same time, I felt the pressure that I was not a good mother since I always felt in the back of my head the burden to complete what I had started.

I currently work as a personal counselor at a community college. I counsel

students about academic challenges, personal concerns, and choosing a career. In doing this work and engaging in a curriculum on adult development, I have realized that I have made many transitions in the last few years due to instability and high levels of stress. Also, I had to get into a better place financially since I was not receiving any other support. I had to work harder and improve the situation for my family especially since my son required more daily attention. I believe that my focus was on stability and not on my dissertation. Dissertation writing became something I pushed back since there were more important things that took priority. Currently, I do not plan to make any more transitions in the near future. I feel as if I am in a better place to be able to focus on the completion of the dissertation.

I realize that my writing may expose my thoughts, feelings, and fears about being a Latina doctoral student. It also places me in a vulnerable situation and there is also a risk associated with sharing my own experiences and being open about what I have encountered throughout my studies, but that is my purpose now. I want others to know that they are not alone and they will be able to achieve success if they keep pushing through the hardships. Also, I want to inform higher education administrators about the struggles doctoral students go through, and Latinas in particular, with the hope this knowledge can lead them to develop and offer systematic supports for Latinas and other students of color. I understand that the doctorate may be one of the most difficult challenges to overcome, but I feel as if there has been some meaning associated with my times of transition. Being a Latina stresses the importance of strong family values and that is a major source of my identity. I also have a strong work ethic because of the Latino values in my culture. My culture believes in working harder than the next person.

I feel as if I have let many others down around me because I wasn't able to handle everything that came my way. My Latin culture taught me to respect my family above all other things and regardless of what actions I took towards being a good mother and family member, I felt the other part of me as a Latina doctoral student was being let down.

Throughout my time in graduate school, I encountered several occasions where I faced role conflict. I had multiple roles in my life and somehow each role opposed the other. I was trying to determine what I was experiencing and questioned the meaning of the doctoral experience. There has been major conflict with time and my personal life because of working full-time and being a single mother to a young child. I found myself being two people, one the doctoral student and the other the working mother. I felt as if there were never enough hours in the day to devote time to my child. There was a part of me that had to leave my child behind while I focused on being a good student. Later, when I was with my child, I would then feel guilty because of the time I needed to devote to my coursework and dissertation writing. Home (1998) describes that the multiple roles one has in life may create a strain where there can be role contagion. Role contagion occurs when one role brings about more strain in other roles. I often felt like a marginal mother and student because I couldn't focus on either of my roles. Women with family responsibilities are most vulnerable in dealing with role strain. Giancola et al. (2009) write that role strain can increase stress and can lead to abandoning educational pursuits. While reviewing the literature, I found that there are some studies that describe doctoral experiences, but there is a gap when it comes to representation of the voices of Latina doctoral students (Arocho, 2017). The purpose of this study is to document the

experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree.

Statement of the Problem

Latinx students are underrepresented in graduate programs, especially at the doctoral level (Martinez, 2018). This is not a new trend and has become a more noticeable issue as the Latinx population grows in United States educational institutions. González (2007) found that Latinx face isolation, alienation, lack of support, low expectations from faculty, and discouragement. Several others report similar findings about the educational experiences of Latina/os (Bañuelos, 2006). Latinx students have often faced marginalization and oppression within the educational system (Yosso et al., 2009). There have been inequalities in the educational system such as insufficient academic preparation because of underfunded schools with limited college preparatory courses. Latina/os may decide to pursue work because they have not been provided sufficient college access information to pursue higher education. They also are tied to the family unit and are responsible for providing for the family and may choose to discontinue their academic journey.

Many who begin a doctoral program leave prior to completion. Doctoral student attrition can have damaging consequences for the student and the institution. Lovitts (2005) reports that about one half of doctoral students do not complete their degrees. Students that leave doctoral programs feel disappointed and may depart with a financial burden as well as leaving behind a financial burden for the institution. However, existent literature (Kong et al., 2013; Willis & Carmichael, 2011) suggests that universities have invested time and financial resources in students that do not graduate. In particular,

Caruth (2015) explains that students may not complete their doctoral program as a result of unpleasant experiences, challenges, or life events faced throughout the doctoral program. This author further elaborates that challenges may include various academic requirements, lack of encouragement received from classmates, and limited socialization for students, loneliness, family and work responsibilities, self-esteem, and advisor-advisee relationships. However, Callary et al. (2012) claim that the challenges vary from student to student.

Equally important to the challenges is the need to describe how Latinx are affected by growth in population. According to the most recent U.S. Census (2010), 308.7 million people live in the United States and 50.5 million (16 percent) were of Hispanic or Latino origin. The growth of Hispanic or Latinos communities may be the result of high rates of fertility and immigration. “Hispanic or Latino” refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (United States Census Bureau, 2010). For the purpose of this dissertation, the preferred term is Latinx. This term refers to a person of Latin American origin or descent; it is used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina.

Latinos rank behind Whites and African American in educational attainment and have received 21% of bachelor’s degrees, whereas, African Americans have received 32% and Whites received 45% (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The educational attainment report describes the educational attainment of the population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2018 a total of 196 doctoral degrees which is about 4.4% were awarded to students of Hispanic or Latino origin, out of 4487 for all races. While the

United States is growing in the number of Latinx individuals there seems to be some improvement in their educational attainment, but there remains an educational gap when comparing Latinx to African Americans, and Whites. Even though there is some progress, Contreras and Gándara (2006) state that Latino students are less likely to earn a college degree and for Latina women the number is lower than for men.

Research has also indicated that there are fewer female students overall enrolled in doctoral programs than males (Caruth, 2015). Women typically are the central figure in the home and struggle to balance family and academics (Espinoza, 2010). Achieving the right balance depends on the student, but it can be described as caring for themselves and their families while simultaneously managing their course schedule and demands. These multiple roles conflict and given these challenges, the prospective female doctoral student may choose not to enroll or persist which could potentially affect the number of future female researchers.

Ovink (2014) states that in Latino culture, familial roles and expectations or *familismo* may differ between men and women. Azpeitia and Bacio (2022) define *familismo* as the cultural value emphasizing the importance of family, providing support and feeling an obligation to family. Latinx students come from a collectivistic culture with strong family values which is in contrast to the academia's culture that is more individualistic, based on White, middle class, and paternalistic norms (Martinez, 2013). In addition, the familial bonds can be an asset to the Latinx students which serve as sources of strength and determination. While the expectations for women are generally high for women in the United States, Latinx cultural values in particular indicate these expectations of women. While her family may not put any direct pressure on the Latina

student, she often feels as if she is alone in balancing home, work, and doctoral studies responsibilities. These conflicting feelings of having to choose between family and academics, can lead to stress, grief, guilt, and other emotional or mental issues (Del Pilar, 2008). For Latina women, it can be more complicated to focus on studies because of “selfless devotion” to children, immediate family, and extended family (Espinoza, 2010). Castillo et al. (2010) and Espinoza (2010) define *marianismo* as a cultural belief and it highlights gender roles found in the Latin culture. Stevens (1973) contributed by bringing awareness of the women’s subordinate status in Latin America cultural beliefs. In addition, *marianismo* promotes certain expectations of family typically coming before anything else including her own needs.

Latinx value education and have historically fought for equal education in the United States. They also face barriers at the beginning of their educational journey that can be traced back to segregation for other racial/ethnic minority populations from the White population. Valencia (2005) writes that in 1946, *Mendez v. Westminster School District* found that segregation was unconstitutional, and the rights of Mexican American students were violated under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. According to Valencia (2005), this triumph was seen as a building block to the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Despite these victories, there continues to be underrepresentation of Latina students in doctoral programs and there are some qualities that can guide them to the best path to complete the doctorate.

Latina students are motivated by achieving success because they may be the first in their families to attend college. Although the term of first-generation student is often applied to undergraduate students, Hoffer et al. (2003) reported that first-generation

Ph.D. students are more likely to be female as well as individuals of color. Such students have a “deeply held desire to achieve academically” due to “parental struggle and sacrifice,” which often included leaving their home country and entering the U.S., working long hours, and struggling to learn English (Easley et al., 2012, p. 169). Latinas feel a duty to repay their parents and do so by providing support and assistance. While there are many family members in or around the home, in most cases, Latina students do not have other family members to turn to for guidance with completing a doctorate degree. As the first in the family to attend college, they do not have many role models within the academic culture. Early (2010) suggested that while they have family support, family members more often serve as cheerleaders and offer them words of encouragement rather than being able to provide informational or financial support.

In addition to the home life of the female doctoral student, she is also a nontraditional student. A nontraditional student is identified by the presence of one or more of the following seven characteristics: delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, attend part time, work full time, financially independent, have dependents, are single parents, or did not obtain a standard high school diploma (Berstein, 2012). Students 25 and over typically exhibit at least one of these characteristics. Nontraditional students generally face barriers, and Latina women have an additional struggle including issues related to race and gender.

As the Latinx population continues to increase, there will be more Latina women who will pursue professional and advanced degrees. It is important to give Latina women access to higher education, but also to provide systems of support that will ensure retention and success. Literature on doctoral students has mostly focused on doctoral

students as a whole, on men in general, on women in general, or on Latinx students as a whole. There is very little information on the unique experiences of Latina doctoral students and correspondingly few studies focused on the adult learner experiences of the Latina doctoral student. Yet, Latinas continue to be underrepresented in doctoral studies, and there are many barriers that Latina students encounter while pursuing a doctoral degree. Therefore, this research will address several important gaps in seeking to better understand the experiences and challenges of Latinas while they pursue a doctorate degree. Most of the studies located on Latina students focused on the undergraduate level and therefore a gap exists in research for first-generation Latina doctoral students. Next, there are some studies that describe transitional experiences of doctoral students, but there is a gap when it comes to the representation of the voices of Latina doctoral students as suggested by Arocho (2017). Finally, the limited research on Latina doctoral students does not examine their experiences both in terms of life events and challenges they encounter and the strategies and cultural supports they draw on facing these events and challenges.

Overview of Conceptual Framework

Latina doctoral students have their own unique experiences while participating in doctoral studies. For this study, I utilized Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model as lenses to enhance my understanding in seeking an explanation of the Latina doctoral experience. Schlossberg's transition theory provided a framework for how Latina doctoral students dealt with the life events and challenges they encountered while they transitioned in and through their doctoral program. The study identified transitions experienced by the participants, examining the

4S System (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies) as it applies to them, and considered the series of phases including *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out* (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995).

The dissertation drew on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model by suggesting that Latinas have additional resources of cultural wealth that go beyond the classroom. Yosso's model highlights the importance of cultural wealth which offered a culturally informed approach to the consideration of supports and strategies they have available to them. Yosso (2005) designed the community cultural wealth as a framework to understand how students of color access and experience college from a strength-based perspective. In this strengths-based perspective, the model captures the talents, strengths and experiences of students of color and how they bring these traits to the college environment. The six forms of cultural capital described are: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistance. Applying this conceptual framework helped to gain a better understanding of the experience of the Latina doctoral student as she transitioned in and through her doctoral program.

Research Questions

The primary question is: What are the experiences faced by Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, and what supports and strategies do they report needing? Questions that guided the exploration include:

1. What life events influence participant decisions to begin the transition into a doctoral program?
2. How do participants describe themselves and their life situations as they have engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies?

3. What life events impact participants' progression in their doctoral program, either positively or negatively?
4. What supports and strategies do participants report needing as they encounter impactful life events during the course of their doctoral studies?

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study documents the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. The study sought to deepen the understanding of how these life events affected progress and completion. This study provided us more information regarding Latina female doctoral students and the challenges they faced, so that institutions can better understand and serve this population.

Many Latinas are struggling to persist and complete doctoral programs. More should be done to support Latinas in academia especially since there are a limited number of Latinx doctorates (Wilds, 2000). This research will assist in addressing the underrepresentation of Latinas in doctoral programs. There has not been much research in this area and also a large portion of the existing research is now dated and does not reflect the current generation of Latinas.

This study is unique because there is very limited research on Latina doctoral students. Also, no research on this population was located that utilizes a conceptual framework integrating Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model. The findings of this study will provide information on how Latina students were able to recognize their assets rather than focusing on the deficits in their lives. Participants were also able identify that the most valuable assets

were the culmination of love and support they had around them.

Also, this study makes significant contributions to the research on the Latina doctoral student and more generally, on women participating in doctoral education. A better understanding of how Latina students make meaning out of life events is needed to help foster and sustain them in doctoral programs. By adding to such understanding, this study draws recommendations for higher education institutions to identify areas where they may need to plan and implement educational resources and other support programs that address the needs of the Latina student.

Organization of the Dissertation

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to document the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. Chapter I introduced the context of the study, research question, and purpose. The next chapter, Chapter II, provides a review of the literature in regard to the Latinx population and culture, educational attainment, first generation college students, previous research on students of color and females in doctoral studies and Latina's experiences in doctoral programs. Chapter III describes the qualitative methods employed and includes the identification of participants, the research design, and the processes of data collection and data analysis. Study findings are presented in Chapter IV and are organized by answering each sub research question formulated for the dissertation. There is a discussion of themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with nine study participants. Lastly, Chapter V provides a discussion of study highlights as well as conclusions and recommendations for research and practice.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature examines the experiences of Latina doctoral students and analyzes these experiences according to the following sections: the Latinx population and culture, educational attainment, first generation college students, previous research on students of color and females in doctoral studies and Latina's experiences in doctoral programs. The aim of this review is to provide the reader a familiarity of the Latina doctoral student in light of existent literature and to provide a foundation for the study.

This chapter includes a brief history of the evolution of the Latinx population in the United States. The review continues with Latinx culture, educational attainment, community cultural wealth, first generation college students, and obstacles to learning. The literature reviewed dates back to 1954 to include the history of the critical incident technique proposed by Flanagan (1954), but primarily focuses on more recent literature spanning 2005-2020. I used the following research parameters including keywords: Latina, Latino, Latinx, Hispanic, adult, women or female, woman or females, life events, doctoral student, doctorate, graduate, transition, higher education or college or university or postsecondary or post-secondary, and persistence. I searched academic journals, dissertations, ERIC, PROQUEST, and books. Other resources included reports from government agencies such as the United States Census Bureau and the United States Department of Education.

Latinx Population and Culture

Latin America is located in the Western Hemisphere south of the United States and includes Mexico, Central America, South America, and the West Indies. The official languages of the Latin American region are Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Although

the terms Latina and Latino have been used in scholarly literature, the United States Census Bureau (2011) and other federal government organizations use the term “Hispanic” instead of Latina/Latino for collecting information to refer to individuals of Latin America descent residing in the United States, who may or may not speak Spanish in the home. More recently, the term Latinx has emerged and been embraced by academics as a more gender inclusive term that pushes against a binary application of Latina/o (Rodriguez, et al., 2018). It was seen as a way to have all Latinas and Latinos stand together instead of being separated into genders. The term of Latinx continues to evolve as personal and language preferences determine the best term for this population.

For the purpose of this review of the literature, the preferred term is Latinx when referring to both Latinas/Latinos except when citing statistics from specific government documents or quoting an author using a different term. However, I chose to utilize the term Latina when describing the participants since they self-identify as Latina, and use the term Latina when referring specifically to women of Latin American descent. See Appendix A for definitions of key terms used throughout this dissertation.

Kotkin (2010) writes that the United States will become a nation in which the racial/ethnic minority population exceeds the Caucasian population by 2050. Hispanics are projected to experience the greatest population increase and by 2060 the population will be projected at 129 million (Berstien, 2012). Thus, Latinx are becoming the largest minority group in the United States. Bernal and Flores-Ortiz (1982) describe Latinos as a diverse group of people that come from different cultural histories and origins. In addition, they have different realities constructed through sociopolitical and economic means.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), Latinx accounted for 18.1 percent of the nation's total population at 58.9 million. The largest group of Latinx is of Mexican origin. Half of U.S. Latinas/Latinos live in Southwest border states and include California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico (Krogstad, 2020). Noe-Bustamante et al. (2019) analyzed the United States Census Bureau of 2016 and reported that Mexicans are people who have self-identified as Hispanics of Mexican origin. These individuals include immigrants from Mexico and those who report that their family traces back to their ancestry in Mexico. The Mexican-American War was a conflict between United States and Mexico after the annexation of the Republic of Texas in 1845 (Guardino, 2017). The Mexican-American War spanned between the years of 1846 to 1848 in which President Polk wanted to expand the nation to the Pacific Ocean (Guardino, 2017). Several series of wars began and Mexico lost about one-third of its territory, which included California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. The United States took over northwestern sections of Mexico and many of those residents were living on the land when it was still Mexico. Those who lived on the lands were granted citizenship by the United States of America.

The second largest group of Latinx in the United States is of Puerto Rican descent. Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony and intended to be a military outpost before American troops raised the United States flag and took control (Flores, 2010). Puerto Rico became a commonwealth territory of the United States in 1898 and residents received U.S. citizenship in 1917 (Flores, 2010). Based on the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), there are 5.68 million Latinos/Hispanics of Puerto Rican origin living in the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Puerto Ricans account for about 10% of the

United States Latino/Hispanic population and 3.4 million live in Puerto Rico (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). Puerto Ricans residing on the United States mainland live predominately in New Jersey and New York.

The third largest group of Latinx is the Cuban Americans. Cuban Americans are those who trace their ancestry to Cuba. An estimated 2.3 million Cubans self-identified as Latino/Hispanics lived in the United States in 2017 (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). Most of the Cuban community lives in Florida with Miami having the highest number of Cuban residents. The United States has also seen a recent rise in other Latinx communities from other countries including Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Venezuelans due to these immigrants seeking asylum and a better life for their families. The demographics of the Latinx population are constantly changing due to immigration.

The U.S. Census reports that there were 60 million Latinas/Latinos living in the United States in 2017 who accounted for 18% of the total population (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). Some would say the number has grown substantially. It is important to note that the Census statistics may not report the complete number of undocumented immigrants due to their not participating in Census data collection out of fear of being persecuted or sent back to their home country. In terms of other characteristics pertaining to the Latina/Latino population, about 61% of Latinas/Latinos in the United States were 35 or younger in 2016 (Lopez et al., 2018). The median age of Latina/Latinos is 28. Latinas/Latinos also tend to have larger families than those of non-Latina/Latino groups whereas the average number of members in a Latino household is three members or more (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). While the rise of the Latinx population increases the diversity of the United States, Latinx students continue to be underrepresented in higher

education.

While the number of Latinx students are increasing, they continue to face many obstacles while attending college. Many make the choice to attend college or graduate school as an economic decision and therefore for financial benefit. Yet, research data indicate that financial, cultural/social, and academic barriers limit access to college (Gardner, 2010). Latina doctoral students may experience acculturative stress as they proceed through the doctoral journey due to having an “incongruence of beliefs, values, and other cultural norms” (Silva et al., 2017, p. 214). Additionally, language, demographics, and political influences are three additional factors that hinder Latinos pursuit of higher education (Elliot & Parks, 2018). The presumed economic advantage of pursuing higher education typically plays a role in motivating a Latinx student earning a degree. Yet, the students’ persistence in higher education is influenced by academic cultural climate and the ability to feel they are a part of the culture of the institution they attend (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). There is an important need for Latinx students to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance from peers, faculty, and administrators. Elliot and Parks (2018) indicate that Latino students also a need a strong sense of self in understanding their social, cultural, and academic connectedness.

While Latinx students feel the need for a sense of belonging and acceptance from others, but this begins in the home. A Latinx student’s family and community influence a student’s decision to enroll and persist until graduation. Members of the Latinx family typically are required to contribute to the family finances. Latino students are likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and will more likely endure the financial responsibility of paying for college attendance (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Some families

resist the choice of higher education because it may place the family in a greater amount of debt. Those families that disapprove of the choice of higher education may hinder, delay, or end the students' aspirations; while those encouraging higher education participation have not necessarily been able to guide their children to encourage aspirations (Elliot & Parks, 2018). The family is the central unit that influences the individual to choose to either focus on academic studies or employment, or to stay at home to care for siblings or younger children.

Religion is important in the Latin culture. Spirituality is part of the everyday life particularly holiday traditions. Many Latinx families cite religion as a way to leave things up to chance or faith. Often, Latinx families pray for a sign to see if they are on track of doing the right thing. In Latinx homes, there is devotion of faith by declaring "it is God's will or leave it in God's hands." The influence of the Catholic Church is to be good descendants and attend mass regularly. Gil and Vazquez (1996) note that it teaches divine mercy and that through trust and love, the church and their faith will sustain and offer support.

Marianismo is the traditional definition of a woman's role in the family. *Marianismo* is the cultural value modeled after the Virgin Mary of the Catholic Church (Gil & Vazquez, 1996). The Virgin Mary is seen as the ideal woman and traditional Latinx culture promotes that all Latinas should work to aspire to be the mother and nurturer. In addition, religious teaching indicates the Virgin Mary endured pain, sorrow and sacrifice for her community and her loved ones. Accordingly, the ideal Latina woman is perceived to be like the Virgin Mary which includes characteristics such as being loving, obedient, giving, and patient. At the core of her values would include

enduring pain and suffering in which she put the needs of others before her own.

Espinoza (2010) found that Latina family obligations include staying close to the home and spending time caring for the family. The obligation and the responsibilities fall more on the Latina than on the males in the home since the Latina is perceived as the caretaker. Espinoza also wrote that *marianismo* includes the values of dependence, subordination, responsibility for domestic chores, and selfless devotion to family.

Although *marianismo* is a prevalent term used with reference to Latina woman, we must also be able to understand *familismo* to get a full picture of the Latinx culture. Latinas with a strong sense of *familismo* have a life full of obligations and reciprocities and must fulfill language/cultural brokering, sibling caretaking, and financial contributions (Espinoza, 2010). Vega (1990) informed that *familismo* emphasizes loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity in which there is a strong identification and attachment to the family. Family members must prioritize family over any individual interests. Next, Espinoza (2010) observed that *familismo* emphasizes cooperation and interdependence; whereas, the United States culture values independence and self-sufficiency. The cultural values of *familismo* and *marianismo* create the expectation that the Latina will always prioritize family needs over her own needs. Espinoza (2010) states that the Latina strives to be the “good Latina woman” for herself and others in the family.

Gender roles weigh heavily on the cultural identity of the Latinx culture for men as well as women. Traditionally, men are the providers of the family and primary breadwinners that contribute to the home. Latin men have typically formed an identity known as *machismo* that requires men to keep their word, act with honor, and protect their name (Ponjuan et al., 2012). While the role of men is the provider, the cultural

expectation of women is subservient. Latinx families include the primary and extended family network. In some cases, there may be three generations living in the home including grandparents, parents, and children (Ponjuan et al., 2012). Individuals within a Latinx family are expected to put the needs of the family before their own. This family dynamic can affect a student's persistence in higher education. Anzaldúa (1987) provided readers an opportunity to learn about cultural incongruity in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Latinas often experience "cultural incongruity and ethnic identity conflict when negotiating their academic and Latina identities (Anzaldúa, 1987, as cited in Hernández, 2015, p. 125). Latinas often learn these identities are incompatible and this may in turn effect their perseverance to continue their education.

Sometimes for the sake of the family, Latinx students sacrifice personal ambitions for the benefit of the family. Braxton et al. (2004) found that "racial or ethnic minority students often feel pressured to spend more time with family, or to oversee family matters" (p. 49). This expectation of Latinx students may lead to decreasing the amount of time available to engage in academic and social activities sponsored by the institution. At the same time, having support from significant others contributes to attendance and success.

Nieman et al. (2000) found that Mexican-American women who pursued degrees often reported difficulty with romantic partners and personal relationships. These women encountered more issues when dating Latino men who were less educated. Further, Nieman et al. inferred that Latino men may not want to date a highly educated women since they view the Latina's education as undermining the traditional gender roles established by the Latino culture.

Hamedani et al. (2013) discovered that European American students are more likely to be motivated with achieving personal goals. Achievement of personal goals requires that the focus be on self rather than others around you. Baker and Robnett (2012) found that Latino undergraduate students were more likely than their Black or White peers to devote time to family and community and spent seventeen or more hours per week fulfilling family obligations. Latinx generally have a strong commitment and love for their family. Even though they aspire for higher education, many hours are spent each week on family responsibilities rather than on academics or maintaining campus connections.

Researchers have not adequately researched the role family and home life experiences play in academic achievement. There is some existing research on the experiences of Latinas in college that highlights the family connection or bond as a key component to their academic success (Sy & Romero, 2006). Family life can enhance educational success, but the family obligations may also interfere or conflict with the demands of higher education. This conflict places them in a cultural bind (Sy & Romero, 2006). The Latina woman, in particular, is tied to close family connections while she pursues higher education along with multiple demands of school and family relationships. Thus, the Latina student is likely to face a strong internal conflict causing her to feel she must choose between her family and education. Many women in general face similar struggles, but Latinas often face additional challenges due to immigration status, poverty, discrimination, and low self-esteem.

Educational Attainment of Latinx Students

Bohon et al. (2006) revealed that Latinos have the highest high school dropout rates and are less likely to earn bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees than any other racial/ethnic group with the exception of Native Americans. Since Latinx have progressively smaller numbers in the educational pipeline, it is expected that their proportions are lower in doctoral education. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF) from a Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED), 55,195 doctorate degrees were awarded in the United States in 2018. NSF adds that not surprisingly, given limited participation in doctoral education by underrepresented minorities such as Latino and Black or African Americans, Latinos earned only 6.5% of all doctorates while Whites earned 52% and Blacks earned 5.5% respectively to the population demographics. NSF further provides that the proportion of students in the United States who identify as Asian American earned 27% of doctoral degrees which is high in consideration to their representation in the population, while American Indian or Alaska Native recipients earned less than 1% of doctorates from 2001 to 2016. Since doctoral degrees are required for research and the professoriate, there is underrepresentation of Latinx individuals in the academic hierarchy.

Pruitt and Isaac (1985) reviewed the enrollment of Latinas/Latinos in graduate school and identified that the under-enrollment is due to segregation and discrimination at lower educational levels. Latinx families tend to live in low-income neighborhoods and attend segregated schools. Pruitt and Isaac explain that these students typically have received lower quality education and experienced racism prior to college enrollment. In the study of 30 successful Latina/Latino students, at least half reported some form of

racism from either individuals or institutions. Several respondents reported inequalities through curriculum, teacher bias, and observations. Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that these forms of racism or inequalities affected Latinas/Latinos decisions to persist in high school, college, and graduate schools. They also suggested that the national dropout rates for Latinx are high because the school system is failing these students.

Growing up, Latinx children have often lacked role models among schoolteachers and administrators who understand their culture. They looked around and did not see many individuals that looked like them, given underrepresentation of faculty due to the significant shortage of Latinas in higher education (Abraído-Lanza, et al., 2022). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) found that the academic failure of Latina/Latino students may be due to stresses of ethnic-minority status, economic hardship, discrimination, alienating schools, difficulty understanding English, and parents who are not familiar with the educational system of the United States. Role models among school staff validated and legitimized the culture and identity of the Latinx student. Role models inspire and show the Latinx student that they can also achieve success through hard work, effort, and action towards academic achievement. Latinx students encounter relatively few such role models as they move higher into the educational pipeline.

Understanding the First-Generation College Student

Data from the 2018 Survey of Earned Doctorates (National Science Foundation, 2019) indicates that nearly one half of Latinx doctoral students are first generation college students. Consequently, a greater proportion of Latinx students are first-generation students than is true for Whites and Asians. Although the purpose of the study is to examine the Latina doctoral student, existing literature draws primarily from the

experience of the first-generation college student at the undergraduate level.

According to the National Science Foundation (2015), first-generation college students represent 30% of doctoral degree recipients. Most of the research for first-generation focuses on undergraduates. First-generation college students are the first in the family to attend college in which neither parent has attended nor has been awarded a college degree. In 2010, there were 4.5 million first-generation college students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States. (Pryor, et al., 2011). Given the high number of students that are first-generation, college and university administrators have recognized that such students face a unique set of challenges and needs in comparison to peers who have had a family member attend and complete college.

Many individuals grow up believing that the key to future success is obtaining a college education. In addition, it is assumed that a college education will somehow open doors to options for a better career and lifestyle. Parents who have a college education may contribute to their child's academic potential and tend to create an expectation of higher education (Martinez et al., 2009). Next, students who have a parent that has attended college can better rely on their parents as a resource for questions about college enrollment or college life. Therefore, first-generation college students begin at a disadvantage from other students in terms of social support, academic expectation, academic preparation, and access to resources.

First-generation students lack a strong support system familiar with college and university expectations. Latinx who are first-generation college students have difficulty navigating the process of accessing support and resources. Most often, their parents and the student herself are unfamiliar with higher education. First-generation students often

feel as if they are by themselves with a perceived lack of familial embeddedness that can transmit knowledge and support about the institution. Cilesiz and Drotos (2011) report that first-generation college students face multiple challenges due to the lack of support at the home and require interventions of support elsewhere to ensure their success.

Parents of first-generation college students typically want the student to find a way to earn a living quickly. In many cases this means that they encourage the Latinx student to find a job. First-generation college students' parents who lack a college education may not be able to emphasize the proper skills needed to obtain or sustain employment. They also are unable to offer guidance to help their child succeed in college. For example, parents that have not attended college cannot provide personal college experience and detailed information about resources available to them since they have not attended college.

First-generation students receive less information about the college application process and applying for financial aid. They also have a difficult time transitioning into a college setting and experience more barriers towards completing a degree. Once enrolled, first-generation students are four times more likely to drop out by the end of the first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Pascarella et al. (2004) found that at the end of five years, first-generation students are similarly less likely to have remained in college and earn a bachelor's degree in comparison to their peers.

First-generation college students need support and assistance before entering college and throughout the college experience. Students are unfamiliar with campus resources and first-generation students would benefit from having more campus support systems such as student organizations, and academic or faculty advisement while they

struggle with the sense of isolation (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Latinx face difficulties when accessing guidance and support from the institution and it was heightened due to the lack of minorities and, in particular Latinx faculty.

Being a first-generation student is an opportunity to fulfill a family obligation. Martinez (2018) found in his research that the pressure of being the first in family to attend college was a motivational factor. Students added that although it was difficult at times, their academic pursuits were seen as a source of pride of the family. Family members often shared in the pride by telling others about the academic pursuits. Students also shared that family members did not fully understand their studies and the decision to pursue graduate school after earning a bachelor's degree.

Students of Color and Females in Doctoral Study

Research suggests that a diverse student population enhances the learning experiences of students. In order to increase the number of students of color, there should be increased access (Graham, 2013). While the number of students of color in a doctoral program have increased, the challenge is the number of those who do not matriculate and complete. The goal of the Ph.D. or doctorate is to produce graduates capable of contributing original knowledge to the discipline, field, or larger society (Berstien, 2012). Afterward, the graduate should hold deep knowledge within their discipline. Achieving the goal can be accomplished through different means depending on the program of study. The American model of doctoral education requires the student to complete coursework in the field before moving into the dissertation research. Gardner (2010) noted that doctoral students who do not complete a doctoral study program may be due to the American education system and in particular to the program culture and the

department.

Experiences of Doctoral Students of Color

The importance of understanding how students of color experience a doctoral program is important. Students of color are often referred to as a minority or those that are not in the White or European background majority. Rankin and Reason (2005) note that students of color may include African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American/American Indian students.

The completion of the doctoral degree is dominated by White recipients (NCES, 2016b) in comparison to the Latino/Hispanics, African American/Blacks, and other students of color. While there may be an increase in attaining the degree for students of color, in contrast the number of White students gaining the degree remains unmatched. When Latinos earn doctoral degrees, it tends to be in the areas of social sciences, humanities, and education (Contreras & Gándara, 2006). In addition, students of color are more represented in social sciences fields rather than in science, engineering, and math (National Science Foundation, 2009). Students of color earn more degrees what are considered soft sciences than in the hard or natural sciences.

One challenge in the pursuit of a doctoral degree is the availability of funding and financial aid. In her book, Lovitts (2001) reported on her study of 816 Ph.D. students of different racial/ethnic and gender identities. She learned that while finances play an important role among adult learner students, the reason they report as why they chose to leave the program is typically related to academic issues such as integration, academic failure, dissatisfaction with faculty or program and problems with an academic advisor.

Relationships with faculty play a role in the way doctoral students integrate into

the social and academic world of a doctoral program. Faculty share information regarding norms and values which could impact the integration and retention of students (Felder & Barker, 2013; Gardner, 2010). While most literature on the doctoral student focuses on relationships with faculty, research on doctoral students of color is typically focused on the connection between socialization and social and academic integration. Gardner (2008a) conducted a qualitative study in which the sample size included 40 doctoral students. Five groups of doctoral students emerged and described their experiences in which they believed they did not fit into the culture of the institution. Gardner termed this as students not “fitting the mold” implying that there was inadequate support for minority students. Since the beginning, graduate education has been most oriented to young, White, single, male population (Berelson, 1960) which became known as the mold or the typical student. When a student of color is unable to learn the rules, guidelines, and culture to fit into the new group, then they do not “fit the mold” of that group or organization.

It should be noted that when a student of color is unable to fit into the culture of the new group they often seek out support from faculty. Nettles and Millet (2006) noted that ineffective or poor faculty support can contribute to doctoral student attainment. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016a) reported that only 2% of female faculty were Latino and 3% of male faculty were Latino in a degree-granting post-secondary institution. This means that Latinx students face a challenge in finding faculty that look like them. Contreras and Gándara (2006) describe the challenge that there is continual underrepresentation of Latinx faculty that creates a cycle of having a lack of future faculty members and therefore, fewer administrators.

Equally important is to review doctoral students across academic disciplines. Ramirez (2017) conducted a qualitative study of doctoral students of color across multiple academic disciplines. Ramirez found that the students of color were perceived by faculty as not having the intellectual capability to withstand doctoral-level education (Ramirez, 2017). In addition, Cueva (2013) found that women of color in doctoral programs experienced a lack of support from faculty and frequently considered dropping out of their doctoral program due to their feelings of lack of belongingness.

The United States has seen a lack of diversity in graduate education and has issued several programs, grants, and agencies to recruit and retain women and students of color across all disciplines (National Science Foundation, 2007). There is little known about the socialization process of students of color across disciplines, but what is known is that the attrition rate of women as well as racial and ethnic minorities is considerably higher than it is for White, male students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2003; Gardner, 2008b; Lovitts 2001). Gardner contends that each unique characteristic of students including race, gender, enrollment status, family background, etc. plays an influential role in the preparation, completion, and the full experience in a doctoral program. Lovitts (2001) adds that the student background characteristics, in combination with the challenges located in the institutional structure, determines their persistence.

In addition, to better understand the doctoral student experience, theories of socialization have been connected to attrition. Gardner (2008a) believes that the student's decision to persist or depart from the doctoral program can be viewed through the lens of socialization. Socialization affects the entire student experience from entry to completion. Socialization is defined as the process through which a student learns to adopt the values,

skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society (Gardner, 2008a; Van Maanen, 1984). Socialization was chosen as the framework for Gardner's (2008a) study since there is not one reason why doctoral students leave a program. Turner and Thompson (1993) determined that socialization has been shown to be an aspect in doctoral student success and retention. As students struggled with socialization and social and academic integration, their academic persistence could be affected.

In a similar manner, research has shown how students of color navigate through doctoral education. Gildersleeve et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study using ethnographic methods with a sample of 22 Black and Latinx doctoral students. The focus of the research was on the culture of doctoral programs while the common theme that developed posed the question, "Am I going crazy?" The "Am I going crazy" narrative argues that the "culture of doctoral education can be dehumanizing and marginalizing for the Latina/o and Black students in the study" (p. 94). In their work, Gildersleeve et al. (2011) reported that students experience (a) lack of socialization to establish relationships and participation of Black and Latino support groups, (b) racial aggressions, (c) self-censorship, (d) questioning ability or worth (e) and being told to adopt the rules and norms by learning to be less aggressive in the classroom.

It should be noted that Latinas encounter objections. González (2007) examined the experiences of Latina faculty during their doctoral journey. He found many issues Latina/os face in their doctoral journey such as facing "isolation, alienation, lack of support, low expectations from faculty based on racial and ethnic discrimination as well as linguistic bias, and discouragement from using more culturally appropriate

epistemologies, theories, and frameworks” (Gildersleeve et al., p. 95). The findings suggest that Black and Latina/o students feel as if they are being pushed out of doctoral education which may take the form of unsatisfactory advising, lack of departmental and institutional support, alienation, and isolation (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). It is suggested that the feeling of being pushed out is more related to who the student is or embodies, as opposed to their capabilities of academic performance (Smith et al., 2006). Black and Latina/o doctoral students feel the tension and experience academic, social, and emotional struggles.

Further research indicates that doctoral students of color faced discrimination. Nettles (1990) study consisted of 1,352 who were African American, Latina/Latino, and Caucasian doctoral students. The students were enrolled at four large state universities. Latinx and Black students reported more feelings of racial and cultural discrimination at their institution. Also, Nettles learned that Black students were not offered as many research and teaching assistantships during their doctoral programs even when taking their background and experiences into account.

Students of color are more likely to complete their doctoral programs when faculty support them academically and mentally. As faculty express and show genuine interest in their research ideas, they are more likely to perform at a greater pace (Felder & Barker, 2013). Additionally, if students of color become less interested in completing their degree, ultimately, there could be fewer doctoral degrees awarded (Felder & Barker, 2013). In the future, there would be fewer faculty of color who can serve as potential mentors and role models to doctoral students of color. Doctoral students of color experience negative external factors that hinder their social and academic integration

(Gardner, 2008b; Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the experiences of doctoral students of color in order to increase their chances of completing.

On the other hand, while some students are not able to complete, other students become more motivated to complete their doctoral journey during adversity. Castro et al. (2011) found that doctoral candidates attributed success to internal factors. Some of these internal factors that contributed to participants remaining in the doctoral program included internal locus of control, perseverance, and the belief that doctoral education gave them a sense of purpose. Castro et al. (2011) also reported that doctoral students may still be motivated to complete their doctoral education because of negative circumstances or hardships they have faced. Doctoral students of color can also be resilient because of their race or culture and are able to withstand the challenges of the doctoral programs.

Experiences of Female Doctoral Students

Beginning in 1980, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) has reported that more women are enrolled in higher education institutions and they have outnumbered men. There has been progress in enrollment, and women earning doctoral degrees increased in science and engineering during 2005-2010 (National Science Foundation, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), women received 52% of the 158,558 bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees conferred in 2009, but fewer women complete professional and doctoral degrees as compared to men (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009a, 2009b). There is a difference between genders in completion of the doctoral degree with men in the lead. The trend of greater completion by women ends at the master's degree. Approximately 672,000 fewer women than men complete the

doctoral degree (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009a, 2009b).

From 2000 to 2010, post baccalaureate enrollment increased for all racial groups, including enrollment for African Americans/Blacks and Latino/Hispanics specifically. While enrollment has increased for African Americans/Blacks and Latino/Hispanics, they appear to still lag behind the enrollment of White women graduate students. As displayed in Table 1, the National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reports the enrollment numbers for female students. Thus, African American/Black women's enrollment increased from 123,000 in 2000 to 256,000 in 2010 and Latina/Hispanic women enrollment increased from 66,000 in 2000 to 123,000 in 2010. Looking at the progress of African American/Black and Latina women, they still lag behind the enrollment of White women representing 854,000 in 2000 to 1,080,000 in 2010. (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, HEGIS, & IPEDS, 2011). Based on the 2010 numbers, that would suggest African American/Black women constitute 17.5% and Latina/Hispanic women constitute 8.4%, while White women constitute 74%. The rates of post baccalaureate enrollment for Latina/Hispanic women changed from 6.3% in 2000 to 8.4% in 2010.

Table 1*2000-2010 Post Baccalaureate Enrollment of Female Students*

	2000	%	2010	%
African American/Black	123,000	11.7%	256,000	17.5%
Latina/Hispanic	66,000	6.3%	123,000	8.4%
White	854,000	82%	1,080,000	74%
Total	1,043,000	100%	1,459,000	100%

Even though their post baccalaureate enrollment has increased, there is a gap on how much time it takes female doctoral students time to complete. Women have had to fight for their opportunity to complete doctoral degrees (Weiler, 1989). Some women have attempted to complete the doctoral program at a slower pace because of conflicting responsibilities. Eitel and Martin (2009) and Heenan (2002) highlighted the responsibilities, financial constraints, and lack of guidance that women face when striving for advanced degrees. Time demands and money were a constant worry for many participants. These students were in a precarious position because of the troubles they faced. In Gardner's (2008a) study, underrepresented students felt as if they did not "fit the mold" because of their differences in gender, race, age, enrollment, and familial status. The female students interviewed reported sexism and most female doctoral students talked to the researcher about leaving, planning to leave, taking anti-depressants, or needing to seek professional help to assist them through their degree programs (p. 134). The women in the study also commented about the male-dominated environment

surrounding them. One participant described the heavily male-dominated field and sexist attitudes as the “Old Boys’ Club.” Other participants pointed out that there were few female faculty in the department and have seen discrimination in faculty hires. The women were concerned about how this might affect their future job searches for faculty positions. Men in the study also discussed issues of gender and shared how a previous survey conducted on student satisfaction showed that the program had trouble retaining women graduate students. Gardner’s (2008a) study also showed that women discussed the issue of having children more often than the men in the study. Schedules and responsibilities were often demanding and did not allow for much flexibility. Women with children reported negative experiences to being a parent in graduate school. One participant described an “inner conflict she experienced when having to choose between spending time with her children and graduate work” (p. 134). The participant added that it was a difficult time for her and she wanted to stay home and just focus on being a mother. Other participants described balancing time and priorities with the demands of pursuing the doctoral degree.

Women are at a greater risk for graduate school and doctoral program attrition (Castro et al., 2011). The Council of Graduate Schools (2008) reported that the attrition rate for women enrolled in Ph.D. programs is higher than men. Castro et al. reveals that the women in the study attributed their doctoral academic success to individual attributes such as independence, internal locus of control, and perseverance. Some of the themes are consistent with previous research by Amini et al. (2008). The researchers also found that negative external factors served as a source of motivation to improve themselves. Other subthemes that emerged for extrinsic supportive factors were positive mentors and

significant marital relationships. Subthemes for negative external factors included the lack of parental/family support, lack of a good father figure, and isolation from family.

Latina Experiences in Doctoral Programs

Latinas represent only 4% of the total number of women that earn a doctoral degree (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009a, 2009c). There are very few studies of the experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs. The majority of the studies found are usually lumped together with male Latino experiences, White graduate students, and other racial groups. Studies that specifically focus on Latina doctoral students began with Gándara (1982) and her study on 45 Chicana/Chicano students who held doctorate degrees in the 1970's. The study contributed in examining factors that contributed to high academic achievement. The findings revealed that a students' success is attributed to having strong emotional support. Most often the women in the study relied on immediate families for the emotional support rather than their teachers and friends. Additional findings revealed that participants' mothers played an important role in their daughters' aspirations and career achievement. Women in the study credited their success with having an internal strength and recognized that it came from the support of their families.

Cuadráz (2011) originally interviewed 10 Chicana doctoral students from the University of California, Berkeley who were enrolled in social sciences between 1970 and 1980. Eight of the ten women identified belonging to the working class. Findings of the study showed that participants' parents had low educational levels and worked in occupations such as farm workers, meatpackers, homemakers, and housekeepers, or were unemployed. Cuadráz (2011) continued her research and added 7 additional Chicanas for a total of 17 Chicanas who attended the university between 1967 and 1980. During their

enrollment, the time period was characterized by conflicts and the organization of civil rights movements. The women described their years as “cultural trauma induced by the challenge of entering the highly politicized environment of graduate school,” (Cuádras, 2011, p. 195). The trauma is defined as a “cultural process through which collective identities and collective memories are formed” (p. 197). Cuádras understood the trauma as it occurred in everyday experiences as opposed to extreme events. In order to persist, women responded to these experiences by building relationships that would foster a sense of community and belonging. The women participated in several academic groups that represented Chicano students across various disciplines in which they helped each other “become academics” (p. 207). Through these groups, they were able to come together and feel a sense of belonging and validation.

On the other hand, Latina students faced hostile academic climates. Solórzano (1998) conducted a qualitative study of 66 Chicanas/Chicanos who were recipients of the Ford Foundation doctoral fellowship. The students shared the experiences of racism and sexism they encountered. In addition, they felt that because of their ethnicity and gender, faculty had lower expectations of their performance and they were expected to fail. Students expressed feelings of isolation because of who they were.

Another study examined the experiences and nature of the graduate institution for Latinx doctoral students. The findings revealed that the institution was conservative, restricting, and discriminatory (K.P. González et al., 2001). For example, students were restricted from choosing research topics of interest related to their cultural or ethnic identity. The researchers found that students were living a fragmented life or existence in which they were separate from their ethnic identity. The participants described how their

culture or ethnic identity was disrespected and they could not integrate or be a part of that university culture.

Additionally, there were also considerations of the socialization process. Ortiz (1998) interviewed a group of female Latina American students during a two-year period. The sample included 80 undergraduate and graduate students from four different University of California campuses. Nineteen students in the sample were at different levels of obtaining a Ph.D. The findings included the feeling of not being acknowledged, accepted, or supported. These feelings inhibited them from any participation in the institution and they were forced to learn in isolation away from peers, faculty, and other university staff. Students also reported feeling some anxiety about participating and leading classroom discussion. Students perceived that they were treated in stereotypical ways which led to discouragement in their academic performance and the completion of the degree. Even though the Latina students experienced discouragement, they also reported experiences related to acceptance and respect. Ortiz (1998) suggested that if the Latina student feels accepted and respected, she will be able to integrate into the group and then will accept her place and embrace being recognized by the group. Moreover, their success can be determined by their socialization into the institution. Ortiz added that successful students have more interaction with faculty and students which could lead to mentorship opportunities.

In *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), a Latina professor shares about her experience in graduate school. She describes her journey as one of isolation and where her place within the institution was often questioned and challenged by the all-White male faculty. The testimonio included her

feelings of nonexistence and invisibility. Other testimonios included experiences of sexism, racism, and neglect.

Latina students also face unique cultural expectations associated with racial, ethnic, and gender-related identities that may be a factor in their underrepresentation. Ibarra (2001) describes the doctoral process as a crossing “from one ethnic culture into another” (p. 89). Not only does the Latina have to think of coursework, but there is more that extends beyond the classroom. Espino et al. (2010) learned that the doctoral experience was weaved together with the intersections of multiple strands of identities. Her values and feelings associated with her ethnic identity are incompatible with the principles needed for being an academic scholar. The Latina looks around and has difficulty identifying with someone else like her. Transitioning from one culture to another has been described as “lonely,” “isolating,” and “alienating” (Rosales, 2006). While the Latina is in pursuit of her doctorate, she experiences guilt, confusion, and frustration as she is conflicted between her two realities; one being her ethnic identity and the other being an academic identity (González et al., 2001; Rendón, 1992).

While the Latina strives to persist in a doctoral program, she is also placed in a situation where she can accumulate high levels of debt. Latinas feel a necessity to go into greater debt since they are not likely to have any financial assistance from the family. Graduate education continues to increase in cost and the amount of student debt incurred by doctoral students is a concern (Grady et al., 2014). Doctoral students rely heavily on financial aid to finance their education (National Science Foundation, 2015). If Latina students were awarded more financial aid or assistantships, they may not have to work to pay for their education. She will be allowed more time to integrate into campus life and

interaction with faculty and peers. Ampaw and Jaegar (2012) concluded that the more connected students feel to the institution, the higher likelihood of completing the doctoral program.

Supporting networks also influence doctoral student satisfaction and persistence (Austin & McDaniels, 2006). As doctoral students face challenges, they rely heavily on emotional support from faculty and a supportive peer network. Gardner's (2010) study cited that the support received by faculty and peer networks ended up having the greatest impact on degree completion. In addition, these students often described their relationships with others within the program as "family" (Gardner, 2010). Students were able to overcome feelings of isolation by relying on their peers.

Faculty also play a role in the success of doctoral students. Establishing a mentoring relationship is an important decision the student will make. The mentor typically answers questions related to the program and further provides the guidance needed to conduct independent research for the dissertation (Anderson et al., 2012). The relationship depends on effective communication between the mentor and the mentee. Constant interaction with the mentor assists the students with the experience and helps navigate the dissertation research process (Nyquist & Wulff, 2001). Gardner (2008a) adds that the ability to consistently interact with a mentor was more important than sharing similar interests.

When a Latina doctoral student is not feeling supported, she faces many obstacles or barriers during this time. Many students are not able to persist for various reasons. Some possibilities include life changes that inhibit their ability to focus on academics or due to personal reasons. González's (2006) phenomenological study found that Latina

doctoral students encounter (a) lack of financial support, (b) gender discrimination, (c) racial discrimination, (d) socioeconomic distribution, (e) tokenism, and (f) lack of departmental mentorship. A further instance of challenges can be found in Carter et al. (2013). In their study of Ph.D. counseling sessions over two years, they determined that there were recurring themes for female doctoral students that included family commitments, relationship problems, time commitment, and female identity problems. Further, a recurring concern for female doctoral students was that academics and the increased time to be successful in their academic goals jeopardized the role and responsibilities of motherhood. Mansfield et al., (2010) found that many women felt that their parenting suffered because of being torn between family, work, and school.

Despite the accomplishment of being in a doctoral program, Latina students may develop feelings of self-doubt. This fear is a belief that peers will soon discover the truth about one's level of competence. Any level of success or accomplishments are dismissed to good luck or timing. Clance and Imes' (1978) study of high achieving woman who advanced professionally described imposter phenomenon as "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (p. 241). These women feel as if their level of competence is overestimated and that someone will discover their incompetence. Imposter phenomenon is prevalent in minority doctoral students who doubt their intelligence and fear that someone would discover that they do not belong (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Sherman (2013) described that feelings of self-doubt can create a fear of failure in addition to burnout and depression.

Conceptual Framework

This dissertation builds on Schlossberg's transition theory and Yosso's community cultural wealth model. The study relied on Schlossberg's transition theory to understand the life events and challenges faced by Latina doctoral students. Schlossberg et al. (1995) define transition as any event or non-event that results in change. The study identified transitions experienced by the participants, examining the 4S System (situation, self, support, and strategies) as it applies to them, and considered the series of phases including *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out* (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Also included as part of the conceptual framework for the study was a more focused look at life events than offered by Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995), and an examination of Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, which offered a more in-depth consideration of supports and strategies that have particular relevance for Latina doctoral students.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory supports my interest in studying life events and transitions from the perspective of the Latina doctoral student. I am interested in understanding the transition experiences from the perspective of the Latina doctoral student and hope to discover factors that impacted their progress and factors that contribute to their persistence to complete the doctoral program. Latina doctoral students that persist in a doctoral degree program is an understudied area. Similar research has typically focused on the undergraduate students and Latinx students in general, and to a lesser degree on the doctoral experience of women and students of color more generally. The researcher hopes to provide new insights and knowledge from the experiences of

Latina doctoral students. It is believed that Latina doctoral students may benefit from sharing their experiences with faculty, staff, and other Latina students interested in enrolling in a doctoral program.

A transition is an event or non-event that results in change from the status quo. This theory can be linked to developmental research on life events. For example, a transition can be a “change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27). A transition occurs when the individual integrates change into his/her life. Schlossberg et al. (1989) mention that when an adult thinks about returning to school and returns, then he/she is in transition (p. 13). They added that there are factors that contribute to a student’s abilities to cope and how they are able to progress in transitions.

Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) suggested a 4S system as the process of mastering change. The 4S system includes (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies.

Situation refers to how an individual sees or views the transition taking place. The student may influence its significance and can perceive the transition in a positive or negative manner. In addition, the student also considers whether the transition is expected or unexpected. Another consideration is whether the transition is at a good time in the student’s life or is this something that is desired or dreaded.

Self is used in reference to looking more closely at the student. It interprets how the student is able to cope while utilizing his or her own strengths. In addition, the student may recognize his or her own weaknesses during the transition. In addition, a student may also recognize how their previous experience has contributed to the transition.

Students either feel as if they have a sense of control of the transition or may feel a lack of control during the process. Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) explain that the student may also recognize whether he/she is able to overcome the transition while practicing resiliency and optimism.

Support is evident when there are sources of support made available to the student. The sources of support could stem from close family relationships or individuals in the workplace. Additional persons of support could be individuals from the college or university such as an academic advisor or counselor. Sources of support may not always be a positive influence on the student. At times, there could be a hindrance to the individual in transition. The student is the only one who knows whether this source contributes to or takes away from their transition.

Strategies address how the student copes during the transition and how he/she is able to manage their emotions and actions. The student learns how he/she reacts to the stresses of transition. Goodman et al. (2006) wrote that individuals cope best when they remain flexible and use multiple strategies when dealing with a transition.

Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) add that in addition to the 4 S's there are a series of phases involved in a transition consisting of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out." They describe *moving in* in terms of when a person is initially experiencing the transition firsthand. *Moving in* moments may include being introduced to a new campus, new process of registering and selecting courses, new friends and family. *Moving through* refers to the day-to-day management of performing the student role throughout the transition. In addition, it can be balancing work, family, and homework. It centers on how students handle the challenging priorities that they

encounter on a daily basis. *Moving out* is when the individual passes their courses or at the end of the transitional period. It is achieved when the student earns credits towards graduation or completes her dissertation.

This study addressed how the Latina doctoral student deals with the transition of participating in a doctoral program while focusing on the supports and strategies to Schlossberg's theory. It also investigated the lives of Latina doctoral students and how they "move in," "move through," and "move out" of the college process. The study examined the cultural factors, challenging priorities, supports and strategies for transition perceived as important by Latina doctoral students. It was also intended to offer insight into how Latina doctoral students persist and how they are able to overcome the challenges and focus on her academic studies.

Schlossberg (1981) states that a transition can occur when an event or non-event occurs resulting in a "change of assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Colleges and universities anticipate traditional transitions such as moving into a new home, making new friends, beginning a new routine, and failing an exam. But often, there are other triggering or life events that occur outside of the institution's focus that can have different effects. The triggering events vary in severity and intensity and are dependent on the student.

Particularly for graduate student and undergraduates who are older than typical, students' outside lives play an important role in the enrollment and completion in higher education. Cox et al. (2016) found that major life events are both common and affect 52% of students, consequently affecting graduation rates. They described three types of

life events, which include death of individuals students are close to, financial, and psychological. Students who encounter challenges in their personal and family lives struggle to keep their plans on track. One area of life events is a student's life outside of the college environment. In his model of student persistence, Tinto (1993) argues that competing communities may have contrasting expectations for the student. Tinto acknowledges that family obligations and employments can "limit one's ability to meet the demands of college" and "pull one away from participation in the local communities of the college" (p. 63). Changes in the family unit or work obligations may lead to departure, but may not be permanent. These changes often derail students and their timeline for graduation.

Complementing Schlossberg's theory, the study will also draw on understanding of life events that are foundational to that theory, with a primary emphasis of Hultsch and Plemons's life events and life span development theory (1979). Hultsch and Plemons focused their research on non-normative events and provided a useful framework within to view the range of the life events. Hultsch and Plemons' research found that critical or stressful life events could affect an individual's learning of new behaviors and reorganization of current psychological structures. These critical or stressful life events are mediated by biological, psychological, and contextual variables.

Developmental psychology has primarily been concerned with the sequence of psychosocial stages over the life cycle. Some theorists have examined the role of life events in the life transitions of an individual including Buhler, Erickson, and Levinson (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). In reviewing the literature on life events, there have been some studies on stress and adaptation. Some investigators have focused on finding

“stressful” or “critical life events.” There may be numerous stressful or critical life events for a person in a lifetime, therefore, Hultsch and Plemons’ typology of events covered a broad range of events such as national disasters, college, marriage, having children, and death. Life events serve as precursors to various responses of stress and adaptation. Investigators have examined the relationship of life events to physical illness, psychiatric disorders, and psychological symptoms.

Holmes and Rahe (1967) define stressful life events as those “whose advent is either indicative or requires a significant change in the ongoing life pattern of the individual” (p. 217). Life events are focused on “experiences involving a role transformation, changes in status or environment, or impositions of pain” (Myers, et al., 1972, p. 399). Other theorists define life crises as “objective situations which on the face of it would seem to be universally stressful” where “an experience which either imposed pain or necessitated a role transformation” (Antonovsky & Kats, 1967, p. 16). Hultsch and Plemons (1979) find a commonality in which the life event involves a change in the usual activity.

Some life events are anticipated and planned such as marriage and graduation. Anticipated transitions are life events that are expected to occur which include finding a job, getting into college, getting married, and having children. Within a cultural context, some of these life events are predictable. Neugarten and Hagestad, (1976) suggested that there is a “socially prescribed timetable for the ordering of major life events,” and the “normative pattern is adhered to, more or less consistently by most persons with a given social group” (p. 16). The timing of major life events is dictated by social norms, and there are optimal ages of when these should occur.

Other life events that are unanticipated include job loss, death, and illness. These life events are “benchmarks in the human life cycle,” that give, “shape and direction to the various aspects of a person’s life” (Danish et al., 1980). In Levinson’s model, these life events and related social roles create the “structure changing” or transition periods in our lives (Merriam, 2005, p. 4). Similarly, Schlossberg et al. (1995) describe transitions as “life events entailing change” (p. 18). Further, they define transition as “any event, or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27).

Merriam (2005) explores the potential for learning and development from a life event and views it as linked to the timing of the event. If the event occurs close to the time that society expects it to occur, similar-aged adults are available for support. However, if the timing is different from the norm, it is out of sync with cultural expectations, there is less support and the potential for the transition to be a crisis.

While return to school is a transition that the student has elected, unanticipated transitions are unexpected and can occur at any time in adult life, including during the period while progressing through a doctoral program. Some examples include: getting fired from a job, major illness, and being a victim of a crime. These events tend to be more stressful, but their potential for learning may be greater than the anticipated life events. Nonetheless, they may have an impact on the student’s timely progress through a degree program, and require adaptation drawing on the resources identified as part of Schlossberg’s 4S system—of self, situation, supports, and strategies. Yosso’s framework of community cultural wealth also offers an important perspective for understanding the particular supports and strategies Latina doctoral students may rely on in responding to those life events they experience.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) designed the community cultural wealth as a framework to understand how students of color access and experience college from a strength-based perspective. In this strengths-based perspective, the model captures the talents, strengths and experiences of students of color and how they bring these traits to the college environment. The six forms of cultural capital described are: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistance. Educational leaders, faculty, and staff may use and apply the framework when working with students of color. It may also be useful in increasing the number of students of color.

Aspirational capital is defined by Yosso (2005) as the hopes and dreams students have about their future. Students should seek these hopes and dreams beyond any real and perceived barriers. Looking beyond the barriers shows how resilient the student can be and allows them to think of possibilities beyond their present circumstances. Gándara (1982, 1995) found that while Chicanas experience the lowest educational growth, they maintain consistently high aspirations for their children's future (Auerbach, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; 1994; Solórzano, 1992). Gándara further shares the personal narratives and gives insights on the strengths rather than focusing on the deficits.

Linguistic capital refers to the language, speech, and communication skills students bring to the college environment. Linguistic capital reflects that the students have multiple language and communication skills. One of the ways that students of color are engaged is through storytelling. Storytelling may include oral histories, stories (*cuentos*), and proverbs (*dichos*). Yosso (2005) discusses how storytelling is a way that students of color display linguistic capital because they bring with them “skills that may

include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythms and rhyme” (p. 79).

Familial capital refers to the external capital such as social and personal human resources students have before college and it usually drawn from family and community networks. The students carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition of the *familia* (kin) (Delgado, 1992; Delgado Bernal, 2002). The *familia* encompasses the extended family, to include immediate family such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends who are considered part of the family. In addition, the *familia* may include lost loved ones who have died. The *familia* establishes the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to the community.

Social capital is defined as “peers and other social contacts” and whether the students of color use these contacts to gain access to college and navigate other social institutions. These peers or networks serve as a network of community resources and can help support the student through various means such as identifying and helping the student attain a college scholarship. In addition, the networks may offer reassurance to the student who is struggling emotionally while they are in the process of pursuing higher education. These networks serve as Communities of Color.

Navigational capital refers to the skills and abilities that students use to navigate social institutions and educational spaces. Navigational capital can be helpful for students as it helps them maneuver through unsupportive or hostile environments. Arellano and Padilla (1996), examined the factors that support Mexican American students’ academic invulnerability which include personal, environmental, and community factors. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) reported that this set of resources can be characterized as

resiliency that permits students of color to survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events.

Resistance capital serves as the foundation of the experiences of the communities of color and secures equal rights and collective freedom (Yosso, 2005). Social justice is at the core of this form of capital and it tends to be taught by parents and community members. Resistance capital can be seen as the historical legacy of resistance and it leaves students of color in a good position to leverage their higher education as better prepared to solve challenging problems of society.

Gap in the Literature

A review of the literature points to a few gaps in the knowledge of Latina doctoral students. First, while existing studies have examined the struggles faced by Latina and Latino students combined, there is little evidence of insights into the experiences and challenges of Latina doctoral students as they transition into and through the university. Most of the studies located focused on Latina students at the undergraduate level and therefore there is a gap in research for first-generation Latina doctoral students. Next, while reviewing the literature, I found that there are some studies that described doctoral experiences, but as suggested by Arocho (2017), there is a gap when it comes to the representation of the voices of Latina doctoral students.

Following, there are limited qualitative studies of Latina students who have obtained a doctoral degree. Most importantly, we need to address the reduced number of Latinas students who completed a degree in comparison to the rising Latinx population. Further research was required and needed to look at this population more closely. The findings of this research helped to address the gap and complement the existing literature

by conducting interviews with nine Latina doctoral students and asking them about the experiences they faced as they transitioned in and through doctoral studies, and what supports and strategies they reported needing and utilizing. Furthermore, understanding the experiences will allow for a better understanding of what they perceive as barriers to completing the doctoral program.

III. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

This qualitative phenomenological study documents the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. The primary research question guiding the dissertation is: What are the experiences faced by Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, what supports and strategies do they report needing? The chapter includes a discussion of qualitative research and the methodological approach to the study design, a description of the study participants as well as the data collection and analysis process. The chapter ends in a discussion of trustworthiness measures and ethical considerations for the implementation of the study.

Qualitative Research

Merriam (2002) describes the purpose of qualitative research as understanding how individuals make sense of their lives and their experiences. Furthermore, Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that qualitative research is based on how reality is constructed in relation to the social world. A qualitative research approach appeared to be the best method in pursuing this study because the main goal was to learn about the experiences of Latina doctoral students and their personal and professional journeys.

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is defined as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p 13). Qualitative research is dependent on the researcher, whom Merriam (2009) defines as one who “studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p 13). Merriam (2009) identified four key

characteristics to assist in understanding the nature of qualitative research. One characteristic includes striving to understand the meaning from the participant's perspective of the phenomenon. Next, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Another characteristic is that it is an inductive process. The researcher gathers data to build concepts, hypothesis or theories, building toward theory from observation and intuitive understanding gleaned from being in the field. Finally, the product is richly descriptive, with the use of words and pictures rather than numbers to convey what the researcher learned about the phenomenon.

Research Orientation

Merriam (2009) writes that phenomenology is both a type of philosophy and a type of research. Phenomenology focuses on the experience and the interpretation, but also on the essence of the shared experience. As the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl based his understanding on the philosophical movement on the meaning of the individual's experience, suspending or bracketing all preconceived opinions (Reiners, 2012). In this view, Tuohy et al. (2013) reported that bracketing is also seen as an essential element of phenomenology in which it is necessary to limit the influence of additional issues on the interpretation of the phenomena being experienced.

Phenomenology allows the person experiencing the phenomenon to be the expert or authority on her own experience. Two forms of phenomenology are described in the literature, descriptive and interpretive. Interpretive phenomenology is an adaptation of Husserl's methods, originated by Martin Heidegger, one of Husserl's students. In interpretive phenomenology, the researcher is trying to get close to the participant's personal world. While I was not able to do this directly, I attempted to access the

participant's world through their experiences and made the best sense of it through a process of interpretive phenomenology. I had to recognize that my own conceptions may have caused me some complications. Therefore, a two-stage interpretation process or double hermeneutics found in Smith and Osborn (2005) was involved in which "the participants are trying to make sense of their world," and "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of the world" (p. 53).

Heidegger dismissed bracketing as a way to eliminate researcher perspectives because he believed that one cannot remove themselves from their pre-understandings of their accepted realities and assumptions (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). One can be reflexive in trying to expose your own understandings vs. bracketing them away, but still must maintain an open mind to truly understand the perspectives of participants as opposed to merely presenting our own experiences.

He believed that the researcher with their own conceptions and pre-existing notions grounded in their own experiences actually enhanced understanding of experiences (McConnel-Henry, et al., 2009). I attempted to understand the phenomena by describing the way participants explained their experiences. Heidegger emphasized understanding and making sense of the experience rather than Husserl who emphasized the description of the experiences.

Methodological Approach: Phenomenology

The study used a derivative of phenomenological research known as heuristic inquiry. Phenomenology aims to understand the experience of various events in peoples' lives (Moustakas, 1994). Likewise, heuristic inquiry aims to understand the lived experience of a certain phenomenon (in this case, Latina students in a doctoral program)

by studying those that experience it and comparing it to the researcher's understanding of the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). It was also noted by Moustakas that understanding and change can occur in heuristic inquiry because the researcher becomes an instrument and serves as a data collection tool for the research process. Moustakas found that at the end of the day, phenomenology ends with the essence of the experience, while as an extension of phenomenology, heuristics preserves the essence of the *person* in the experience.

Van Manen (2014), with a more recent approach, acknowledges that researchers also make meaning of data, and favors a more constructivist approach. Van Manen believes that phenomenology is viewed more as “meaning giving” rather than “meaning discovery.” Phenomenology is situated in both meaning and reflectivity. The individual reflects and discerns meaning in the world of things, others and self. The goal of the study was to develop an understanding of the shared experiences that Latina doctoral students encounter while pursuing a doctoral degree. Therefore, this research sought to explore an area that is understudied to develop a deeper understanding about the phenomenon.

Phenomenological studies are more suited for “affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 28). The life events that Latinas experienced while pursuing a doctoral degree were studied using heuristic inquiry, allowing me as the researcher to study and draw on my own experiences as well as analyze the experience of others, to gain and share a deeper understanding of meaning made of these experiences by Latina doctoral students.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

Qualitative researchers are interested in learning personal accounts from individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon and would like to speak about it. The study utilized a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher established the criterion for the study. Creswell (2007) described purposeful sampling as an approach whereby “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p 125). In this case, Latina doctoral students from different programs were recruited. Patton (2002) agrees that purposeful sampling provides a snapshot of the population of interest. Thus, the participants interviewed for this study self-identified as Latina and were enrolled in doctoral studies for at least one year, and were at least 25 years old.

I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application through the Texas State University IRB Committee. After approval, I recruited and selected suitable candidates for the study who met the study criteria. The recruitment of participants was conducted through email, flyers, and referrals (Appendix B). I also solicited referrals from students, colleagues, faculty, or other members of higher education. I selected for interviews only those candidates who fit the criteria. To recruit additional participants that met the criteria, I used snowball sampling to locate participants within universities that have relatively high enrollment for Latina doctoral students. The use of snowball sampling served the purpose of having participants in the study assist in the recruitment and referral of other Latina doctoral students. Once I was able to interview a few of the participants early in the study, I asked the participants to refer me to another Latina

doctoral students that might be interested in participating.

Marshall (1996) wrote that the size of the sample is determined by what the researcher believes to be the optimum number necessary to enable valid inferences about the population. Choosing a study sample is an important step in the research. Creswell (2007) wrote that the process of phenomenological study primarily involves in-depth interviews with as many as 10 individuals. The in-depth interview can last as long as two hours where 10 subjects in a study represents a reasonable size. In this study, the researcher was one of the nine interviewed. According to Moustakas (1994), the self-reflection of the researcher may serve as the initial step in the analysis.

Selected criteria required participants identified as Latina and were a minimum of 25 years of age. In order to increase the likelihood of non-academic events, the priority in selecting participants for this study was over the age of 30 since they may be more likely to have one or more roles such as spouse/partner, parent, adult caregiver, etc. Other requirements include being enrolled in a doctoral program for one year. Participants ages ranged from 28 to 49 years. Most of the participants were bilingual in Spanish ranging from intermediate to fluent. Several acknowledged that they were first-generation college students. The geographic locations of their current academic programs ranged from the south-central region to the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Data Collection

Merriam (1998) writes that qualitative researchers rely primarily on three kinds of data collection and include: observation, interviews, and documents. Since observations were not appropriate due to time and location constraints, the researcher primarily sought to understand the experiences, feelings, and the interpretations of the participants that lie

in the participant's mind using other data collection strategies. Data sources included two audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, a critical incident description written or shared verbally by each participant, field notes and the researcher's journal (see Table 2). This triangulated data collection method allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences.

Table 2

Data Collection Sources

	Prescreening Questionnaire	Interviews	Critical Incident Technique	Researcher's Journal
Data Collection	One prescreening questionnaire	One 60-90 minute semi-structured interview and one 30-45 minute semi-structured interview	Written account of key life event that has impacted the student's entry or progression; collected after the first interview and before the follow-up interview.	Record impressions of the interview immediately after each session
Purpose	Ensure participants meet the criteria. Familiarity of participants.	Elicit stories in first person Re-tell life stories.	Gain an understanding of an experience from the participant's perspective	Make sense of the interview; document thoughts, feelings and reflections
Data Type	Demographic data	Audiotaped and transcribed	A written or oral account by the participant submitted via email between interviews or during a follow-up interview.	Notebook with notes on reflection, thoughts, biases, and impressions

Prescreening Questionnaire

Once participants manifested interest in taking part of the study, they received a questionnaire (Appendix C) to ensure that they met the criteria established for the purpose of the dissertation. The pre-interview questionnaire also gave an opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the participants prior to the initial interview.

Interviews

The semi-structured interview was the primary mode of data collection. Merriam maintains that through interviewing, the researcher will learn information about the participant's feelings, past experiences, and worldview. Interviews are the main form of evidence in all forms of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). Two interviews allowed the researcher to learn more about the experiences of the Latina doctoral student. The researcher began the first interview with a set of interview questions and added any questions that appeared appropriate throughout the conversation. The researcher utilized interviewing skills that drew out the experiences of the Latina doctoral student participants. The researcher used open-ended questions that elicited a response to their experiences.

Face-to-face interviews would have been preferable for the purpose of this research study. It is also the most personal and immediate approximation for interviewing. However, due to Coronavirus (COVID-19), there were alternative measures that I took to complete the interviews that fell within the Risk Reduction guidelines of the Institutional Research Board such as videoconferencing and making appropriate adjustments in collecting consent in a secure mode.

The first interview was 60 to 90 minutes (see Appendix D). The second interview

was shorter and ranged from 30 to 45 minutes (see Appendix E). The second interview allowed for member checking and follow-up questions regarding clarification of data collected in the first interview. All interviews took place in a private setting that limited distraction for the interviewer and the interviewee. I was able to gather more insight into their detailed experiences since videoconferencing technology allowed me visual access into their home and in some cases family members.

The purpose of the interview protocol was to help the researcher prepare for the interview. The protocol ensured that I would not forget key points that I wanted to discuss over the course of the interview. I employed a guide of questions or issues that were explored during the course of the interview. The guide provided me with topics or subject areas in which I was free to explore, probe, or ask follow-up questions. Yet, I remained at liberty to build a conversation, calling upon sample questions that were developed in advance. The guide also served as a checklist to ensure that relevant topics were discussed.

While I hoped to gather data, I also attempted to make a good connection with the participants. The participant was more likely to open up and share experiences if I helped the participant feel more comfortable. I made sure that I maintained eye contact, listened effectively, and limited distractions during the interview. I considered the experience of the participant as a gift and was enriched by learning something new from the interview.

Critical Incident Technique

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) employs rich qualitative inquiry by examining the behavior of the people involved and the outcomes of the behavior. The critical incident technique (CIT) was developed by Flanagan (1954) to use to collect

information about behavior in a specific situation such as in vocational work settings. CIT was initially used as a tool for military behavioral outcomes training and leadership development but has since been used in a wide array of educational and social science research. The goal of the CIT is to acquire an understanding of the incident from the perspective of the participant and to share in their own words. The incident is defined as critical when the actions taken contributed to an effective or ineffective outcome, or alternatively, had a striking effect. It also allows participants to share how these incidents were managed and any effects of the incidents.

The reporting of the critical incident can take the form of an interview, a response to a written prompt, or be captured orally as part of an interview. As implemented in the study, participants were asked to write a critical incident reflection about a life event that occurred as part of their doctoral student experiences. Once the participants completed the first interview, I provided the participants with several questions related to a critical incident they have experienced. The purpose of providing these questions early was to allow the participant time to reflect and become familiar with the questions. I also sent an email prompt at the conclusion of the first interview to remind them to complete a written critical incident description. The critical incident description was either submitted electronically or collected orally at the beginning of the follow-up interview if the participant did not submit an incident in writing prior to that time (see Appendix F).

Researcher Journal

Glesne (2016) recommended that the researcher's journal be used to record ideas, reflections, observations, and notes about patterns and themes that emerge. In this study, the researcher's journal was used to record the impressions of the interview immediately

after the interview. I wrote down any memory of my experience while working on the transcription, reading the transcripts and after reflecting on the interviews and critical incident. I used the journal to make notations of any thoughts, biases, and impressions. These notes helped remind me of my personal experiences and how the experiences of the participants were similar to my own and also highlighted how some experiences were different. They also helped to transform what was seen and heard into perceptions which can then be used for data. I consistently wrote in the researcher journal to acknowledge my thoughts and feelings and placed them at the forefront of my research since this was a heuristic study. Also, I allowed time for reflection on the interviewee's reaction to questions. During reflection, I made notes as soon as possible while it was still fresh in my mind.

I felt that the researcher journal allowed me to be honest, reflective, and open about my experience. Table 3 briefly provides a snapshot of the kind of reflection that occurred after the interview. Also, the table includes a description of the theme.

Table 3*Researcher Journal*

Date	Reflection after Interview	Theme Description
10/19/2020	(Bianca) I love how she has a really good relationship with her parents, they seem to really support her. She is lucky to have them.	Family Support
11/23/2020	(Imelda) There never seems to be enough time. I have felt the same way that I had to choose school over parenting responsibilities. Sometimes, I feel like a bad mother.	Multiple Commitments and Obligations
12/4/2020	(Luisa) I listened to her experience and felt really sad for her that she was not able to get some immediate help. I wish there were more resources available.	Mental Health

The researcher journal permitted me to share how I felt in relation to my experiences as a doctoral student, mother, and full-time employee as well as to tease out my understandings of participant data. It also provided me the chance to reflect back on my time as a doctoral student. This experience has changed me. It also allowed me time for deep reflection and to grant myself some grace. This experience allowed me to bring into my life the experiences of 8 additional women on a similar path as me trying to complete the doctorate. It was fresh and different hearing about their experiences. Taking their experiences and compiling them with my own, I was able to look at the data with a different lens, that of a doctoral student analyzing her work and many perspectives. It was also refreshing to realize that I was writing my way to finish my place in this program

and to find meaning in this work by sharing the essence of the participant experiences.

In sum, research data was collected using interviews, pre-interview questionnaire, critical incident description, and the researcher's journal. The expectation of the multiple data collection method is to enable a deeper understanding of the Latina doctoral experience.

Data Analysis

Heuristic inquiry aims to understand various experiences, but heuristic inquiry also offers an additional examination in which the researcher is already personally familiar with the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1990) explained that in heuristic research, the "self" of the researcher is always present throughout the study. The researcher understands the phenomenon with increasing depth and knowledge that leads to self-awareness and self-discovery. I used an audio recorder to record my answers while responding to each interview question. The self-interview gave me the opportunity to stop and think about my own answers relative to participant experiences. I noticed that my memories took some time to come back and on occasion, I took a quick pause and returned to the interview questions. While listening to my answers, I also added more detail through written responses. In terms of the experience of the Latina doctoral student, I am a Latina student enrolled in a doctoral program attempting to complete the degree. Heuristic inquiry allowed me the opportunity to learn more through this study since I experience the phenomenon in my daily life.

Afterward, I reflected, compared and contrasted this interview with information provided by other Latina doctoral students. My purpose was to personalize the research and center the voices of the participants including my own. I hoped to capture the essence

of my experience along with those of other Latina students like me. In the presentation of findings, information from my own interview is included using a pseudonym, as with other participants.

Moustakas (1990) highlights that if using personal experiences for inquiry and change, the researcher should acknowledge tacit knowing and intuition. Tacit knowing is “implicit knowing, or knowing that lies beyond what may be readily observed or articulated” (Rumi, 2019, p. 14). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) identify two types of knowing in which the first is codified and can be transmitted in language. The second is personal, subjective, and difficult to communicate. Intuition is linked to tacit knowing. The researcher used intuition throughout the inquiry and when trying to understand experiences and relationships. The community cultural wealth model refers to intuition as familial capital in which cultural knowledge is nurtured among family (Yosso, 2005). The experiences of people of color are seen as legitimate forms of knowledge.

There are several phases when implementing heuristic inquiry. The learning that precedes the study has a path of its own and the steps of this methodology unfold spontaneously, but are guided at the same time by a strong desire to illuminate the experience in question (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Douglass and Moustakas organized a series of critical components in heuristics into a three-phase model that include immersion, acquisition, and realization. They also stated that it is acceptable to change methods or procedures of the study in midstream, in order to connect as closely as possible with the meaning of the phenomenon in question. When Moustakas (1990) published *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, the phases of heuristic research were expanded to include initial engagement, immersion into the topic

and question, incubation, illumination, explication, creative synthesis, and validation.

For the purpose of the study, I used the 3-phase data analysis process suggested by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) for analyzing data in phenomenological studies. In this process, the research was organized into a three-phase model including *immersion*, *acquisition*, and *realization*.

In *immersion*, the researcher fully engages in the research by intense exploration, self-search, and getting inside the research. I was fully involved in the research and it became my whole world by reviewing my research questions and reading literature about my framework. I wanted to make sure that I understood the process of interviewing participants and I wanted to prepare myself as an interviewer. Next, I reflected on Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) and Yosso's (2005) model of cultural wealth. I was able to bring my passion for the topic and allow my curiosity to be drawn into the research. In this phase, I was also preparing for the next phase which was to obtain the data. I knew that I had to immerse myself for what was to come.

In *acquisition*, the purpose is to acquire data "involving expressions of and meaningful associations to the theme is achieved through whole and pervasive immersion" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 47). Table 4 showed how the potential categories were developed into emergent themes.

Table 4*Analysis of Raw Data*

Raw Data	Potential Categories	Development of Emergent Theme
“As far for me, I feel like I am sacrificing financial security right now. And sometimes that makes me nervous, but I think overall, it will pay off.” (Bianca)	Financial Risk	Financial Decisions
“There’s a little bit of pressure. And then because there's so few of us it's even more important that I finish and then I hit this milestone and look what it's going to mean to our culture.” (Rosita)	Increasing Latina Doctorates	Obligation to Give Back
“I think I question this program every day. Especially when you know you have to think about your dissertation and writing that and presenting it and you know just the amount of work that goes into that every day. Why did I do this, what did I get myself into?” (Carla)	Doubts	Stressful Events

In the acquisition phase, I conducted the interviews. The process of analysis started with the collection of the words of the participants and the transcription of the interviews which were the raw data collected. I used the Zoom transcript service, but also had to correct several phrases due to errors. The transcription occurred within an hour or two after I received the link from the Texas State zoom link. The analysis continued with an examination of the first interview and the critical incident, to have an impression of Interview One. To prepare for the second interview, I would review the transcript of the first interview and identify any questions that required further clarification.

After further understanding and reflection, I then examined the second interview. This step required further analysis and time for understanding and reflection. Then, I would examine the first and second interview along with the critical incident to have a

better understanding of their experiences. Often, I would listen to the audio recordings and read the transcription simultaneously several times. This process added greater meaning to the understanding of the research. The experiences and stories of participants were illuminated and brought the participants' choices, actions, and behaviors into focus. In addition, I reviewed my notes in order to jog my memory and recall the participants more fully. By bringing the internal frame of reference into a more complete view, I discovered and portrayed an experience that was heuristic because it came from within.

Data analysis during this phase consisted of data managing including the transcription of interviews into Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel for organizing files, data storage and retrieval; and reading and making notes to capture key phrases, concepts and field notes. I participated in self-dialogue and self-disclosure throughout the process. Moustakas (1990) advocated for self-dialogue and its two qualities. The first, is that to fully understand an experience deeply, the researcher must understand herself so that she can be receptive to other facets of the experiences. The second is being open to others and having a personal appreciation of the other participants. The purpose is to have the researcher and participants come together more authentically. By using Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, I analyzed the data with discipline and purpose. This framework allowed me to use it as a tool and guide to organize my ideas and make conceptual distinctions. I would make connections to life events and challenges using the moving in and moving on stages along with the 4S system in Schlossberg's transition theory (1981). Next, I would make notes of their experiences in relation to Yosso's (2005) six forms of cultural capital.

Realization or synthesis is the intentionality, verification, and dissemination of the

data (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). The whole is assembled from the stories or fragments of the research study. The procedure includes coding and interpreting the data to establish patterns and themes from participant's comments. As the researcher, I analyzed the content by writing notes in the margin of each interview to capture recurring themes and patterns for coding. According to Creswell (2007), using coded segments can "represent information that researchers expect to find before the study; represent surprising information that researchers did not expect to find; and represent information that is conceptually interesting or unusual to researchers and potentially participants and audiences" (p. 153). I used Microsoft Excel to organize data into spreadsheets. Data collected from the sources outlined above were analyzed using a coding system to designate patterns and themes. Table 5 provides codes and potential categories for research question one.

Table 5

Codes for Research Question One

Codes	Potential Categories	Participants
Worried About Paying for Doctorate	Financial	Imelda, Bianca, Frida, Luisa, Rosa, Carla, Sofia
Seeking Respect	Respect from Others	Frida, Imelda, Bianca, Luisa, Rosa, Carla
Wanting More Qualifications	Seeking a Better Job	Frida, Imelda, Bianca, Rosita, Victoria, Luisa, Rosa, Carla, Sofia

Realizations occurred throughout the experiential involvement of being with the research participants and reflecting on the research questions. Realization is a "quest for

synthesis through realization of what lies most undeniably at the heart of all that has been discovered” (p. 52). I was able to generate a new reality during this phase that embodied the essence of the researcher and participants. In this state, I was able to illuminate emergent themes from the data using Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory and Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model. I began noticing commonalities between experiences which then allowed me to look at my own experience to make sense of it all in light of these theories.

Building Trustworthiness

Qualitative research differs from quantitative in the standards by which it is evaluated. In conducting qualitative research, I sought to ensure trustworthiness which is “strictness in judgment and conduct, which must be used to ensure that the successive steps in a project have been set out clearly and undertaken with scrupulous attention to detail so that the results/findings/insights can be trusted” (Taylor, et al., 2006, p. 400). As the researcher, I want to have confidence that my results are truthful and reliable. Trustworthiness is relevant because it establishes the rigor and ensures quality. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) outline four components of trustworthiness that include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In an effort to achieve trustworthiness, I established these four components. Credibility is important because it links the research study findings with reality. I sought to demonstrate the truth by drawing from the participants’ experiences and interpreting those faithfully into research findings.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe prolonged engagement as a way to better understand the contextual meaning of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon. Through prolonged engagement, I spent sufficient time interacting with the participant to

build trust and rapport. I began the interaction with an email about the pre-interview questionnaire. I continued prolonged engagement through the interview, critical incident, and follow-up interview. In the end, I took the time to become very familiar with the data and was able to provide findings that were more rich or full due to prolonged engagement.

Two other methods used to ensure credibility were through triangulation and member checks. Triangulation involves employing multiple methods, data sources, or theories in order to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Triangulation assisted with making the research findings more robust, comprehensive, and developed. In using two interviews, a critical incident report, and a researcher journal as sources of data, I engaged in data source triangulation. I also interpreted the data through three interrelated theories that are a part of the conceptual framework.

I also used member checking to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations. The member check allowed the participant and researcher to see the data in a different manner. Member-checking is a technique in which the data, interpretations, and conclusions are shared with the participants in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants of the study often will clarify findings, correct errors, and provide additional insight. I engaged in member checking by sharing a summary of interpretations from their own interviews with participants. Participants received the summary of interpretations by email after the first interview. The participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback at the beginning of the second interview. At that time, they were asked if they believe the summary seemed to reflect an accurate understanding

of their interview. They were given an opportunity to offer any clarifications, corrections, additions, or other feedback they would like on the content of the summary. All participants were able to provide feedback about their profile and initial analysis of the first interview and critical incident reflection. Throughout the member checks, each participant appreciated the validation and recognition of their feelings and experiences.

Transferability is the state in which the researcher has provided enough data, details, and description that the reader of study finding is able to make judgments about whether those finding might transfer to their own similar situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher, I was responsible for presenting an adequate amount of evidence substantiated by the participant's words, critical incident description, or pre-interview questionnaire. The study involved nine participants and included evidence such as direct quotes from participant interviews. Providing a rich and detailed description of the findings, supported by numerous quotations assists the reader in making judgments about transferability.

Dependability in qualitative research is when the data is stable over time and conditions. A study that is dependable needs to be consistent and accurate based on the data. The research was documented at length and used multiple collection sources gathered over time such as interviews, critical incident descriptions provided by participants, and the researcher's journal. Confirmability is the process in which the researcher checks and rechecks the data to help ensure that the outcomes sufficiently reflect the experiences of the participants. To enhance confirmability, I maintained a detailed account of the research by using a researcher's journal. The researcher's journal was used to record reflections immediately following the interview to include

descriptions, thoughts, and behaviors. I kept the research journal throughout the entire process of the research study. In addition, a rich, thick description provided a full picture of the setting and participants of the study. In addition, while the research was heuristic in nature, I still was aware of my own predispositions and beliefs when conducting the study. The researcher journal was a safe place in which as a researcher I could document feelings, concerns, biases, etc. of the study.

Researcher Background and Role

I felt it was important for me to reflect on my experiences and recognize how the doctoral experience has changed me, while at the same time seeking to understand the experiences of the participants. Bess and Dee (2012) describe the interaction between the researcher and the respondents as a social process. Since the researcher can be seen as an instrument for the study, I wanted to provide some information about my background. I bring practical experience to this research study since I have firsthand knowledge and understanding of being a Latina doctoral student. I acknowledge that my experiences are valuable in providing insight, and I believe it could serve as an advantage to understanding other women enrolled in doctorate programs. I kept a researcher journal for ongoing review and reflection as well as to document research processes.

I am the youngest child and the first in my family to attend college. Also, both my parents were unable to complete a high school education. I live in San Antonio, TX with my son, who is 11 years old. At the time of this study, I am enrolled in a doctoral program at Texas State University. Previously, I was enrolled in a doctoral program at TAMU in College Station, TX. I left the program after not being able to commute due to finding out the news of my pregnancy. Because of my age, I was considered to have a

high-risk pregnancy and decided to leave the program because of my long commute to College Station, TX. My education consists of having a Master's in Psychology, Master's in Business Administration, and a certificate as a Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of TX.

I have a background in counseling and advising since I currently work as a personal counselor at a community college in San Antonio, TX. I have experience in higher education for over 18 years and as a Licensed Professional Counselor for 15 years. Throughout my duration in higher education, I have a background in Student Affairs and Student Success and assist students through enrollment, persistence, and completion. As part of my daily role, I often give training and presentations on the topic of mental health topics at the community college level. I have also facilitated a poster session on the Latina experiences from first-generation doctoral students and a roundtable discussion on experiences from a first-year doctoral program.

I have noticed throughout all these years that I have a great interest in learning more about women like me. I began the doctoral program in the fall of 2013. I was on track with other members of my cohort throughout my coursework, but once I moved into the dissertation phase, I had personal difficulties that prevented me from motivating myself to write. The many demands of my everyday life were affecting me and it appeared that I was reading and writing less and less each day. I wondered if I was alone or if there were others experiencing life events that have impacted their progression. It is my hope that the information gained from this study will be useful to educators and administrators that educate Latina doctoral students.

As the researcher for this study, it was my firm belief that I needed to understand

my experiences and perspectives first as it was related to transitioning into a doctoral program. My positionality was created by being a Mexican American woman growing up in San Antonio, TX. I am fluent in Spanish because my mother is predominately Spanish speaking. I was the first woman in my family to attend college and receive a degree. My Mexican culture is rich and vibrant, and we value personal relationships and religion. My personal experience in this area has influenced my opinions, but I was always aware of them while I interviewed the participants and completed the data analysis. I was cognizant of the potential bias throughout the duration of the research. I allowed ample opportunity to reflect on my journey and also incorporate the journey of the other eight participants into my worldview. With the shared experiences, I was able to allow for the illumination of the emerging themes and come up with implications and recommendations to support the research.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher is the primary investigator and must make every effort to abide by ethical considerations. As researcher, I submitted an IRB application for review. The purpose of the IRB is to protect the rights of the participants. Once approved, the data collection took place and I ensured that risks to participants were minimized. The study required each participant to complete an informed consent (Appendix G).

Informed Consent

Participants were fully aware of the aims and objectives of the research study. I provided a full account of ethical considerations to each of the participants, including informed consent. In the initial interview, I also answered any questions a participant had regarding the process. The informed consent ensured the privacy and confidentiality of

the participants. Participants received a copy of the informed consent for their records. Participants were also able to choose to withdraw from the research at any time, without any penalty. No participant withdrew from the study.

I made every effort to minimize the risks associated with being a research participant. When I observed the participant experiencing some fatigue, I offered a break, privacy, and/or time away from the study. The participants expressed tiredness, but wanted to proceed with the interviews. I also reminded the participant that she could withdraw from the study at any time.

Pseudonyms were used in place of the participants' names to protect the identity of participants. Additionally, data collected were stored in accordance with Texas State University regulations, kept on university network drive, and will remain in a locked filing cabinet for three years. I, as the researcher, used the assigned pseudonyms for any data sharing. While my faculty advisor and co-chair had access to portions of the data to provide guidance in data analysis and write-up, as the primary researcher I was the only person to know the identity of the pseudonyms.

Study Safeguards

The interviews were audio and digitally recorded for the purposes of retrieval and transcription with participants' consent. Transcriptions from interviews recorded via the video conferencing platform were moved to a designated secure repository for project data. I was able to retrieve a transcript from the conferencing platform, but I also listened to the audio multiple times to edit and verify that the transcribed data was accurate. All digital audio files, pre-interview questionnaires, interview transcripts, critical incident reflections, and field notes were saved on a password-protected computer meeting

TxState security specifications, and were stored in OneDrive files for business directory within TxState's Microsoft 365. Data will be safely retained for three years in compliance with IRB Guidelines in a restricted-access share drive. After three years, all data files will be destroyed.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the study design and methods. In order to learn about the experiences of Latina doctoral students and life events, a phenomenological approach was selected, and because I realized my own experience would be difficult to totally isolate as well as offering an asset for interpreting the experiences of other Latina doctoral students, I elected to conduct the study as a heuristic inquiry. This chapter reviewed the methods that were used to engage in purposeful sampling for the identification and selection of participants for this study. The chapter also discussed the semi-structured interviews and critical incident technique that were used for data collection, along with the researcher's journal. Data analysis strategies were discussed next, drawing on Douglass and Moustakas (1985) 3-phase model for heuristic inquiry including immersion, acquisition, and realization. Finally, the chapter provided information on how the researcher built trustworthiness, the role of the investigator, ethical considerations, and researcher background and role.

IV. STUDY FINDINGS

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to document the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. The primary question is: What are the experiences faced by Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, and what supports and strategies do they report needing? Questions that guided the exploration include:

1. What life events influence participant decisions to begin the transition into a doctoral program?
2. How do participants describe themselves and their life situations as they have engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies?
3. What life events impact participants' progression in their doctoral program, either positively or negatively?
4. What supports and strategies do participants report needing as they encounter impactful life events during the course of their doctoral studies?

This chapter consists of four sections. Section one provides the demographic profile of the participants. Section two describes brief personal profiles of each participant, including reasons for pursuing the doctorate. Section three presents the themes emerging through the analysis of data across participants. Lastly, section four presents a summary of findings.

Demographic Profile of Participants

The participants were nine females who self-identify as Latina. The ages of the participants ranged from 28-49 with a median age of 39. Six participants worked full-time and three worked part-time. Six participants were either married or in a long-term

partnership. Three participants had young children in the home. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

For the purpose of this research, the pseudonyms assigned to the study participants were inspired and have been changed to reflect the names of the female characters in the Disney movie *Coco* which was released in 2017 (Unkrich & Molina). *Coco* is a film about Mexican culture and the true representation of a Mexican family. The film follows a boy named Miguel who is accidentally transported to the Land of the Living Dead because of his love for music. There he seeks the help of many women in his life along with his great grandfather to help him return to his family among the living. In the Land of the Living Dead, Miguel learns about his true heritage and explores the theme of familial responsibility. The movie was made in 2017 and it was an important movie by Disney because they depicted the Mexican culture and centered on the tradition and Mexican holiday of the Day of the Dead or Día de los Muertos. This holiday is the bridge between the land of the living and the land of the dead. On the Day of the Dead, family members return to the land of the living and visit their family members.

Miguel encounters several Mexican women throughout his journey in the living and the afterworld. By the end of the film, Miguel realizes that his family is at the forefront of his identity and has experienced the concept of *familismo* and learned that family comes first. The film reminded me of my own Mexican family and I was proud to see the portrayal of loving, hard-working Mexican families. The women in the film have characteristics that are representative of the strong women in my life and family history. The movie was important because it reflected the diversity of the people and of the participants in the study. The film was released a few months after former president

Trump declared that he wanted to dismantle the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA is a policy that allows individuals who meet program requirements to get a request for a grant of deferred action of deportation (USCIS, 2021). The policy protects the DREAMers, or those who entered the United States unlawfully as children, in most cases with their parents.

The film illustrated strong women in different roles in both the land of the living and the land of the dead. They were depicted as women that Miguel has encountered throughout this journey. Their names were Imelda, Frida, Bianca, Rosita, Victoria, Luisa, Rosa, Carla, and Sofia. They were the important women in his life who offered love, protection, security, and support. Most of the women in the film reminded me of the strong women in my family. For this dissertation, the study participants were assigned a pseudonym based on the characters of *Coco* and in connection with the description of their experiences shared during the semi-structured interviews. The demographic characteristics of participants are found in Table 6.

Table 6*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Employment Status	Type of Institution	Region	Young Children at Home
Luisa	28	Full-time	Private	South Central	No
Frida	31	Part-time	Private	South Central	No
Imelda	32	Full-time	Private	South Central	Yes
Bianca	32	Part-time	Private	South Central	No
Rosita	42	Full-time	Private	Mid-Atlantic	No
Victoria	43	Full-time	Public	South Central	No
Sofia	45	Full-time	Public	South Central	Yes
Carla	47	Full-time	Public	Southwest	Yes
Rosa	49	Part-time	Public	South Central	No

Personal Profiles of Participants

This section of the chapter introduced the nine participants that graciously agreed to be a part of this study and share their experiences with me. During the interviews, the participants shared their experiences about the life events faced while enrolled in a doctoral program. Collectively, they provided me an opportunity to learn of their personal experiences in a doctoral program. Their experiences allowed me to learn about their reasons for enrolling in a doctoral program and why they saw it as important to complete their doctorates.

While each participant is at a different point in the doctoral journey, each has

completed the first year. A commonality across participants is experiencing life events, challenges, supports, and strategies during her doctoral program. The interviews were an opportunity for each participant to provide an understanding of her experience and how she taught herself to manage her own setbacks, triumphs, and learning.

Most of the women attribute their drive and success to improving the outlook for their careers and their families. Members of their family played an important role in their development and their support has been key to their success. Most of the women claimed that their mother and/or father is at the core of their journey and are their most influential role models. They would not be where they are without them. Their mothers and/or fathers were in the background offering guidance and support, and most of the participants shared that their parents lacked access to formal education. The participants also shared that their mother served as a strong female leader who may have not been the primary breadwinner in the home, but proudly served as the backbone of the family. The mother made sure that everyone was fed, clothed, and had a clean home. She provided the stability of having a proper home and a place that provided nurture and care. In addition, they learned the importance of education, how to fight for independence, and how to have a strong and committed work ethic.

Luisa

Luisa is 28 years old and is not married. She began the program as single and speaks most about her experience as single female. When she began the program, she lived with her parents and recently, she lives with her partner and has no children. She is the youngest of all the participants. Luisa is the daughter of immigrants and would like to be able to work with immigrant communities. She added that she has lived with her

parents throughout her doctorate. She shared:

I was living independently and I had to move back home. I lived in and out of my parents' home throughout my doctorate program, depending on how I was doing financially and that was a big help for me. It was also life altering because there was a shift in values based on my relationship with my mom. My relationship with her was not the best at the time. That was hard for me to come home and shift and be back into like feeling like a child at home in a Latin household especially after being independent and on my own and paying my own bills and that transition was a little rough.

She was often encouraged to complete the doctorate since her father has a doctorate. She chose to pursue the doctorate because she felt it would help her with her career. She shared that she wanted:

I think just kind of being taken a little more seriously with a doctorate level training. I was pulled to that. My father has his doctorate in engineering. I did grow up with this idea of like graduate education is pretty common or like encouraged in my home.

While enrolled, she felt supported and comfortable with faculty and staff and cohort members. She felt as if she had guidance from other doctoral students. The student shared that she had some stress and some mental health concerns. She considered withdrawing from the program, but a faculty member provided an option that allowed her to reduce her course load. She often heard it was appropriate to feel overwhelmed. Luisa had some conflict with her mother due to needing to fulfill household duties and to take care of her father while enrolled in the program. Luisa sacrificed her independence and

her mental health for the needs of the family. Luisa wished that there were more mental health resources for doctoral students. Doctoral students are a different population than the traditional undergraduate student and the institution prepares and offers programs predominately for the undergraduate.

Frida

Frida is 31 years old, lives with her partner and another roommate, and has no children. She is working to complete the doctorate for financial stability. She decided to seek a doctorate due to wanting to increase her knowledge and skills. She also wanted to have her voice heard and be included in conversations involving work and her expertise. Frida claimed the reasons that contributed to her decision to enroll in a doctorate program include:

Because I wanted to have more knowledge on the field. I wanted to be able to help people. Sometimes, I believe that having a masters is not enough. And they will not listen to you because you just have a Masters unless you really know mental health. They kind of put you down.

Another reason she chose the program is because it was closer to her home than other programs. Her family lives predominately in Mexico. She added:

And it was best for my family and I wanted to stay close to my family. I don't speak English well, even though I'm in the US. I don't like it. I don't feel comfortable. I still struggle. I wanted to be close to my comfort zone. This was close to my family and I like the program.

Frida mentioned that she is not able to spend much time with her partner and is dedicated to school. Frida adds that she has sacrificed her timeline of getting married and

having children because of the doctorate. She hopes that she is not wasting critical time to have children in the future. Frida also believes that because of her age and language barrier that it is taking more time for her to complete requirements. She believes that hopefully because of her sacrifice now that will pay off in the future. She also shared that the doctoral program is competitive and she does not feel fully supported by faculty and cohort members.

Imelda

The first interviewee was Imelda. Imelda is 32 and began the doctoral program at 30. She is married and has 2 young children. She was born in Mexico and grew up there until she was 10 years old. Imelda was selected to be part of a leadership development program and had several experiences being a part of the group. As a member, she was provided leadership skills and opportunities to engage with others about making improvements to the community. She credits the program with giving her a greater perspective of the world and how her input and feedback is needed for change. She shared that she was able to travel to several places and was surprised that they paid for all flights, accommodations, and meals. When she attended Bezos Scholars' functions, she realized that there were few scholars that looked like her. Imelda was open and outspoken about her time served in the army and decided to leave the army due to having another goal to accomplish. She shared about her experience:

I did 7 years active duty and then after that I was like okay, I need to start planning, other things because I just didn't feel like it was the right thing for me at the time anymore and I really wanted to continue my education.

One of her peers introduced the concept of applying to a doctoral program. She

was not sure what it entailed and wasn't sure if it was the best option for her, but her peer convinced her to pursue the doctorate. She is happy she has pursued the doctorate and she stated that being in a doctoral program has been a purpose or calling. She felt unprepared to begin the doctoral program and described her experience:

I was not prepared when it comes to theoretical understanding of the program. All I knew was that in the military there were a power hierarchy and now there were differences. I was used to seeing professors like my superiors and in a position of power. I had to figure things out on my own and eventually learned that if I don't 'get it, then go and ask questions.

Imelda discussed how she had a baby while in the doctoral program. She missed minimal time and was told that she had the best excuse for missing classes. After some time, she felt comfortable and supported by her cohort. She explains that she has a close friend or *comadre* in the program. A *comadre* in a Latina household is someone who is close to you or someone identified as having a shared responsibility with you. In this case, the classmate and cohort member is also the godmother of her child. Imelda enjoys the program because she is able to offer a different point of view and recognizes that is primarily the reason she was selected for the program. Imelda continues to practice the military lifestyle by enforcing rules and abiding by all expectations required of her.

Even though it was difficult to ask for help or assistance, Imelda requested some time off from the program to focus on her family. She mentioned that her husband needed her focus and attention due to a medical crisis and she had to put the needs of her family above her own. She knew it was best for the family and never regretted the decision. Her husband has improved and is doing well. Imelda expressed relief that the program and

faculty supported her decision.

Bianca

Bianca is 32 and single without children. She previously worked full time and had to leave her previous position to pursue the doctoral degree. She claimed that:

I miss my career and I dedicated all of my time and energy, and I left it to start the program. My career was my life. And I had to let that go, obviously, because that job was very intense. I was working a lot of hours, and there was just no way that I could maintain that.

Bianca decided to move to San Antonio with her family. Before she began the program, she shared with her parents that she needed their help:

I hadn't lived with my family, you know, since that time and I decided to start the doctoral program and I told them, I'm going to need your support. I'm going to need y'all to move over here and they did and they were excited they wanted a new adventure. They wanted to be closer to us because my siblings also are located more in Central Texas.

Bianca lives with her family to assist with the finances. She adds that she is stressed about how she is going to pay for courses and would have liked more financial aid. She discussed how her family is there for financial support and has been grateful for them to have the support while she focuses on her studies full time. She shared that she has a close relationship with her parents and “they're kind of, you know, supporting me right now. During this time, because it is financially, a very difficult time for me.” Bianca added that her parents question the reason she is pursuing a doctoral program when she already has completed a master’s degree. She shared that her parents have difficulty

understanding the purpose of a doctoral degree and they do not comprehend the significance or importance since she can search for employment with her master's degree. Her parents have sacrificed by moving to San Antonio and help her with renting a home to help her complete her degree. Bianca is a social activist and believes that issues such as immigration are important especially since she identifies as a Latina student. Bianca has often felt that her career goals are taking long to reach and often puts too much pressure on herself to complete.

Rosita

Rosita is 42 years old and has no children. She lives with her husband and works full time. She mentioned that she has no siblings and therefore is really close with her parents. She shared:

Yeah, I mean I can't stress enough like how great they are and they know I take it seriously. They know that it's a priority for me and not just being in school, but also like doing well. Right, like I'm making it something that I have to do and specifically to where I have to excel.

She is passionate about her doctoral program and researched several programs before she found the right one. Rosita shared that she wants to help other Latinas complete their doctorates since there are only a few who have completed. Rosita shared that she was prepared to begin the program, but knew that she needed to be fully committed to it. She added:

It was mostly going to be like committing right. It's like okay you know the next three plus years of your life you're going to be in school and understanding what that means for anything outside of your personal world and you know in your

personal life.

Rosita mentioned that she feels supported by her cohort and most faculty members. She shared that her husband is her biggest supporter. After sharing a story about a peer that was deciding to leave the program, her husband stated that if she desired one day to withdraw from the program, that he would not let her leave the program. She was honored that her husband would not let her quit on herself and her potential greatest achievement.

Victoria

Victoria is 43 years old and is married with no children. She grew up in a single parent household after her father died when she was young. Victoria mentioned that this is her second opportunity in a doctoral program. She was enrolled in a competitive program before and then after seeing a dissertation defense, she knew it was not the right program for her. She shared her experience:

They were having to get up and defend their dissertation and people were just ripping them apart like it was just like ripping people to shreds. And they were mean and brutal and negative. I was like, I don't want to turn into that. Like, I don't want that to be me. I don't ever want to be the kind of person that just like is tearing somebody down that might eventually be my colleague. This experience actually just hit me wrong and I decided to leave.

She eventually returned to another program and received a second master's degree. She decided to work full time in educational leadership. She worked several years in positions that showcased her talent and abilities. Victoria claimed that she wanted to make changes in her life and learn something new:

I think professionally, I was in a bit of a like midlife crisis. In my work like at my school, I had been really successful and our school was nationally ranked. And I think I was in my 30s, and I thought I can't imagine what I'm going to do from here that's going to top this right. I'm an achiever, and then I'm like, okay, what's next. Like, how am I going to move forward?

Victoria added that her mother is the greatest example of strength and served as a role model for her to complete the doctorate. She was taught that education is the only way to be powerful and independent. Victoria adds that she is a high achiever and her work experience has contributed to expectations for doctoral work. Victoria mentioned that she felt supported by her faculty and cohort members, but there was a conflict when one student felt as if she had been singled out from a personal outing because she was not Latina. She added that it caused her some discomfort to know that the student who appeared to have privilege expressed discrimination and therefore discouraged gatherings and outings from the Latinas in the doctoral program. Victoria feels as if the greatest sacrifice of being in a doctoral program is loss of time with family. She also misses having some time for self-care. Victoria adds that she has a strong sense of responsibility of being a Latina in a doctoral program.

Sofia

Sofia is 45 years old and has one child. She is divorced and raises her child as a single mother. She works full time and her mother watches her son while she attends courses. Sofia works full time while enrolled in a doctoral program. This is Sofia's second attempt at a doctorate. She attended another program before having her son and left due to her medical condition. She shared:

It was a difficult decision for me to leave the program, but felt it was the best one for me and my unborn son. I really thought I would return, but no one ever reached out to me. I guess I didn't feel as if they cared if I returned or not.

Whenever I thought about returning, I didn't know how to do it- Eventually I decided to apply elsewhere.

Sofia has been a good student and has completed all coursework. Sofia struggled with completing the dissertation and has changed her dissertation topic. She has lacked motivation to write the dissertation and finds it difficult to focus and find time to write. She noted:

Every day was harder to write especially when I no longer felt connected to the campus community. I felt as if I possibly chose the wrong topic and thought what is wrong with me and why couldn't I just write it like others in my cohort did. The time and distance made it easier for me to neglect.

Since she is a single parent, Sofia was looking for a more significant income and has transitioned throughout several different positions in the last few years. Sofia spends most of her free time with her child and feels guilt when she is away from him especially since she is the only parent he knows. She mentioned:

My main focus as a single parent is to provide a good and stable home. I had to make sure that I had enough income for my son and his needs. I became preoccupied with moving up in positions to earn more pay. I also felt as if I did not have the time to write. I became overwhelmed with responsibility and even though it was always on my mind, it was the least important. My family, mostly my son was in most need.

Sofia had a supportive cohort and had good relationships with faculty, but lost contact with most of them after she completed courses. Sofia is emotionally supported by her family, but mostly her mother who serves as a pillar of strength.

Carla

Carla is 47 years old and married and had two children. One child lives at home with her and husband while her other child is deceased. She shared that she has a supportive family who have assisted her while she works full time. She enrolled in a doctoral program because of the expectation of her employer and the workplace culture for aspiring to the doctorate. She wants to complete to be able to compete for other positions in leadership or administration. She mentioned:

To get your doctorate degree down there. It's kind of your way of getting your foot in the door. And that was a huge proponent for going back to school. Also, it was something that I kind of promised myself. For many, many years ago and it was something that I had promised my daughter, a while back, and that I would finish and I would get my dreams met, which was to go all the way and get my doctorate. It's just it was that promise I made to myself.

She recalls her high school counselor telling her that she would not be able to accomplish much because of her lack of skills, but could have a future career as a secretary. Her motivation to complete is to prove her high school counselor wrong and to teach others you can be more than what everyone expects. When she began the program, she did not feel prepared and everyone seemed to be in a different league, but now feels differently. She mentioned her experience:

I was not at all ready. I did not feel prepared. I felt very out of my league going

into it and because the majority of it was online and we had students from all over the world in those classes. And you got to see a lot of different viewpoints and a lot of different ways of thinking. And I just in so many ways showed me how behind the curve I felt.

Her doctoral program is online and she has made some adjustments to her learning and interaction with other students. Carla has a strong desire to succeed and made a promise to her late daughter and herself that she will complete. She also wants to teach her son about perseverance and serves as an example for him to work hard. She also shared that she tells her son daily that if you want something bad enough, you have to work for it. No one is going to give you anything. Carla has a personal drive to succeed and that is why she will not settle for less.

Rosa

Rosa is 49 years old and single. She has no young children at home, but has an adopted daughter who works for law enforcement. Rosa looks forward to being a grandmother soon. Rosa previously worked full time in non-profit work, but has since left her job to focus on her doctoral program. She chose to enroll in a program because she wanted to find ways to improve the community. She shared:

I just believe for my own personal life that education is the ticket. Education is the way and finding ways that utilize my community-based work compared with academia to figure out how to maximize opportunities for our community. And that's what it was just, it was like a turning point. It was like, you've done all of this. Now, in order to really have the impact you want, you need to have those three little letters. Go get those three little letters and come back so that you can

fight for what you really want.

Her parents are providing financial support while enrolled which contributed to her decision to enroll. Rosa stated that she is completing the degree for her parents. Her mother and father provided her an opportunity to attend a master's and then a doctoral program. Her mother has since passed away and now her father is dealing with a debilitating condition. She claimed the following:

And they've been there. They'll help me financially, which is a huge blessing and relief to not have to stress about everything and to be able to order the books I need and to not stress about ordering toner and stuff like that. They are very supportive and behind me in all my decisions.

Rosa shared that her faculty and cohort members are supportive. She did mention a previous incident with a faculty member who almost questioned her place in the program. Rosa shared that she disengaged and almost quit the program. She decided against it due to the promise she made to her parents. She claims that she likes to challenge faculty. She claims that being enrolled in a doctoral program has taken a toll on her mental health. Rosa believes that she has lost her identity without working and it offered her a good work/life balance. She said that she was prepared for the intellectual aspect, but not the emotional aspect of being enrolled in a doctoral program.

Study Findings Organized by Research Question

This section presents study findings related to each of the research questions. The research questions are presented with the themes that were identified that include a description or definition. Also, each of the themes have subthemes which highlight the shared experiences of the participants. The following figure serves as a visual

representation focusing on the themes identified from the data related to each of the four research questions.

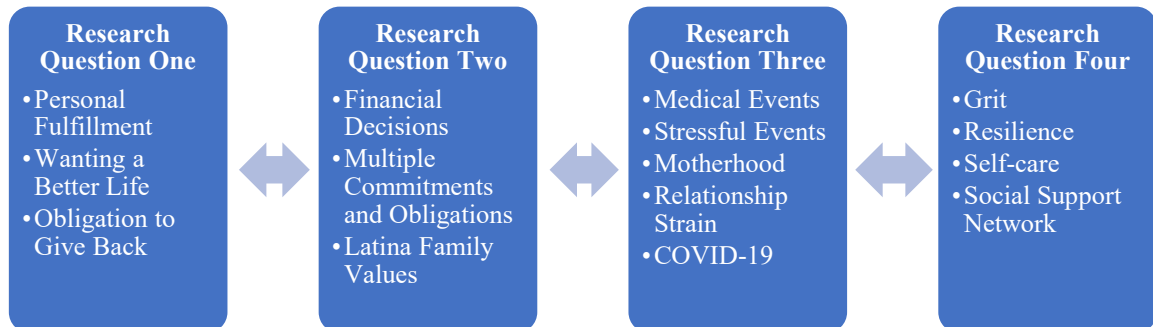


Figure 1

Themes by Research Question

Research Question One

The focus of the first research question was on exploring the life events that influenced the participants' decisions to begin the transition into a doctoral program. Rather than life events, participants described influential forces that compelled them to begin seeking changes in their lives. These forces provided an opportunity to seek, select, and begin the transition into the doctoral program. The participants' descriptions of influential forces are clustered into three themes. Table 7 briefly describes the themes and indicates the frequency or number of times each theme was identified in the data. Also, the table includes a description of the theme.

Table 7*Research Question One*

Theme	Frequency	Theme Description
Personal Fulfillment	27	In pursuit of achievement of life goals
Wanting a Better Life	42	Taking positive action to improve your life
Obligation to Give Back	44	Giving back to improve Latina and family experiences

Personal Fulfillment

Personal fulfillment was the first theme that emerged from the data. Participants expressed feeling strongly motivated to find personal fulfillment in their lives. They shared their thoughts on what it would feel like if they were doing something significant or worthwhile. Most questioned at some point before beginning the doctoral program what they were supposed to be doing with their life. Also, others asked whether they were working in the right place. Trying to find personal fulfillment, motivated the participants to seek, apply and begin a doctoral program. Participants discussed a deep desire that they are capable of accomplishing this goal regardless of challenges. Personal fulfillment occurs when the participants achieve the life goal of completing the doctorate. Participants describe their journey towards achieving personal fulfillment. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory focuses on transition-- how an individual experiences change and how they adapt to it that determines whether or not they are successful in the outcome.

As the participants approached the transition in the *Moving in* stage, they began the doctoral program and started to understand the nature of the transition and the best

way to anticipate the changes that it would bring to their lives (Goodman et al., 2006). Carla reported, “I spent a great deal of time thinking of achieving the doctorate because most believed that I wouldn’t be able to accomplish more in life than being a secretary.” She believed that regardless of what others thought of her, “I am fully capable and have the skills and abilities to be able to achieve the doctoral degree.” Consistent with the community cultural wealth model, Carla displayed aspirational capital as she chose to persist when others did not believe in her capabilities. She focused on her commitment to pursue her dreams. Rosa shared, “I have a goal of wanting to be the best version of myself and felt that in order to accomplish that, I need to complete the doctorate.” She has always had a successful career, but felt in order to make more of an impact in the community, she needed to strive for the doctoral degree. Frida expressed a deep desire to achieve the doctoral degree and stated: “I believe no matter how hard the personal struggles I was going through, I would make it through, persist, and complete.”

Finding Purpose. Finding purpose was one of the subthemes that I developed from the data. Participants spoke of a purpose or the reason for which they decided to apply and enroll in a doctoral program. Several participants in the study spoke about the reasons for enrolling in a doctoral program in terms of pursuing their own true calling. They wanted to lead a life that felt purposeful, fulfilling and engaging in their passion to learn and be better versions of themselves. Most spoke about the inner voice that they heard to pursue more. Several believed that larger forces were at play and believed there was a spiritual or divine influence or reasoning for hearing that inner voice.

Many expressed the reasons they enrolled in a doctoral program in terms of advancing their career or for better options for their career. They believed that they were

at a point in life when they wanted to tend to their craft and improve their skills. They also shared that they wanted to be the first in their family to complete the doctorate.

Participants reported a purpose or calling in which they had a strong inner urge to aspire to complete a doctoral program. Benard's (2004) resiliency model, describes a sense of purpose and how it is the ability to find meaning in what you are currently doing and make it purposeful. This theme arose during the analysis of Carla's interview. Carla learned of her purpose or calling and depicted her experience as having purpose not only for her, but also for her teenage son and her daughter who died in her womb. She defined her experience as, "Being in a doctoral program has given me a larger purpose in my life and that fulfilling all my dreams gives also purpose to my life so that drive was there for me." She also mentioned, "I felt as if there were larger forces at play and I was honoring the memory of my daughter by pursuing my education further." She shared, "I wanted to show my son that his mother could do something that only few Latina women complete."

Similarly, Imelda expressed a particular course of action, of wanting to listen to her heart, and being guided in the path towards pursuing a doctoral degree and her future professional career. Imelda also recounted this calling as motivational to keep aspiring towards her goal. She changed directions in her profession because of the calling towards a new career. She recalled:

And that's when I decided that I needed to go back to my calling. I then applied and I was very impressed with the university. I felt like I really had to do it; I just think it's a calling. Now, I know that being in a doctoral program and helping others is my calling. And, knowing that the whole calling part of this profession keeps me going.

Sofia learned that her purpose was to become the best version of herself. Even though she knew the time requirements and demands, she made the decision to apply to a doctoral program.

I wanted to apply to a doctoral program because I felt it was my purpose to serve others. I wanted to be able to have the most amount of education to be able to serve to the best of my capabilities. I guess my purpose grew and I knew that yes, I wanted to do it for others, but I also wanted to do it most for myself. To prove to myself that I can do it.

Furthermore, Victoria described that being in the doctoral program serves a greater purpose in life, and her purpose in life is to complete the degree by all means necessary. She felt she had to sacrifice for a greater purpose and had faith that it would all be worth it one day. She shared:

I learned from a faculty member that there are sacrifices that have to be made, and I have to keep in mind that those sacrifices are temporary for like a greater purpose. And, I actually go back to that piece of advice pretty regularly.

The theme of finding purpose arose during the data analysis of all the participants' interviews. It appears that the participants were able to find meaning in their decision to enroll in a doctoral program. It is apparent that Benard's (2004) resiliency framework is applicable to their pursuit of the doctorate and having a sense of purpose.

Self-motivation. Self-motivation was another subtheme identified in the data. Participants expressed an inner motivation and a strong impulse towards enrolling in a doctoral program. Participants took initiative to learn about different doctoral programs and proceeded with action to apply. Eventually, as participants began the doctoral

program, the self-motivation became more important as they transitioned into the doctoral program.

Angelica stated, “My identity motivated me. It drives me to not give up and to just be patient. And be hopeful.” Frida placed an inspirational quote in her desk, “Be brave and work hard.” The participants expressed deep passion for their career and wanted to earn a doctoral degree for career advancement or because they wanted to achieve their own personal goal. Some of these participants linked their self-motivation to a desire to enroll in doctoral program because it was beneficial for them to stay competitive with others in their field of study. Many expressed that they have always had a competitiveness or self-motivation to be better than those around them and be at their best. They also were motivated by the fact that others in their family were looking up to them and they were serving as role models for close family members.

Wanting a Better Life

Wanting a better life was another theme derived from analysis of the data. Participants described wanting a better life in terms of an improvement in their current situation. It had different meanings, but for most, it meant to improve their financial situation. Several participants discussed a better life for self, family, and for others. They not only described it, but believed that this better life exists and they only have to open up their minds to the possibilities that it is out there for them.

Rosa detailed how wanting a better life for herself played a role to pursue a doctoral degree. Rosa explained her reasons for pursuing the doctorate, “And I've just been real I just believe just for my own personal life that education is the ticket. Education is a way to make a better life for myself and my family.”

Victoria also expressed how her professional career contributed to her decision to pursue a doctoral degree.

I think professionally. I was in a bit of a like midlife crisis. Like there's just a lot of positive things that contributed to it, but I think like the professional pieces were what really like nudged me like I was in a little midlife professional crisis. Like, what would I do next with my life.

Similarly, Imelda voiced:

And I was thinking that this is going to be me, like in 15 years and I saw a lot of things that I didn't want to have as a lifestyle. You know, staying at work until 8:00 p.m. and I mean this was nonstop and I was thinking I really don't want to do that. And then, I thought, I really need to go back to school.

Bianca stressed that she wanted more than just working long hours for an agency for the rest of her life. She noted:

I got excited and then I started to work and then that work, I realized like, oh my gosh, it was really hard. It was a really hard job and it just further solidified that I wanted to do more than just work at that type of agency for the rest of my life. I know that sounds kind of dramatic, but I knew I had to make a change.

Participants recalled how they looked beyond their current job, and looked at opportunities to begin a doctoral program. At this stage in their life, they are pursuing a better life and believe that with the doctorate, they have the chance to do anything they want and the possibilities are endless.

Career Pursuit or Advancement. Career pursuit or advancement was a subtheme of wanting a better life. Receiving a doctorate will assist participants with the future and improve the opportunity to advance to a higher position. Participants described how they wanted to develop advanced research skills and improved practice. Participants wanted the potential to increase credibility and opportunity. Most participants believed that the doctorate is required for success and to be a leader in the field.

Carla admitted that she wanted to get her doctoral degree because most of her coworkers have already attained it. She added that in order to compete for positions at her workplace, she is encouraged to have the doctoral degree. She stated, "I decided to go back into school to get my doctorate degree as most of them [her coworkers] have their doctorate." Luisa chose to apply to doctoral program because she was interested in improving her career. She acknowledged:

I had graduated with my masters in marriage and family therapy and began work. But I was really drawn to doing immigration evaluations for court. And in order to do that, I felt like I really wanted to be at a doctoral level. I think it would help me with assessments and help me.

Rosita reported how her career influenced her decision to begin the doctorate.

And the goal behind receiving my doctorate is really tied to my career and to improve my current situation. Then there's also this expectation that when I finish the doors and then in 10 years, will the doctorate have been worth it? You know, it's things like that. I would say that yes, probably more than anything!

Bianca shared that she would like to reach her maximum potential in her career. She also realized that the doctorate can open up possibilities for future career growth. She

responded:

I really want to go as far as I can in my career because I see myself you know working the rest of my life. And I really want to have the greatest impact. And I think getting the doctorate will open up many doors for me to be able to be in more of a leadership position.

Similarly, Sofia acknowledged that the doctorate can begin to open doors in her career. Also, with it she has the possibility to explore and consider options in her career. She recalled:

I hope that it will provide me an opportunity to extend some doors in my career, explore, and consider options outside of higher education. I think, obviously, that there are benefits to the recognition that comes with having a doctoral degree and you know the status that comes with that.

Participants wanted to broaden their career opportunities and increase their salary in order to make a difference in their lives and their family members.

Sharing One's Voice. Sharing one's voice is another subtheme of wanting a better life. Several participants described how sharing one's voice prompted them to aspire to enroll in a doctoral program. They had a strong sense of who they were and what they stood for and they wanted to be able to share that voice with others.

Participants wanted their voice to be heard and to amplify the reach of their voice in terms of knowledge, ideas, and arguments. Most participants want to have others realize that they are the authority and expert in the subject matter.

Frida depicted that she felt she lacked a voice in her company. Her description of the company is:

Some companies put a lot of restraints on a lot of things and say oh no, you don't know better than me and then put you on the side without listening to you. I want to have a voice for me and to also help other people have a voice.

Additionally, Rosa wanted to hear a voice like her own and shared that she wanted to contribute to changes. She recalled her experience, "There are few things that I have read by someone like me. And I've never heard our voice and I started reflecting back and wanted to make a change." Similarly, Luisa felt as if she was not respected nor had a voice in her workplace. She disclosed that enrolling in a doctoral program was a large factor in wanting to be seen as more credible and able to speak up on matters. She responded, "I think just being taken a little more seriously in the court system with a doctorate level training. I was pulled to that." Furthermore, Imelda wanted her voice to be heard in the military and had to make changes in her life. She described her experience:

In the military, when I was the only female officer in many scenarios, there were several times when my voice was not heard. I am understanding that things need to change on how to make my voice heard especially when you're in the minority. I think that is a key thing like knowing how to do it especially when they do not see you.

Obligation to Give Back

A sense of obligation to give back was the third theme. An obligation to give back meant that the participants understood their role to improve Latina and family experiences. Most participants wanted to give back to their communities to help improve educational success, whereas others wanted to improve the outlook for other women like them. They felt being in a doctoral program may motivate or influence others in their

network or family to choose higher education. In addition, it could create a ripple effect in seeking out careers that require higher education or even a doctoral degree.

Improving Latina and Family Experiences. Improving Latina and family experiences was a subtheme of Obligation to Give Back. The majority of participants disclosed how their motivation to pursue a doctoral degree was to improve Latina and family experiences. Most participants mentioned the desire to give others the courage to take a risk in their life and apply to college and ultimately doctoral programs. Participants shared that they have broken the mold of the typical Latina woman and want to inspire other women like them to pursue opportunities that come their way.

Imelda wants to encourage other Latinas to have the courage to apply to doctoral programs. She offered:

Being a Latina is important because I want to help others like me. I want them to know that it's possible to be in the program that I'm in, but also the program has even fostered an identity that I have kept with myself because of my early career experiences in life.

Similarly, Carla wants to improve Latina experiences by helping other Latinas around her.

I'm motivated by seeing other Latina women in my cohort in the program and I read a quote that said when you reach your goals you turn around and reach back and you pull somebody else up. And I think that's what Latina women should do.

Rosita has been supported by other Latina women around her and she is the first in her circle to be in a doctoral program. She knows that they have a master's or bachelor's degree and wants to achieve the degree for herself and also for the women

around her.

All of my mom's friends are teachers or counselors in K-12 and they're constantly very supportive and they're all Latinas, you know, and I am the first around them to be in a doctoral program. Most of them have gotten their masters or something, you know, have a college degree, but I'm the one that is going beyond that.

Participants were motivated by improving Latina and family experiences. Participants wanted others around them to be inspired by their choices and take a risk in education to move forward in their lives.

Increasing Latina Doctorates. Increasing Latina doctorates was another subtheme. Several participants revealed how they are underrepresented in doctoral programs and chose to enroll in a doctoral program to increase the number of Latina doctorates. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering is highlighted based on the responses of participants. Participants described that they want their efforts to matter and to bring attention to other Latina students. Participants also shared how they want to empower other women like them to pursue the doctorate even though many challenges occur along the way. Most participants discussed how they want to pave the way for other Latina women to be tomorrow's leaders and in positions of power and influence. For instance, Rosa wants to improve the number of Latinas who complete a doctoral program. Rosa described her experience as, "We can do it and you know you talked about the demographics of how few of us, was it .03% of us have our PhDs." Rosita also wants to change the low number of Latina women who receive a doctoral degree and hopes that her efforts can impact that number:

But as far as being Latina and being a woman, and in general, as having their

doctorates, we're like 1%-2% and there's not a lot of us. And, you know, that comes with a little bit of pressure to say and what's the reasoning behind the fact that there's so few of us.

Victoria has an interest in serving as a leader and helping other Latinas around her and she believes her dissertation topic may influence others to enroll in a doctoral program. She believes it has taken her a long time to get to the point about wanting to share how Latinas can support one another to achieve their goals.

And, you know, in a really supportive way, right, with the intention of, we're not going to let anything get in our way. We're all going to graduate, like less than 1% of Latinas get a doctorate, we're going to do this and we are going to like support each other like through this program, we're going to make sure that like we all finish. And it's not just like one or two of us.

Carla wants to change the way others think of Latinas and how to reframe the opportunity of having Latinas completing their doctorate. She would like for more organizations to begin supporting Latinas in pursuing a doctoral degree.

I think that we do not have a huge push here to support Latinas in getting a doctoral degree. And, I don't want to fall into that statistic of, you know, not doing it. I want to go all the way. I want to prove people wrong. I also want it to be more expected of Latina women that they, just as much as everyone else, especially men, can complete the doctorate.

Desire to Improve Community. The desire to improve the community was an additional subtheme of the Obligation to Give Back. Many participants described their desire to improve the community. They want their community members to see how it is

possible to achieve the impossible. Also, they want to encourage others around them that they can improve their situation and how education plays an important education role in this change. Furthermore, they believe it is important to give back to the community and serve those around them that have taken part in this journey of the pursuit of the doctoral degree. Luisa shared:

A little bit about myself, I am really passionate about working with immigrant communities. And I like to be really active as an activist, as a supporter, as an ally with the undocumented community, that's always been something I've been really passionate about.

Likewise, Frida wants to use her education to improve community resources and access to education. She explained, "I want to help other people and better serve the community because of the lack of education that certain systems have and they still lack." She commented how she would like to be able change her community and improve access to her community members.

Similarly, Sofia chose to apply to a doctoral program to help others around her and to serve her community. She communicated her experience as:

I wanted to pursue a doctorate to help other people have a voice. I also want to help other people make changes to their lives. I wanted to better serve the community because of the lack of education that certain systems.

Victoria added that she felt an added responsibility to her Latina community. She wanted to do well in this program to prove that Latinas can achieve doctorates just like anyone else.

For me, I carry that sense of responsibility. I am going to have a 4.0, and I am

going to kick ass in this program because no one is going to say that Latinas cannot do this. I'm not going to fall into that. And I carry that little chip on my shoulder from my sense of responsibility to my community.

Bianca detailed how she wants to go back to her hometown and improve the community by using her degree and experience to influence others to complete attend college or graduate school.

Not only will the doctorate impact my immediate and extended family, but it will also impact my community where I come from. I want to create more services for people that need it and for those populations that have limited access and resources. I also want to change the brain drain when people leave to complete their education and don't come back.

And finally, Rosa shared that she has a strong desire to serve and give to the community. She noted:

Education is the way and finding ways that utilize my community-based work compared with academia to figure out how to maximize opportunities for our community. I know that with my doctorate that I can contribute to making a better place for the community to live.

She believed that she wanted to complete her doctorate to have more influence with the meeting the needs of others. Rosa felt as if it was important for her to improve the lives of those in her community.

The framework of community cultural wealth helps to understand how participants navigated their lives and academic experiences. Participant responses illustrate how familial, navigational and aspirational capital were intertwined in their

decision to apply to a doctoral program. They also drew on these forms of capital as they made their decision and began the transition into the doctoral program.

Responses of participants related to their decision-making experiences as doctoral students especially highlighted two forms of capital: familial and aspirational capital. Relative to familial capital, participants discussed the need to stay close to their family and improve family experiences. They felt it was their responsibility to serve as role models and lead the way to expose their family members to higher education. Many participants chose a doctoral program that was close to their family. Rosa described that she chose a program based on location. She stated, “The program’s right here in my backyard. I don’t need to go off anywhere else and I can stay connected to my family and the community I love.” Victoria described a similar situation because she wanted to stay close to her mother. She added:

I moved to this area because my family is here. I’m not a young kid who can just pick up and go. My mom is 76 and I’m going to be here to stay close. As long as she’s here. I’m going to be here.

Participants were also strongly focused on their goal of completing the doctoral degree which connects to their aspirational capital. They followed their aspirations because they knew it would benefit their families, community and themselves. All participants displayed aspirational capital and the connection to their future career and sharing one’s voice. They knew that the doctoral degree was the key to their personal and professional goals. Participants were often engaged in the moving forward in their lives and what they wanted to achieve next. After completion of her master’s degree, Rosa noted:

It was like, you’ve done all of this and now, in order to really have the impact you

want, you need to have those three little letters. So, go get those three little letters and come back so that you can fight for what you really want.

Next, Carla mentioned, “To get your doctorate degree down is kind of your way of getting your foot in the door. And so that was a huge proponent for going back to school.”

The intent of research question one was to explore the life events that influenced the participants’ decision to begin the transition into the doctoral program. Participants did not mention life events, but did describe influential forces that compelled them to begin seeking changes to their lives. Research question one was clustered into three themes and included: personal fulfillment, wanting a better life, and obligation to give back. In personal fulfillment, participants described seeking a purpose and pursuing their own true calling. Next, participants shared that they were often self-motivated to earn a doctoral degree for career advancement or because of a personal goal to have a better life for themselves, their family, and others around them. Participants described wanting to improve their current situation, which for most, meant their financial situation. Participants also felt as if they had an obligation to give back to improve Latina and family experiences. Several participants also lamented that Latinas were underrepresented in doctoral programs and chose to enroll to change the number of Latina doctorates. They also wanted to empower other women like themselves to believe that it is possible to pursue the doctorate despite having a family, career, or other challenges.

Research Question Two

The focus of the second research question was on learning how participants describe themselves and their life situation as they have engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies. The participants' descriptions of themselves and their life situations as they engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies were clustered into three themes. Table 8 briefly describes the themes and indicates the frequency or number of times each theme was identified in the data. Also, the table includes a description of the theme.

Table 8

Research Question Two

Theme	Frequency	Theme Description
Financial Decisions	24	Impacted by financial decisions due to enrolling in a doctoral program
Multiple Commitments and Obligations	35	The balancing act of managing multiple commitments and obligations
Latina Family Values	30	The influence and understanding of their role in the family

Financial Decisions

The first theme that emerged from the data was financial decisions. Several participants described their life situation and how they have been impacted by financial decisions due to enrolling in a doctoral program. Schlossberg (1981) and the 4S system's first factor is situation and it describes situation as the trigger for change. Each participant explained her timing, trigger, and role change. All participants explained that they had to consider whether enrolling in a doctoral program would be a good financial decision.

Participants had to develop a plan to finance their doctoral studies and determine whether the doctoral program was a good investment. In addition, participants had to decide whether they would stop working full-time and financially contributing to their household. Each participant had to consider the ramifications of their decisions on their own basic living expenses and how other members of their family may be impacted.

Participants displayed navigational and familial capital. Yosso (2005) noted navigational capital “acknowledged individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces including schools,” (p. 80). Participants were able to navigate though the system and figure out a way to develop a plan to finance their studies. Familial capital was also evident as their family members supported them in the process.

Financial Support by Family. Financial support by family was one of the subthemes. Financial support was often provided by the family. Grady et al. (2014) found that graduate education continues to increase in cost and student debt incurred is a concern. The family often made a financial sacrifice to allow the participant to live in the home or provided the participant funds for tuition and living expenses.

Rosa explained how her parents encouraged her and her sister to enroll in graduate programs and that they would contribute financially and pay for everything. She recalled:

And they decided and told my sisters and I that if you want to go back and get your degrees, go, we'll pay for everything. And my parents were like, go for it. Go get it. And my mom passed before I even started. So, she hasn't gotten to see me, you know. And my goal is to get my PhD while my dad still knows you know

that I've gotten my PhD and all that.

She further noted that they have helped her through the financial worry about paying for the doctoral program, “My parents are helping me and that's a huge relief. I mean, I benefit to have the financial and additional help, you know, to where I'm not freaking about rent.” Rosa discussed:

And they've been there. They'll help me financially, they've been helping me financially, which is a huge blessing and relief to not have to stress about everything and to be able to order the books I need and to not stress about ordering toner and stuff like that.

Most participants explained that they were working full time jobs and had to make lifestyle changes after enrolling in a doctoral program. Several believed that a few years of sacrifice by living at home with parents will benefit them in the future. Bianca shared that she worked full time and had to leave the position to begin a doctoral program. Due to her financial situation, she decided to move in with her family prior to beginning the program. She recounted, “I hadn't lived with my family, and I decided to start the doctoral program and I told them, I'm going to need your support.” Bianca shared an experience that her parents moved from their home in El Paso to be with her and contribute financially to help pay for living expenses. Bianca acknowledged that there were plenty of sacrifices:

My parents I feel they sacrificed. Their house being there and they owned their house. So, they didn't have to move over here. And for a while we were living in an apartment and we had to pay rent and my, my parents were both working at that time and along with me and all together we were paying you know rent and

groceries and everything, but it was a sacrifice, because they could have not been paying rent back home in El Paso.

She added that her parents had to also sacrifice their own prior living expenses, “It’s affected those around me they’ve had to kind of make sacrifices to support me through the process. My parents moved cities you know 600 miles and it’s a big thing that they’re doing for me.” She disclosed that she continues to need their support “because it is financially, a very difficult time” for her.

Luisa expressed that she was fortunate to live with her parents throughout the doctoral program. She noted, “I lived on in in and out of my parents’ home throughout my doctorate program, depending on how I was doing financially. That was a big help for me.” Luisa described her situation:

The financial piece, I had a really hard time for a while with the finances. So being able to be at home living with my parents and not paying for anything was super helpful. And that was like a strategy that I had to sacrifice my independence but I probably wouldn’t have been able to afford what financial aid didn’t cover and I wouldn’t be able to afford the out of pocket. And I was trying to do the least amount of loans as possible.

Frida detailed that she is living with her partner and has attempted to find part time work, but was not able secure good pay. She noted, “I guess a lot of the financial responsibility is placed on him. I still work. I tried to find some sites that pay me but then they’re not going to pay me well so a lot of the financial obligation is placed on him.” Imelda reported that she and her husband were able to receive military benefits and that her husband worked full-time to provide for the family. She detailed her life situation,

“I’m blessed because of the military retirement, we get compensated through the VA system and my husband works so I don’t need to work.”

Financial Aid. Financial aid was one of the subthemes analyzed from the data. According to the National Science Foundation (2009), doctoral students rely heavily on financial aid to finance their education. Participants noted that the lack of financing caused additional stress with families having less money to finance education, participants turned to student loans to be able to begin the doctoral program. Due to the additional cost of the doctoral program, most participants took out federal or private loans and are now adding to their previous debt. Participants described the doctoral program as an investment and took on additional debt with the expectation that it would pay off in the future by having an opportunity for better pay from employers. Without these loans, the participants would have not been able to begin the program. Frida wished to finance the entire doctoral program with scholarships, but rather had to take out student loans. She expressed:

I tried to apply for financial aid, I had never had to cover and pay for my education. I usually always find scholarships. So, I was trying to look for any types of scholarships, but unfortunately, I have some, but it will not cover everything. So, I'm taking a lot of loans. And kind of extending my loans, so I can have some money and still help him. Or pay my stuff because he's not paying my stuff. I don't think is fair, in a way, so it's like still have to find a way how to pay everything and still help him. And make that money last.

Bianca explained that it is financially limiting while you are a student. She recalled:

I was a little worried that I would have to take out more loans. I had this hope that

I would get a scholarship and I won't do the program if I don't get the scholarship.

At first, I wasn't going to do it and that was hard for me to turn down. I had the acceptance and I told my mom, you know, I'm, I'm just going to do it even though I knew it was going to be very expensive. I think it's going to be over \$120,000 in loans. And I was worried that's a huge commitment. I was just trying to be hopeful that maybe I would come across more scholarships, but it hasn't happened yet.

Bianca added that she is sacrificing her financial security by beginning the program and that it made her nervous to think about how she will pay it off in the future. She explained:

And hurting myself financially in that way. It's just been a little bit scary because I don't know how smart that decision is going to be, but I'm hoping that I can maybe apply for some loan forgiveness programs later on down the line and just, manage it in that way.

Sofia hoped that she would begin the program with scholarships, but all she found were student loans. She stated:

I wish they would offer more scholarships, because that would be very helpful. I think we can't deny the reality that you know school is so expensive and it's very stressful to constantly be having to ask for more loans and getting approved for more loans.

Further, Sofia mentioned that it is difficult to focus on your courses when:

You know when you have all this other stuff that you have to do and you're trying to make sure you have enough funds for the next semester. I think just more

support in general would be great. A lot of students are struggling and I think that if they could help us a little bit more in that way we, I think we could perform better and have more time to do other things that are helpful to the program. I know sometimes they'll invite us to like do certain things and extra activities, but I don't have time for that. I need to work and I need to make sure I have enough money for food.

Luisa spoke about her experience with having loans to finance her doctoral education. She felt it was a choice in her future, and “I should be doing this and I want to invest in my education. I had some financial support at the doctoral level, but not all.” She narrated, that “I'm using loans. I'm definitely going to have to pay back a lot of money involved in this process.” Additionally, Carla has financed her doctoral education with student loans. She knew that it was the best possible outcome since there was not a way that she could ask her family for any financial assistance. She also felt it was her responsibility to pay for any further education.

Multiple Commitments and Obligations

The second theme that emerged from the data was multiple commitments and obligations. Several participants described the balancing act of managing multiple commitments and obligations. Participants expressed everything they needed to accomplish on a single day and the commonality was that multiple commitments and obligations can be overwhelming. For example, before even stepping foot onto the campus to begin the doctoral program, participants were trying to figure out how their usual daily life would continue. Most realized that they had to go through many changes to be able to begin the doctoral program. Participants discussed their priorities as either

student, family, or work related. They had to prioritize and decide which one was most important at that point in their life. The ultimate goal for the participants was to earn the degree and they did not have time or money to waste, given the cost of tuition was high especially since most of it was covered by loans. Only a few participants continued to work full-time while participating in doctoral studies.

Several participants also shared the only way they were able to handle the multiple commitments and obligations was by staying organized. Being organized often saved them time and also helped alleviate some of their stress. Many participants expressed using a time management tool such as their mobile phone to help them balance their time and to keep track of their class schedule, home schedule, and other priorities. Participants also reported the juggling of roles as they transitioned into the doctoral program.

Role Conflict. Role conflict was one of the subthemes that emerged from the data. Participants described that as they are participating in the doctoral program, they are managing multiple roles. These roles have often led to time constraints and role conflict that add to the daily stress of being a doctoral student. Giancola et al. (2009) wrote that among students juggling roles beyond the student role, women with family responsibilities are mostly vulnerable when dealing with role strain, which can lead to abandoning their educational pursuits. As the participant is in conflict regarding which role should take priority, the other role is often rejected creating an internal struggle within the participant. The feeling of either winning or losing between the roles often lets the participant feel as if they are not able to fully be successful in either role. This feeling can lead to stress, exhaustion, and burnout. Schlossberg (1981) discussed role change and

stress level as part of an individual's situation during a transition. Based on the participants' experiences, the role change was not advantageous to them and because of that they experienced high levels of stress.

Participants with children reported that they often felt the stress of not being able to be in two places at the same time. Imelda shared, "At the time, you had to choose one or the other." Also, she discussed her feelings regarding her children by stating, "I love my children; it felt like my heart was at home while my brain was at the university." Sofia mentioned that she felt guilt when she would not be able to spend time with her child. She added, "I felt as if I was not a good mother when I decided to begin a doctoral program. Even though I had my child's best interests at heart, it was still difficult to participate in a doctoral program." Research on Latina women indicates that they have a difficult time focusing on their studies because of the devotion to their children, immediate family, and extended family (Espinoza, 2010). Also, because of *marianismo*, there are certain expectations for the Latina to put everything else before her own needs.

A different role that participants described was the role of being primarily a student rather than full-time employee. Several participants had to leave a full-time job behind because their program encourages that students focus primarily on studies rather than working full-time. Bianca shared that she missed her employment and also her previous co-workers. She mentioned: "Along the way, I sometimes do miss being a full-time employee and being a clinician working in the field. Even though at times it did have a lot of downsides, I still miss that role." Additionally, Rosa left a full-time position to begin a doctoral program. She took on a different role and it was difficult to adjust to now primarily attending courses full-time. She missed her work family and being able to

help the public with education and policy. She also expressed how supportive her work family has been to her in the past and misses that emotional connection.

On the other hand, Bianca has shifted from being mostly independent and living on her own to now living with her parents. She stated:

I was just used to dedicating all of my time and energy to my career prior to starting the program. So, my career was my life. And I had to let that go, obviously, because that job was very intense. I was working a lot of hours, and there was just no way that I could maintain that.

Now, her role has shifted from employee to student and she is no longer independent, but rather a dependent again. Yet, she enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with her parents because she was gone for a long time.

We had been separated for such a long time and it was kind of hard for a while to kind of adjust to that again. Being the daughter and having a different kind of relationship with my parents. That's been kind of neat, kind of cool to explore that change of role.

Similarly, Luisa described:

That was hard for me to come home and shift and be back into like feeling like a child at home in a Latin household and then having gone from being independent and on my own and paying my own bills. And that transition was a little rough financially, but it was the best option. So, that was a role.

However, Luisa mentioned that she had to fill in for her mother while she was away.

Luisa had to take on the responsibilities of the home and take care of her father. She shared that she feels some resentment towards her mother for leaving and because her

family expects her to fill in that role because she is Latina. She recounted it as, “I think a lot of that came up for me because I was juggling the role of being a housewife for most of the year and then being in a doctorate program.” She mentioned that “her father wanted her to focus on her studies, but then since her mom was gone for long periods of time that a lot of the traditional gender roles that fell on her, fell on me. So, cooking, cleaning, all that stuff.”

In contrast, Rosita mentioned that she felt that she had a difficult time balancing being a wife, daughter, employee, and a student. She struggled with the decision of making the doctoral program a priority. She wanted to be able to spend time with her husband and family and would be able to find an opportunity when she was fully caught up with assignments. She often would spend her free time visiting her parents on the weekend.

Lack of Time. Lack of time was one of the subthemes that emerged from the data. Participants frequently expressed that they did not anticipate the amount of time required for coursework. The courses also serve as an important building block for conducting research and learning the stages of dissertation writing. They also were unsure on how it would affect family and their personal lives. Participants shared that because of the many life commitments occurring each day, spending quality time with family members was a challenge. Participants explained that there were negative effects of not spending enough time with loved ones. They added that they felt as if they were leading separate lives at times especially when attending courses, staying up late to complete assignments, and focusing on the demands of a doctoral program.

Carla stated, “I think the biggest sacrifice to knowing them is limited with my son

and I have to kind of share that time with my family who also takes care of him.”

Victoria acknowledged, “I think the number one sacrifice that I have made is time and especially time with family, and time with my husband. And you know time is super, super valuable.” Later she considered that there was also no individual time for her:

And I have no capacity to do any of that and I think those are all rolled into one like me time, you know, there's not any *me* time, like the me time that I used to have to do anything I would like, the only time I have now is for school work.

Bianca shared that she had limited time and was unable to spend time with her extended family. She acknowledged:

Not able to visit my family. And yeah, being away from family. I mean, I did want to move back to El Paso, but I had to put that on hold. So, you know, extended family. I have a lot of family in El Paso, but it's been such a long time that I haven't been over there and we don't get a chance to hang out so much anymore.

Frida mentioned that she often was unable to spend time with her family due to the commitments of being in a doctoral program. She was also unsure how other female doctoral students were able to balance the program with being a mother. She recalled, “You're always on the go and there's no time for anything much less a family. If I had a kid, most likely it will come out all stressed out.” Also, she would spend most of the weekend working on assignments.

Imelda described how limited time with her husband was impacting him to feel as if he was not seen as a priority. She added that there were some disagreements due to the time commitment of being enrolled in doctoral studies. She explained:

My husband knows that there are things that I have to do. Well, it was a little bit of, we have had conversations about it and there were some friction points sometimes. Sometimes, there was a time when he would feel that my time for the doctoral program was more important than him.

Luisa felt overwhelmed due to lack of time and shared that, “I think as students we’re pulled in a lot of different directions.” She also said that she was not involved in a romantic relationship and was not participating in dating and realized that she may have to be single for the duration of the doctoral program. Nieman et al. (2000) found that Mexican-American women who were pursuing academic degrees often reported having more difficulty with finding a romantic partner or having personal relationships. Luisa stated:

The idea of dating was not an option in a doctorate program. I didn't have the time, even if I had wanted to, it wasn't until this last year that that even happened. And that was a big shift to think this idea of you're kind of going to be single for a while. Some are either already married when they started or you're single through it, because you don't have time for relationships outside of the program.

Rosita is married and mentioned that she is often working on her class assignments and enjoys being in the program. She works hard to stay ahead of the expectation since she works full time. She shared that she and her husband would like to be able to spend more time together. She added that now that they have a dog, they probably have limited time alone. She noted, “Well, I'm sure you know, myself and probably my husband would say we sacrifice time, time together. I mean obviously I'm still home because of COVID. And it might be different if we hadn't decided to also like

have a dog.” Also, Rosita acknowledged that her dog requires a large amount of time and attention. Rosita tries to set a schedule and work on her tasks everyday to not be overwhelmed. Then, her husband would think that she is done with that assignment and can relax the next day, but that is further from the truth since, as she has attempted to explain, her work will never be done completely until she has completed the doctorate.

Rosa explained that the time requirements of a doctoral program are not regular hours. Also, expectation is that you stay up late until you complete as much as possible. She added, “It's a different speed of life. And one thing I've realized that when you're a full time PhD student, it's not a nine to five job. And usually, you're working later into the night.” She sometimes gets to the brink of exhaustion and then allows herself to stop and rest. She knows that there are limits to her learning and she described:

And then sometimes you just hit a point, I can't comprehend anymore. I have to stop. And you know, when you read the title of the article, and you can't even tell what the article is about, you tell yourself it's time to stop.

Victoria considered that the most important thing for her to focus on is the time needed for her to complete assignments for the program. She also learned about her productivity after a long day of work and realized that she produces better thinking on the weekends and has decided to spend her free time on the weekends working on doctoral assignments and readings.

Latina Family Values

Latina family values was another theme that emerged from the data. Participants described that there was a lack of understanding by faculty and other peers about the importance of family in the Latina culture and how their roles are different than others in

the family. Latinas are expected to be caretakers of all family members and not only a spouse or children. Often, it includes the extended family such as a parent, grandparent, uncles, aunts, and siblings. Sofia explained, “As a Latina, your family comes first and it is form of obligation to help those around you especially since they have done so much for you, I am not able to tell them that I have to attend classes or complete a paper or assignment, family is at the forefront of my existence and identity.”

Latina Sacrifice. Latina sacrifice was a subtheme of Latina family values. Family is a core value for the participants and often they put their own needs and desires after those of the family unit. Based on the participants ties to their families, they often reported beliefs and behaviors associated with selflessness and sacrifice. Participants described sacrifice as a Latina family value. Victoria explained that everything is all about sacrifice. For example, “It's like small sacrifices and big sacrifices, right, like, financial sacrifices, like, sacrifices with time with family, sacrifices for time for yourself, like those all add up.” She added:

I can't go anywhere, I can't run around. So yeah, I feel like the number one thing like that I have sacrificed just like time and especially like time with family, like in time with time with family and time with my husband, I think.

Bianca noted that not only is she sacrificing, but her parents are as well and she believes that it puts some burden on her to make sure she does a good job because they are counting on her to be successful. Luisa felt that she had to sacrifice for the sake of the family. While her mother was away, she had the responsibilities of the home and caring for the family. Sacrificing for the family is a common trait for Latina families. Imelda illustrated her experience on sacrificing. She shared:

I don't think there's ever a good time to begin a doctoral program because there's a lot of sacrifices. I mean, I just think there's so many sacrifices, you really have to be in it to win it. You really have to like all that they put you through, you have to do it, and you have to give so much especially time with your family.

Participants discussed how their Latina family values influence their understanding of their role in the family and the influence of their choices in the transition through their doctoral studies. The interviewees acknowledged that they had to still fulfill family obligations such as caring for the needs of parents and extended family members. In addition, the closeness of family relationships including the mother-daughter relationship requires the daughter to fulfill cultural roles in the home.

Luisa described a pull towards her family values since she began the program. She would also feel the need to spend more time with her family even though she couldn't find the time. Frida reported that her partner has felt a burden on the relationship. Her partner felt as if she was constantly doing homework or dedicating time to school. Daily, she would inform him of her schedule and yet he was never fully satisfied. She has had to miss several birthday celebrations and time with the family. Frida expressed a situation when she feels as if she is constantly needing to do things around the house especially since she is not contributing financially.

I was getting to a point that I was not functioning well and I started going down. And I noticed that I need to do something about it. I have never been like this. I do everything. It's insane and it drives me nuts because I guess this is the Latina culture. So, when am I going to rest? When am I going to get to do the stuff that I like? I have to put everything on the side and there's no balance.

Family Responsibility. A subtheme of Latina family values is family responsibility. There are different types of family responsibilities among the participants and how these responsibilities affected their doctoral experiences. Such responsibilities included spending time with the family, taking care of children, cooking, cleaning, and helping maintain the home. There are multiple conflictual obligations in which the participant had to balance family responsibilities with duties of a doctoral program. Frida highlighted:

I'm averaging anywhere from like five to six days a week. And there could be some extra time dedicated to school. It depends on my discussions and when my assignments are due. I also work and after work, I go home and make supper. If I have a major paper or something, then I will have to spend more time on it and it may fall on Saturday and Sunday, usually both days. It doesn't leave much time for anything else.

Sofia recounted her experience and disclosed that "There's always something to do and I sometimes feel guilty about that, but I want to get caught up and focus just on my research and just on like reading another article or you know, things like that." She added that the time spent on assignments and research consumes most of her evenings and weekends. She is not able to spend time with her family and is unable to have quality time for herself.

Victoria knew that there was no time to fulfill any responsibilities in the home and she believed that she couldn't stop her progress to clean up her home. She stated, "Our house doesn't usually get super messy because there's only two of us, but yet I still don't have time to be mopping and cleaning. I don't have time to do all that."

Most participants explained that there is a general expectation to be loyal to family members and it is typically expected more for Latina women. Participants described being close to their families and that their family influences decisions and actions. The concept of loyalty was introduced to them at a young age and they have to commit to putting the interests of the family above their own. This loyalty serves as a safety net for help and protection and participants acknowledge that there is a family responsibility to stay close to the family. They chose a doctoral program based on a location that allowed them to remain close in proximity to family members. They wanted to be able to be close to home to offer or receive family support. Participants noted that they wanted to stay close to home and be able to spend time with their family members when possible.

Several participants chose to live with parents, partners, or family members who would be able to help them financially and pay for all or most living expenses. They chose a program that was close to their family member and knew that they could live with them during the doctoral program. Others chose a program and the family member decided to move with them to stay close and to assist with the cost of living expenses and tuition. Imelda chose a program that allowed her to stay close to her family. Even though she didn't have much of an opportunity to spend time with them, she knew that they were close enough to visit. Victoria wanted to be closer to family and chose to stay near her mom and other family members in the vicinity. She reported:

I'm just not interested in that right now in hopping around and moving around. I moved to San Antonio because my family is here. My mom is 76 and I'm going to be here for her. As long as she's here, I'm going to be here.

Similarly, Carla chose a program that would allow her to remain close to her family especially since she has a young son and family members that require her assistance due to medical reasons. She added that she does not regret her decision to stay close to the family. She understood that was her responsibility and she needed to stay close to her parents.

Consistent with the framework of community cultural wealth, study participants displayed navigational and familial capital in describing how they transitioned through their doctoral program. Navigation and familial capital were displayed when some participants had to leave full-time employment and chose to live with their parents or other family members to assist with costs of being a doctoral student. Another example of navigational capital was searching for scholarships and grants to fund the program. After all their options for free funding were exhausted, most participants relied primarily on student loans.

At the same time, there were tensions associated with *familismo* when the obligation of taking care of family members conflicted with duties of the doctoral program. Participants also faced gendered and cultural expectations regarding household tasks like cooking and cleaning while engaging in the doctoral program. Bianca shared, “Managing everything during that first year was challenging for my family, especially when I was coming and going everywhere. And, getting home really late and tired and struggling to keep up with everything.” Luisa mentioned, “At first, my father wanted me to focus on my university, but after my mom was gone for so long, a lot of the traditional gender roles that fall on her, fell on me. So, cooking, cleaning all of that stuff.” Sofia shared that most times her mother cared for her son, but there were times she was unable.

She added, “I struggled when I didn’t have anyone to watch my son; it was difficult to go to work and to attend classes. It was tough to keep the momentum up and staying motivated in classes.” Participants navigated the best way they knew to be able to satisfy the requirements of taking care of the home and raising children while also striving to meet doctoral program requirements.

The intent of research question two was to learn how participants described themselves and their life situations as they have engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies. Research question two was clustered into three themes and included: financial decisions, multiple commitments and obligations, and Latina family values. Many participants were impacted by financial decisions to enroll in doctoral studies. Therefore, they had to stop working full-time and were no longer able to contribute to the household. Several participants were financially supported by family members. Next, participants relied heavily on financial aid to finance their doctoral education. Many, explained that financial aid in the form of scholarships was limited and chose to take out more student loans with the possibility of having more income and opportunities in the future. Participants faced multiple commitments and obligations and had difficulty maintaining balance in their lives. Many participants described the role conflict that added to the daily stress of being a doctoral student. In addition, participants shared that there was never enough time in the day to accomplish coursework, time with family, and demands of life commitments. Finally, Latina sacrifice was often discussed as participants often put their own needs and desires after those of the family unit.

Research Question Three

The focus of the third research question was on learning how life events impacted participants' progression either positively or negatively. The participants' descriptions of these life events were clustered into five themes. Table 9 briefly describes the themes and indicates the frequency or number of times each theme was identified in the data. Also, the table includes a description of the theme.

Table 9

Research Question Three

Theme	Frequency	Theme Description
Medical Events	10	Medical events or reasons that affected their ability to perform in the doctoral program
Stressful Events	33	Stressful events that occurred while enrolled in the doctoral program
Motherhood	15	Challenges of raising children while enrolled in a doctoral program
Relationship Strain	11	Ways in which the doctoral program impacted their relationships
COVID-19	17	The impact of COVID-19

Medical Events

The first theme identified from the data was medical events. Some participants described personal and family medical events or reasons that affected their ability to perform in the doctoral program. The theme substantiated previous research findings by Sosoo and Wise (2021) who found that medical events have an impact on the doctoral student experience and the ability to function in academics and research. While personal

health and medical information should be a private matter, participants often shared personal information on what was occurring with a faculty member or administrator. They sought advice on how best to manage the doctoral program while dealing with a medical condition of a loved one or dealing with a medical condition themselves. Participants usually requested a medical withdrawal when a serious medical condition prevented them from continuing their classes in the doctoral program. On the other hand, some participants reported either taking some time off or making a change to their schedule.

For example, Imelda shared that her husband had a medical condition that prohibited her from being able to attend courses for a period of time. At first his symptoms were minor and then she said, “they spiraled out of control and left me experiencing enough discomfort that I had to request time off from the program.” She knew that she should be thinking more about him and his needs and finally decided that her husband and family were priority. She met with the program lead to discuss alternatives to her schedule. They were able to accommodate her request and allowed her to withdraw while also coming up with an alternative advising plan. Imelda was grateful to the program for allowing her to take the time she needed to be with her husband and family.

As discussed above, Imelda experienced unanticipated life events during her doctoral program which involved the death of a family member and the grief that her husband experienced. These life events led to a transition for her, which led her to reduce her course load because it was affecting her family, support system, and her husband’s well-being. The findings support Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory indicating that

transitions can result in changes in relationships, roles, and daily life. Imelda identified her current situation and the trigger for change being that her husband and family needed her attention during this difficult transition. Regardless of her internal motivation to put her doctoral study first, she learned that because of these traumatic life events she should focus primarily on her husband and family. Imelda found a way to cope, realizing she did the right thing by taking some time off and requesting a change in her degree plan.

Similarly, Sofia experienced a medical concern that affected her young son. She experienced a life event which had a negative effect on her doctoral studies and her employment. The life event was her son's medical diagnosis and how she felt overwhelmed and experienced high levels of guilt. She struggled with several emotions once she received the diagnosis and tried to make sense of it and even felt regret about not pursuing the diagnosis sooner. She stated, "I am worried about the life of my son and what I need to do in order to make the best life for him." Sofia realized that her son presented unique challenges and had to take him to several specialists to assist him. She spent all her time meeting the needs of her child that she didn't allow herself time to relax. "I felt that if I had the time to relax and think about what was happening, that I would break down." Also, "I was so exhausted and stressed out that I could barely consider my own needs and I thought that the best thing would be to take some time off." Finally, she cried and had a release of emotion and asked herself if she could be able to complete the doctoral program when her child needed her to be the main focus in her life. She approached a faculty member who listened and offered support. Even though she managed to stay enrolled in courses, she felt as if her focus struggled. She managed to take some time off work to help with the medical appointments and the demand of her

courses.

On the other hand, Carla stated that she herself had a medical condition. Eventually after many doctor's visits, she was notified that she would need to have surgery right away. She thought of the doctoral program and how she would be able to fit in the surgery without withdrawing from any courses. She knew that her program had limited time to complete courses. She was able to meet with instructors and her advisor and requested time off for the surgery and recuperation. She was granted some time off and as soon as she was able to recover, she quickly resumed attending courses. Hultsch and Plemons (1979) describe that individuals faced with stressful life events end up coping with the life stress in alternative ways to restore balance in their lives. After being diagnosed, Carla mentioned, "I was fearful of falling behind, but there was no other alternative." She had to prioritize her own needs and schedule surgery immediately in order to have a chance for survival. After surgery, she took time to recover, but quickly wanted to return to her life and expectations of a doctoral student. She struggled with completing assignments and had to allow herself to heal. She reached out to peers, friends, and faculty members to assist with her return to courses. This life event solidified how important it was for her to complete the doctorate. She knew that she wanted to leave a legacy for her son and for him to be inspired by her hard work and achievement.

Stressful Events

The second theme that emerged from the data was that of experiences with stressful events. Most participants reported the stress that comes with being in a doctoral program. While the doctoral program is challenging, the participants recalled other obligations such as full-time or part-time employment or even raising a family that

contributed to stress. Home (1998) found that women experience high levels of stress when dealing with several urgent and incompatible demands. Next, several participants have taken a financial risk and are receiving a substantial amount in student loans. The extra pressure of the student loan repayment adds to the anxiety of paying off the loans in the future regardless if you complete the doctorate or not. The data supports Goodman et al. (2006) who highlighted that stress is intensified by the additional responsibilities that affect both personal and professional disciplines. Stress affected the daily lives of participants which resulted in lack of sleep, weight gain, trouble focusing, and losing interest in things they had previously enjoyed. Some participants shared that they had a pre-existing mental health condition that may have contributed to them being more vulnerable to stress.

Luisa expressed how the doctoral program impacted her mental health. Goodman et al. (2006) discuss how transitions and stressful life events can in turn cause other events or stressors. The concurrent stress that Luisa experienced with the increased demands of time and responsibility was a decline in her mental health. She detailed the stress that she faced and learned that mostly all other students in doctoral programs experience something similar at some point in the doctoral program. Luisa mentioned, “I wish that doctoral students should openly discuss their high levels of stress and for it not to be perceived as a sign of weakness.” She added that if everyone is feeling stressed at some time or another, then why wouldn’t the university try to proactively help. She encourages dialogue with university officials regarding the common issues and challenges faced by doctoral students which may be a different stress element than those of an undergraduate student. This theme was consistent with previous research by Ramos

and Torres-Fernandez (2020) who found that the mental health and emotional needs of Latinx doctoral students were critical for their success.

Additionally, Sofia mentioned that she was juggling many responsibilities in her life and would have frequent panic attacks. “When I was at the university, I would often wonder of the many items that I still needed to complete when I got home. On the other hand, when I was home, I was often thinking of all the assignments and readings.”

Further, “It happens at a subconscious level. You can be sitting in a room maybe grabbing a bite to eat and then suddenly you think about all the things you need to do and then your heart will start pounding and you’re having difficulty breathing.” This theme is consistent with the Home’s (1998) explanation of role contagion and Goode’s (1960) work introducing the concept of role obligations in which a person navigates multiple role and experiences feelings of not doing either role well.

Further, Carla discussed how stress interfered with her ability to sleep. She would try to go to bed and couldn’t stop thinking about her responsibilities. “I stayed up late just worrying about everything that I had to do. It was really frustrating because I knew that sleeping would help me, but I just couldn’t find a way to just shut off my brain at least for the evening.”

On the other hand, Frida noted that the stress was often coming from herself. She reported how she would constantly tell herself that things needed to be perfect and that “I had to be working harder than everyone else around me. Then, I started to doubt myself and begin asking if whether this was the right choice for me or if I am smart enough to do this.” Additionally, Rosa shared that she feels the pressure to perform well at home and in the doctoral program. It’s an honor to be the one from my family who has made it this far

to try to complete a doctoral degree. But, there is stress attached to wanting to make my family proud. Furthermore, Bianca explained “Being a doctoral student is overwhelming. So many of my family members have sacrificed for me to be here and it puts a lot of pressure on me.”

Participants voiced being overextended and unable to maintain a work-life balance. Several participants reported having to support and care for the family. Carla expressed how she would often take her son to her parents or ask her husband to watch their son so they would be able to care for him while she either attended classes or completed assignments. “It’s hard on me because I have to figure out where my son will stay or who will care for him all while I am trying to just get through another day as a doctoral student.”

Motherhood

Motherhood was the third theme that emerged from the data. Most participants described motherhood as filled with joy and new experiences. Yet, being a mother working towards a doctoral degree can introduce a whole new set of challenges and obstacles while still having the benefits of being a mother and raising children. In another study, Lynch (2008) found that the roles of doctoral student and mother are most often in conflict. Participants who are mothers had to prioritize the needs and demands of children over the requirements of the program and academic life which created an internal tension.

Participants who did not have children reported wanting a family in the future. They knew that they might find it difficult to achieve balance in their academic, work, and family lives. Only one participant, Imelda, had a child while she was in the program. She took some time off after having the baby and was able to return to the program.

Nearly all participants described how women pursuing a doctorate are typically discouraged from having children. The participants that were mothers acknowledged that they had to work twice as hard as anyone else around them to show that having kids has not prevented them from having a strong work ethic and in being a doctoral student.

Carla is a full-time mom and she discussed how she balances the responsibilities of motherhood with doctoral coursework. She said, “what was most difficult is that other doctoral students could not relate to being a parent or mother.” She felt isolated and alone, but still remained committed to the program. She also worked full-time and used any free time to work on her coursework. She admitted that her path to the doctorate is not easy, but she knew she wanted to do this and that helped her stay inspired and motivated.

Sofia also explained that she had a difficult time balancing being a mother with the doctoral program. “When I was having a hard time, I wondered if it would be easier to stop or just leave the program.” She knew she couldn’t give up on being a parent or working full-time. The only thing left for her to give up was the pursuit of the doctorate. She knew deep down that this is what she wanted to do and where she wanted to be, and she couldn’t allow herself to quit. Undoubtedly, she often reminded herself the reason she was working hard in the first place was to make a better life for her and her son. On the other hand, Rosa was not a full-time mother; her daughter is grown and is now expecting a child of her own. Yet, she explained that even though a child is older, that doesn’t mean you stop being their mother. “I am there for her for whatever she needs. If she needs me, I will find a way to make it happen. I have often had to put my own work on the backburner if she calls me and asks for help.”

There was guilt that the participants experienced from being enrolled in a doctoral program. Besides, feeling the fear that they would not be able to handle it academically, they also feared that they would feel alone as mothers in the doctoral program. Rosa added, “It didn’t help, that other peers in the program were not mothers.” Likewise, Sofia struggled with the stress that “I was being selfish and that I prioritized my career over my son.” Lastly, Imelda, considered whether she was making the right choice for her family and if “I am missing out on opportunities of them being little and spending enough time with them.” This theme reinforces Elvin-Nowak’s (1999) finding that mothers felt guilt that is related to a sense of failure of responsibility to caring for one’s children.

Other participants reported sacrificing or delaying being a mother since the priority at the time was doctoral studies. Carter et al. (2013) noted that the doctorate “may thwart their fulfilment of motherhood, a goal that is enshrined and endorsed culturally” (p. 346). Frida mentioned, “I am sacrificing being able to have children since I know that I would not be able to concentrate on any doctoral program if I have children.” She also added that if she were to be pregnant, her child may feel the stress of the program in vitro while she was in the program and felt that it would be best to wait. Next, Luisa mentioned that she sacrificed the opportunity of being a mother because she understood that when it is time to have a family her career and education would no longer be a priority and child raising would be at the forefront. As discussed, the data supports Goodman et al. (2006) and the notion of a non-event which are transitions that were expected, but have not occurred. Most participants shared that they knew they were taking a big risk in waiting to have children and that they hope that it will still be an option when they complete the program. They knew the timing was not right for them to

begin having children.

Relationship Strain

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was relationship strain. Participants expressed how the doctoral program impacted their relationships. Family, friends, and partners were not aware of the process of being in a doctoral program which often led to frustration or hurt feelings. Most participants recounted how others were often confused about the doctoral process, especially the requirement of being unavailable for hours or days at a time. Participants also reported that even though they were at home, they were working late into the night, possibly writing a paper, researching, or reading an assignment. Most of the time, the participants disclosed being emotionally unavailable to others because the doctoral program took priority at times.

Imelda shared that her husband did not understand the reason she needed to read for several hours. “He did not understand that I needed to mentally prepare myself for the material, I couldn’t just skim it and expect to be ready to have a conversation about it with my professors.” It was difficult for Imelda to share her frustrations because her husband would not be able to fully understand. Additionally, Imelda shared that there was some conflict and resentment about her pursuing the doctorate while he had to be a full-time father. Carter et al. (2013) describe a common tension that doctoral level women feel when they extend their academic goals beyond their husband or partner which ultimately questions their relationship contribution.

Victoria mentioned that she hardly saw her husband on the weekends because that is the scheduled time she works on her assignments for the doctoral program. She finds that Saturday and Sunday are the best days for her to work even though it may interfere

with time with her husband and family. She added that because of her employment, she is not able to devote as much time to her studies during the week. She shared that she attends courses during the week, but does not consider it straining.

Frida lives with her committed partner and is financially supported by him. Lynch (2008) suggested that this is the more traditional role of responsibility for women who forgo a career for a period of time while completing a doctoral program. Frida noted that her partner did not like that she was really busy. “He didn’t like that he was always waiting for me to finish so we can do something together. He didn’t like doing things alone.” Frida found herself often pressured to quickly finish things or leave things even incomplete in order to appease her partner. Likewise, Carter et al. (2013) described this situation, as the male doctoral partner may feel aggrieved when the doctoral student is not available to him especially since he is financially responsible for her.

As discussed above, the findings supported previous research from Goodman et al. (2006) and how several participants were experiencing relationship transitions. The partners of the participants were having a difficult time dealing with the demands of the doctoral program. While they remain committed, at times there was significant tension that threatened their relationship. The participants experienced fear and insecurity when they were not able to fulfill their relationship needs. They also had to find a way to handle the challenges of the household and care for their children when their partners were not available. The partners had to learn to value their time together and accept that the current situation is temporary.

On the other hand, there were some participants who were unable to have a committed relationship because they were unable to spend the time to find the right

person that would be accepting of their demanding responsibilities. While the relationship would be seen as a source of support, it can also be complex and challenging because it will require attention and time. Bianca illustrated:

That's something I struggle with, because I would like to have time to date and to get to meet new people, unfortunately I don't have much time, and especially now with a pandemic. I mean not going out anywhere. So that's taken a hold on me.

And that is something that I think I knew that was likely to happen and I was okay with that.

Next, participants reported that they were not able to spend as much time with friends since they had multiple commitments and obligations. Sofia mentioned that she has not been able to spend time socializing with her friends because she feels as if she does not belong. Also, her mind is always drifting towards the doctoral program and how she should be spending more time doing something else rather than socializing. Carla added that she no longer feels as if she connects with her friends because they may have different goals and they no longer have many things in common. She noted: "Sometimes I feel like an outsider just trying to make conversation, but all I can think about is when I am able to leave and finally go home."

COVID-19

COVID-19 was the fifth theme identified from the data related to the third research question. Participants described their experiences from before COVID-19 and currently with COVID-19 active in our community. The transition to online instruction occurred for all participants beginning March 2020. While COVID-19 caused campus closures and remote learning, it brought challenges along with some unanticipated

benefits of remote learning, social distancing, and stay at home orders. It interrupted the daily lives of the participants in their semester coursework which led to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Afterwards, there was a shift in perspective when it became an opportunity to spend more time at home with their family.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a time of uncertainty and the participants depicted their experiences throughout the interview. No one knew when they could resume their normal life. The participants had to compromise their studies and adapt to learning in an online setting. COVID-19 also represented a time of loss of the doctoral experience. Participants talked about the loss of their daily lives and the structure of being in a doctoral program. The greatest loss was not participating in face-to-face classes and seeing or connecting with peers, faculty, and friends. Participants reported how they missed the informal interactions that occurred before and after class and the university buildings such as the cafeteria or elevator. It impacted them and affected how they would build relationships with their classmates and other faculty members. It also impacted how they would collaborate with classmates on assignments or on completing group projects via videoconferencing which became the only option for participants to engage in classrooms and campus events.

Participants described loss and the grief that surrounded them. They felt the grief detailed to them in television programs and social media caused them to have more fear for loved one's health and well-being. Further, many participants were unable to visit with family members and friends who were a significant source of support. These experiences reflected Hultsch and Plemons (1979) perspective of life events especially as it relates to unanticipated events. COVID-19 has changed the sequence of events

throughout the life course of the participants, similar to how other historical events have impacted the lives of a given cohort. Participants have had to adapt to their new reality of COVID-19 being a part of their lives. Needs and demands may have changed because of the result of their environment. Alternatively, there was a silver lining through all of this in which technology was a benefit for staying connected and sometimes seeing them using Facetime or Zoom. COVID-19 affected students physically, socially, and emotionally. Participants did not leave their homes and did not participate in exercise options or keep up with physical activity. Socially, the participants voiced being isolated and experiencing lack of connection to their peers and support network. Participants recounted missing family events, holidays, and spiritual and religious services. Imelda mentioned that she missed spending time with other classmates discussing the lecture or upcoming assignments.

In their reality, there was general fear about the pandemic which participants described in terms of the future being unknown, and the world now looking differently. *Familismo* played an important role during COVID-19. Based on Espinoza (2010), *familismo* was demonstrated when participants prioritized the family needs over their own. Many of the participants took care of their family members during the pandemic. Since the closure of daycare and schools to keep children safe, some participants had to care for their children at home while balancing the duties of the doctoral program. Participants were responsible for providing support with teaching and virtual learning while trying to keep their children motivated about completing required tasks or assignments. The participants played a central role in the home responsibilities and taking care of family members which made it difficult to focus on schoolwork. Participants were

able to see their family as both a source of stress and strength at the same time.

Some participants also expressed a challenge with finding a quiet space in the home to do work, especially when other family members were trying to do the same. Another technical challenge was having suitable internet access and having a strong Wi-Fi signal to view coursework, login to participate in synchronous virtual learning, and complete assignments online. Participants also felt anxious about their own health, safety, and well-being. Fear of contracting COVID-19 was widespread especially since the varying statistics were broadcast on major networks, social media, and word of mouth.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated great resilience and found ways to cope during the pandemic. Participants expressed that they were forced to re-evaluate their priorities and learned how to manage their time to be able to survive the crisis. Participants also shared that they were able to practice gratitude even during uncertain times. They looked around them and were able to find ways to move forward even though they could not control what was going on around them.

Victoria voiced that pandemic has been a significant experience. She noted:

I honestly think like the most memorable experience that has occurred is the pandemic. No one has gone through a pandemic since 1918. When I think about going through this, it's altered my experience in the program pretty dramatically. And I think about how it impacts many aspects of the doctoral program, but also added many of the greatest benefits.

Since the participants reported previously being away from home at all hours working on courses, assignments, or even working, they experienced some positive outcomes of remote learning. The positive outcomes included spending increased time

with family, reduced commute time, improved time management, and time for self-care. Participants reported that with the extra time they could focus on their physical and mental health. Participants enjoyed spending more time at home, but missed their interactions with faculty and other peers in the program. But the fact that they were able to spend more time with the family made up for it. Luisa recounted:

Just being able to be with family, despite like COVID and being able to be with family has been really helpful. So, like being able to get together with our extended family. In a way that feels like safe and social distance that's been so helpful.

In addition, Rosita was able to save several hours in her day. She mentioned:

Since COVID, I don't have to get up at 5:40 a.m. I don't have an hour commute both ways. So, you know, that's 10 hours a week that I'm not spending in my car. And I feel like as a result, I'm spending a majority of that time getting rest. Like in the mornings or devoting it to maybe a little bit more to school. And definitely being more present at home.

Subsequently, Rosa expressed that she saves time usually used for going to campus, and appreciates just logging in at home. She also is able to spend more time with her father who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. She added, "So that will be a challenge in the years to come as it is now. And we're relatively close. I think we've actually gotten closer during the pandemic."

Additionally, Bianca shared that she is "loving this online learning because it gives much more time for self-care." She added that she can "have a nice meal, eat together with her family, and maybe do something fun on the weekend." She expressed

that her first year was much more difficult than the second year in which the pandemic occurred. She added:

Or just have a better handle and just time management in general. And I do have less things now on my plate than I did back then, but just getting through that really busy, really hectic time. I think that was a challenge for sure.

Rosita recalled that she preferred the additional time offered to her by the pandemic. She stated, “And then being in a pandemic has been to some degree, it has kind of been beneficial because working from home allows me more time to be at home, which therefore allows me more time to do everything.”

Participants also described that they felt less guilt when they chose to isolate themselves from extended family and friends due to COVID. They now had a substantial reason to keep their distance and it was now expected to stay at home. Victoria voiced: “Okay, well, even more of a reason for me to be able to do the things that I need to do. I can't go anywhere, I can't run around.” While many participants describe keeping their distance to stay safe, there was still some uncertainty on how long COVID-19 would still remain.

The intent of research question three was to learn how life events impacted participants' progression either positively or negatively. Research question three was clustered into five themes and included: medical events, stressful events, motherhood, relationship strain, and COVID-19. There were several life events throughout the transition into the doctoral program. Each person varied in how they were impacted and how various life events shaped the course of one's life. Carla and Sofia described medical events such as surgery and a medical diagnosis for a child. Imelda shared a traumatic life

event which caused her to immediately focus on her husband's needs. Most participants described stress, relationship strain, and roles of motherhood as linked to life events which they felt impacted their progression. The findings support Schlossberg et al. (1995) on the idea of ratio of assets to liabilities in which individuals react differently at different times. If students viewed the life event as a positive experience, they saw it as an asset. If they thought the life event was negative, it was a liability. While participants discussed the life event, initially the life event was challenging as they struggled both academically and personally. Eventually, participants viewed the transition in a positive light because of the way they were able to cope and continue to remain committed to the doctoral program. They also benefited from social distancing due to COVID-19 and were able to spend time at home with their immediate family members.

Research Question Four

The focus of the fourth research question was to learn about the strategies that participants used and the supports they report needing as they encounter impactful life events during their doctoral studies. The participants' descriptions of supports and strategies that they reported needing as they encountered impactful life events during their doctoral studies were clustered into four themes. Table 10 briefly describes the themes and indicates the frequency or number of times each theme was identified in the data. Also, the table includes a description of the theme.

Table 10*Research Question Four*

Theme	Frequency	Theme Description
Grit	23	Strong passion to achieve their long-term goal
Resilience	38	The ability to bounce back from difficult life events
Self-care	37	Process of taking care of oneself in the best way to promote physical, mental, and emotional health
Social Support Network	73	Social support needed as they encountered impactful life events during their transition into doctoral studies

Grit

Grit was the first theme that emerged from the data and was used as a strategy to manage the transition into the doctoral program. Nearly all participants discussed a strong passion to achieve their long-term goal of completing a doctoral program. Duckworth (2016) defined grit as a combination of passion and perseverance towards an important goal which can lead to achievement and success. The participants noted that they are intelligent and talented, but that alone is not enough to sustain them in this journey. Participants detailed that they have to keep their focus and attention on trying to achieve the doctorate even when it has proven to be difficult. Participants needed to believe that there will be a positive end result and all their hard work will be worth the struggle. Problems and setbacks will occur in the life of the Latina doctoral student, but they have to remember the reward at the end. Additionally, participants also possessed the ability to stick with their goal regardless of any setbacks or challenges.

Listening to the experiences of the participants, I heard stories of desire and

courage, in which they were willing to do whatever it takes to take a step towards their dream. Participants described their daily lives and how they continued with their work, day in and day out for years. Being in a doctoral program has been a great amount of work and the participants had to commit, sacrifice, and stay disciplined to achieve their goals. The data also supported Yosso's (2005) model of cultural capital and highlighted how participants utilized navigational, aspirational, and resistant capital by having sustained and continuous effort while pushing forward through challenging times. They knew that the road to the doctorate was not easy and yet, they still accepted the challenge. Next, Bianca suggested that her identity motivates her and "drives me to not give up and to just be patient. And be hopeful."

Rosa disclosed:

I want the degree so I can fight and to advocate for things and get into places that I can't right now. Whatever I have to put up with whatever I have to deal with, I'll deal with it because that's where I want to go.

Additionally, Carla revealed that she is not willing to quit because of her own self-determination and drive. She also realizes that her program has time constraints and does not have it in her mindset to take any breaks from the program.

If you take a break and come back, you're starting over. And, you know, you have to have that drive and determination to say that I'm going to finish this. And I'm going to get through it. And I have seen people who have left the program and I think, you've put so much work into it and then you just, you're done. I'm not willing to go there.

Moreover, Carla wanted to prove people wrong, especially those who didn't believe in

her abilities.

I guess, growing up the one thing that I heard the most in school from my counselors was you should probably be a secretary or you're not going to make it in college, and it was because I really didn't have that drive in school to apply myself the way that I needed to growing up.

Carla also wanted to honor the memory of her daughter and to be a role model to her son by showing him that actions speak louder than words. She stated:

I have the drive that I didn't get until later on in life. Pushing myself and again, I think the biggest thing. I did lose my daughter at a young age, she passed away at a young age, and just having that promise to her that I was not going to stop and I was going to keep going.

Additionally, Rosita discussed:

I want to be that exception. I want to be the one that continues to propel other women, other minorities to achieve a doctoral degree. I want to be a mentor that that younger people can have something to aspire to.

Schlossberg's (1989) transition theory suggests participants responded to the transition by utilizing their personal coping strategies to navigate through the transition. Schlossberg's theory provides the four S model in which *self* can assist the participant towards perseverance to achieve their goal. The participants were taking stock which refers to identifying and developing coping strategies. Grit relies on the coping process of self and these coping strategies are based on their beliefs in their abilities and competencies towards completion of the doctoral degree. Rosita shared further that she would be the first in her family to complete the doctorate in her family and "There's the

need to succeed. And defining success isn't just about completing this goal, but completing it at my very best." Frida illustrated that she is determined to do her best and usually takes longer on her assignments because she has to translate it back and forth. She also has to double check to make sure she is doing it correctly. "It takes me more time to do a lot more stuff than others," Frida also asks 1-2 peers to review the assignment prior to submission. She stated, "I will not turn in an assignment without having it checked by another person." Victoria mentioned:

I focus a lot on my end goal. I think setting small goals or taking small steps is a strategy that gets me closer to the goal. It helps me navigate where I am towards accomplishing the goal and actually it works really well for me.

Additionally, Frida would motivate herself by using positive self-talk. For example, she would tell herself, "Tu puedes. Esto solo son unos años. No, pienses que es tanto," which translates to "You can do it. This will only be for a few years and it's really not that much longer." She also looks for a token on her desk that reads, "Be brave, work hard."

Resilience

Resilience was the second theme and another strategy that emerged from the data. Resilience can be described as the ability to bounce back from difficult life events. It can also be the ability to bend without reaching a breaking point. The participants have all faced challenges and obstacles along the way that have brought a flood of emotions including uncertainty. Other life events have made them question whether or not to continue to the program. Yet, the participants have adapted to the life-changing situations because of their resiliency. Because of being an adult learner, the participants have made difficult or painful choices to determine how they will be able to complete the doctorate.

Most participants have experienced a personal crisis such as illness, job loss, and financial instability. Participants who displayed resilience utilized their resources, strengths, and skills to be able to work through the setbacks. The participants were able to adapt with change and it became a significant coping method to maintain a healthy balance of life. They learned adaptation from the repeated challenging experiences in their lives and this adaption resulted in resilience.

Yosso (2005) describes aspirational capital as the hopes and dreams students have for their lives. Participants embodied resilience when they were able to still maintain their ambitions for the future despite potential challenges. For example, Luisa demonstrated resilience by bouncing back from her personal crisis of dealing with the stress and emotional upheaval of being a doctoral student. She was able to work through her emotional suffering and reach out to a trusted advisor who provided her time and allowed her to change her course timeline. In addition, Rosa had to work through the challenge of doctoral studies taking an emotional toll on her wellbeing. She learned to work through the pressure by reaching out to others close to her such as family and peers. Several participants have demonstrated their resilience by trial and error which can also be an example of navigational capital. Yosso (2005) notes that navigational capital empowers individuals to be resilient in environments that are unsupportive. Every trial and tribulation brought an opportunity to learn and see the progress they have made over time. Participants understood resilience as being able to jump over a hurdle. The hurdles are the challenges or obstacles that the participant has encountered during the transition into a doctoral program. Willingness to take on challenges was an example of resistant capital. Participants wanted to be push forward and reach their goals, despite facing

obstacles. As the participant becomes more resilient, they are able to grow stronger and improve in jumping the hurdle in strength and ability. Eventually, the participants learn to have faith in their own capabilities and to be able to overcome the next unexpected hurdle when it arises. For example, Sofia was experiencing job instability and had to find new employment to be able to provide for her son. She recounted that she has been able to work hard and not give up even though at times she wanted. She realized that the only way to move forward it to take it one day at a time and not make any decisions when you are exhausted, frustrated, or stressed.

I would allow myself to take a moment and reflect. And usually thinking about it and giving myself some time to sleep on it, helped the struggle. The next morning, I would wake up and just got right back up and looked at my challenges with a new perspective. I was able to see it a little more clearly and it didn't feel as overwhelming as before.

Frida mentioned that being in the program has taught her to be flexible with herself and realize that things will sometimes not turn out the best way you want, but it may be the only way. "I have learned to be more flexible and accept the things that I cannot control."

On the other hand, Bianca was challenged by a faculty member and she shared:

I really struggled for a while in that class and I would talk to my mom about it. There was emotional support because she would just encourage me to not give up and to do the best that I could. Also, she would tell me not to worry about the professor's comments or just to keep being myself. And, she just reassured me that I would be okay and luckily that worked out.

On another note, Bianca started feeling the pressure of courses and felt discouraged because her goals were taking long to reach. She mentioned:

Stress was challenging and now I feel I have a way better handle on that. Maybe, in part because I don't have to drive anywhere right now I can just stay where I am. And I do have less things now on my plate than I did back then, but just getting through that really busy and hectic time.

Frida highlighted that she was terrified of working with a group of students on a project and she initially tried to avoid it as much as possible. She felt as if her language barrier restricted her and made her feel as if she does not belong. She is getting more comfortable with herself and feels more confident with others and realized that “she needs to push herself more often.”

Rosita shared an event that occurred with an instructor who called her by the wrong name. She described “I got the impression that there were certain folks in the classroom that he admired what they do or what their role is and as a result, he was more interested in hearing their perspective.” She found it frustrating, and tried not to take it personally. She discussed it with a peer and she said that he did the same thing to her. Rosita chose not to overreact and simply understood that there will be some professors that you will connect with more because you share similar interests.

Victoria has been challenged by working full-time and balancing her schoolwork. She explained “I think figuring out life to ensure that I can do both has been probably the biggest challenge.” Luisa recalled the first few years of her program.

The first few years are usually the worst because they're the heaviest academically. I remember I had a lot of times when I was breaking down crying

and I was really considering quitting the program. I felt I was really overwhelmed. I was really tired. I was really burnt out. That's when I was working six days a week and I was also juggling a household. My mom wasn't there a lot. I think I was just really overwhelmed.

Luisa embodied resilience by facing her fears. One of her greatest fears was not doing well in the program and not being able to complete it successfully. She reached out to her advisor and requested an opportunity to take a step back from the program and focus on her emotional wellbeing. The data supports Schlossberg (1981) in which the self of the 4S model considers not only the personal resources, but also the resiliency and outlook of the individual. Luisa expressed that she was worried that she wouldn't be able to stay on track of her expected timeline of completing the program. Instead, because of the change of the schedule, she was able to adapt to her new state of normal and bounce back from her emotional distress to commit that she wanted to complete this program. Next, Rosa was ready to quit the program when she felt as if her daughter and son-in-law who are police officers were misrepresented in a classroom discussion. "And let's just say it was not exactly accepted with open arms. I was at that point when I really felt attacked and demeaned and dismissed that I wanted to quit, No, no, I'm done with this." While Rosa did not quit the program, she found a way to put the situation behind her and focus on her goal. Also, she thought about how her daughter and son-in-law would not want her to quit because of them. Also, Rosa recognized how passionate she is about her interests and how this is the type of conversation she wants to continue once she completes the doctorate.

Self-care

Self-care is another theme that emerged from the data and was also a strategy for participants to manage the stress of the transition. Self-care is the process of taking care of oneself in the best way to promote physical, mental, and emotional health. Self-care differs by person and there are many forms that it can take. Participants have expressed that self-care is a strategy that they have utilized when encountering impactful life events. Participants depicted self-care as a luxury rather than a priority. Most participants did not have an opportunity for self-care and usually will turn to it only when they are facing a challenge. The participants explained that self-care means taking care of yourself in order to be healthy, live well, and be able to do a good job in the doctoral program. Self-care also leads to the ability of being able to help and care for others and being able to handle all the things you need and want to accomplish on any given day.

The data supports what Schlossberg et al. (1995) highlighted about how life can be overwhelming and how important is it to find time for personal improvement. The participants portrayed the life and responsibilities of being a doctoral student which included coursework, reading, writing papers, research, and writing a dissertation. Even though they understand that they must be able to take care of themselves before being able to live up to the daily life of a doctoral student, most never made time for it until it was absolutely necessary. Based on the interviews, the participants reported that their doctoral program does not usually teach them about making time for self-care. Some opportunities for self-care that participants recalled included maintaining a healthy diet, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, having personal time, engaging in an activity that they enjoy, and spending quality time with family and friends.

Schlossberg (1981) describes how life is about identifying and balancing resources to aid in transition. Frida mentioned that she meditated and put her “thoughts on hold” to see it from different perspectives. Also, she wished she had more time to work out. Similarly, Imelda would take a pause and practiced it as a way of self-care. If she felt she required more than a brief pause, she decided to take a mental health day. “It's for one day. I just don't do anything related to the doctoral program whether papers and any reading.” During a self-care day, Imelda focused on her family and would drive on a short road trip.

Now I'm going to be a mom. And that's it, no schoolwork and taking the opportunity to reset. When we are feeling tense, we go on a road trip and camp.

We love nature and feel that connecting to nature is important.

Additionally, Victoria tends to get overwhelmed when she is not organized and does not manage her time well. But she shared that she likes to take time to reset herself and takes a day off of work when she is feeling overwhelmed.

When I am stressed, I will take a day off from work. A couple of weeks ago, I took a day off and I hardly ever take days off of work. I'll do it, maybe once a semester. That equals to twice a year and it's really not a big deal.

Bianca noted that there is limited time for self-care. “Handling that because I also had to work on the weekends and finding self-care time is really tough or finding time to do something fun is really tough.” When given an opportunity, Bianca enjoys journaling since she is an avid writer.

I write down everything like my thoughts, my plans, my emotions, my actions. I mean everything. My achievements, what I'm grateful for, all of that just helps

me. You know, kind of refocus when I feel you know, things are not going so well. And that helped me a lot, especially that first year I think looking back now. I was doing it a lot more.

Rosita mentioned that she has a different way she practices self-care and that it requires her to be more organized to help stay on track.

I'm very organized. The strategies that have helped me stay successful are being organized. I'm a planner and I like to think ahead. I give myself the time I think I need to make sure it's successful because of what I know I'm capable of. That's sort of my approach. Again, it's being organized, asking questions, so that I feel I have the best understanding of the expectations and planning ahead.

As a strategy, Luisa practices with visual charts and checks off items that she completes. She finds that this level of organization helps her stay calm and clear. Unfortunately, at times, her load is too overwhelming. At one point she was forced to take time for herself and practice self-care, when a previous tragedy resurfaced from her time as an undergraduate.

And then I think about my third or fourth year, I was having a lot of my trauma from my undergrad and it resurfaced and I was getting triggered because my classes were at night and I had to walk alone to campus and walk back to my car. My PTSD was getting really triggered and I started going to counseling at that point.

In contrast, Luisa tried to focus on her self-care, but felt that she did not feel as if there was a plan around it. Also, it appeared as if she had no real conversation about her mental health and had to find a way to cope on her own before returning to counseling.

I wish there had been more of a focus on my student mental health resources. I think even, even if I didn't, didn't have all of my other preexisting stuff. I think a lot of us in my cohort and the cohorts above us felt really burnt out, and mentally exhausted and there was just this mentality that you kind of keep treading through and I think I would have liked to have known more about the resources that were available to me as a doctorate student.

Yosso (2005) described resistant capital as the attempt to securing equal rights and collective freedom. Self-care can also be known as an act of resistance for women of color. Nicol and Yee (2017) dived deeply into cultural capital and developed a culturally based feminist epistemology in which their standpoints evolved from their resistance to the “unrelenting expectations of family and academia.” The practice of radical self-care emerged while they were new faculty in the early years in their career. Nicol and Yee (2017) described radical self-care as involving “embracing practices that keep us physically and psychologically healthy and fit, making time to reflect on what matters to us, challenging ourselves to grow, and checking ourselves to ensure that we are doing aligns with what matters to us” (p. 134). Further, it involves taking ownership and directing our own lives and choosing how we engage in the world without unrelenting pressure and expectations. Participants in the study described self-care behaviors including improving sleep, increasing exercise, and eating more nutritious meals. They also knew that they had to take a step towards more self-care in order to be able to handle the pressures of the doctoral program. In essence, they were awakened and made the decision to put themselves first and to be deliberate about their time, energy, and resources. Participants believed that it was the only way they would be able to thrive and

flourish in their respective programs.

Social Support Network

Social support network was the final theme that emerged from the data.

Participants' social support network was needed as they encountered impactful life events during their transition into doctoral studies. Participants received support through affirmation and positive feedback which supports Anderson et al. (2012). While the doctoral journey may be lonely and isolating, the Latina doctoral students recalled that they would not be able to participate in the program without support from friends and loved ones and helpful relationships. Participants indicated that their social support network is comprised of individuals in their life who influenced them and provided support. The support can take various forms including emotional, academic, and companionship support. The data supports Goodman et al. (2006) in which they viewed support as the key to handling stress. All participants described healthy and supportive relationships around them that have made a difference in how they handle stress and life challenges. Some participants expressed that a lack of support can lead to isolation and loneliness. Supportive family, friends, co-workers, and peers played an important part of the participants' lives and ultimately, they provided comfort in knowing that they are there if and when the participants needed them. Not only do the participants have a good social support network at home, they also benefited from having a social support network at their respective universities. Peers or cohort members tended to be a good social support for them since they have similar interests and progress through the doctoral program together.

Participants have described that they have been able to achieve balance in their

life because of having a strong support network that they can depend on to help them get through difficult times. Yosso's (2005) model and notion of social capital is supported by the data presented about the participants' support network. Mostly all participants have credited a family member, friend, faculty or mentor for being able to cope with the challenges and life events of a doctoral program. Bianca stated that she often relied on her support system and it was always her family. Imelda detailed her support network which included, "My husband for sure. Professors, and yeah, my mom, my dad, my husband, I would say more than anything. And apparently, it's the whole community, the VA, and obviously my veteran benefits." Frida explained that her brother and parents have been helpful during the transition. Frida recalled:

Well, they're very supportive when it comes to school. My parents have always told us to take advantage of our education. I also find time to help them too especially when they get stuck in a situation; we kind of help them with that. But besides that, we try to have a good balance. When they know that I have homework or if I need to go, they will not say anything. They tell me, okay, you got this. Keep it up. You're almost done, you're almost there.

These experiences reflected Yosso's (2005) concept of familial capital when participants expressed how their families provided critical support by displaying validation, encouragement, and a reason for completing the doctorate. Rosita mentioned that her support network was her husband, mother, and father. Further she outlined that she told her husband about a peer who was considering leaving the program. At that point her husband said:

Oh, don't worry, I won't let you quit. I looked at him, and I asked him, what do

you mean? And he responds that I'm not going to let you. If you think about it, I'm not, I'm going to tell you no, you're not quitting. He said that to me and I told him, thank you. I appreciated that more than anything, and I needed to hear that. In addition, Rosita expressed that deciding to enroll in a doctoral program was perfect timing. Her family members who love and support her are also the motivating force for her to continue this journey.

Victoria mentioned that her family has been extremely supportive, "I think they're always my biggest cheerleaders, you know my sisters are my biggest champions. And my mom and my extended family as well." In the same fashion, Luisa expressed:

And just being able to be with family, despite COVID and being able to be with family has been really helpful. Being able to get together with our extended family in a way that feels safe while social distancing has been a blessing.

All participants shared that the support of one or both of their parents was critical for persistence in the doctoral program. Parental support sometimes included financial support, but the most important aspects were encouragement, understanding, and supportive nature. Some participants explained that their parents did not understand the level of commitment that is necessary to succeed in the doctoral program. In several cases, participants also reported that parents did not understand why they would want to receive a doctoral degree when they were already capable of gaining full-time employment. Yet at the same time, even though parents were unsure about the value of the degree, they still expressed pride in them for pursuing a doctoral degree. These experiences also reflected Ramos and Torres-Fernandez's (2020) notion of family as a support system and the tie that most participants' families did not understand academia to

guide them through the doctoral program, but were able to provide them with support through encouragement and motivating them in their ability to succeed.

Bianca experienced:

Having my parents here is really nice because you know they can help me feel better emotionally and it's just nice having that emotional support. And of course, the practical support of having someone to help me take care of the little things, like taking out the trash, so that the house isn't filthy. All the practical and emotional support has helped me be a better student.

Additionally, Frida explained that when she needs a different perspective, she turns to her parents and finds that they hold wisdom and truth in their stories about the family. She enjoys spending time visiting with them and talking to them about what is bothering her and how she can handle the obstacles. Rosa found that her safe place to be able to escape from the struggles of the doctoral program is at her parent's home. She just needed to be herself and let it all go without thinking of the demands of the doctoral program. Carla shared that her parents are her support system. She enjoyed spending time with them when possible and knew she always felt emotionally supported.

Equally important, Rosita explained that she when she decided to enroll in a doctoral program, she knew that in the background her parents were unconditionally supportive. "I always knew that if I decided to do so, I would always have the support of my parents and husband and it made my decision to enroll easier to make." Next, Rosa recalled the memory of her mother right before she died. They had a conversation about returning to her studies. Her parents asked her about whether she wanted to pursue her PhD.

And my parents were like, go for it. Go get it. And then my mom passed before I even started. She hasn't gotten to see me, you know. And my goal is to get my PhD before my dad gets worse and while he still knows that I am working towards the PhD.

Moreover, Rosa mentioned that after her mother passed, her father remarried. Rosa still continues to feel as if she had the support from father, her mother's memory, and now stepmother and added, "my dad and my stepmom are very involved in the fact that they have been there and are some of my biggest supporters."

Another frequently mentioned source of support was a husband or partner. Luisa reported that her husband has assisted her and helped her deal with a writer's block, "I had a major writer's block in my dissertation, but it just sat there for a year, it was bad. He helped me get through that. That was super helpful for me." Carla mentioned that her husband was skilled at writing and editing papers and often gave her feedback on her papers. "Having him kind of helped me along the way and reading over my papers and making sure that you know I'm dotting my I's crossing my T's and making my sentences make sense." Frida also detailed that her partner has been supportive throughout her time as a doctoral student and attributed her being successful because of his love and support.

Several participants shared that pets have been a constant for emotional support. Luisa, Rosita, and Carla mentioned that their pets are seen as members of the family. Luisa described, "My dogs have been a great deal of support. I don't think I would have gotten through my doctorate program without my dogs." Rosita also mentioned that her dog has been a great deal of joy and support. Rosa discussed that her dogs are her children and have helped her relieve stress and worry. She found that they

also provided emotional support and unconditional love.

Similarly, friends and coworkers also play a key role in assisting with the strategies of remaining successful in a doctoral program. Bianca found that her friends were a form of support and encouraged her to take a step forward in her career.

Sometimes talking to friends about it that are not in the program. And when I would catch up with them, every now and then, I would just kind of tell them what I was going through. It's just nice to get that out. And people are like, we know it must be hard, but you know you're doing good and we're proud of you. It's just nice to share with other people that are not in the program.

One key component of being successful is attributed to faculty members. Some participants expressed that faculty members have been available to discuss research and getting support for professional activities such as attending national conferences and giving presentations. This finding was consistent with previous research by González (2006) that highlighted the importance of getting opportunities for intellectual development through research and also receiving support for additional activities that exposes students to best practices in their field. Faculty members were also available to offer support by listening and providing solutions to any challenges the participants encountered throughout the process. Imelda experienced that there were a couple of faculty members that they could open up to and share their frustrations and challenges.

They are very open and I can talk to them as a person. Also, I can tell them what is happening in my life especially if I cannot do something. And then they're very understanding. Some faculty really go beyond the professional and professor roles for sure.

In similar fashion, Rosa illustrated:

This program really has amazing faculty that care about you and invest in you. They also support you in it, they realize life's life. And they're like, you know, don't worry, we'll work with you or with your assignments or whatever.

Rosa added:

Several of the professors in the department have been great. They're not afraid to challenge you. They want you to step up and challenge you, which is a form of investment. They are understanding when you come talk to them.

Moreover, Carla illustrated:

The instructors that I had took time to sit down and say, you know, you can do this. We got this. What kind of help do you need? And really pushed me along and gave me that determination, that kind of drive, that I needed to get through it. I didn't have anybody that first semester that said, oh, figure it out. You know, they were all there.

Additionally, Bianca reported that:

Some of the professors have been very helpful, kind, and understanding. They helped us feel comfortable at the university or in the program which I think contributed to my success. I mean, that's very important for me to feel in a good, safe, comfortable environment and that helps me a lot.

Luisa voiced a challenge and how she was able to overcome it by speaking with a faculty member. Her faculty member expressed “What's on your plate that I can take off your plate. I want to make sure that you are feeling supported and that your needs are being met.” Victoria received praise from several of her instructors.

Within the program, I get a lot of positive feedback around the work that I complete. I do get a lot of affirmation that I'm on the right track. I think that overall, my experience has been a really positive experience within the program.

While most received praise, there were some occasions in which feedback allowed the participants to be challenged and improve their skills. Faculty members were often pushing the participants to do their best. Victoria noted:

I think that she just did a super masterful job of providing assignments with really good feedback to help you turn it around, she gives feedback and pretty substantive feedback from my perspective just to make you a better scholar.

By the same token, Rosa mentioned, “The curriculum and the faculty have been outstanding. They've challenged me and they pushed me to be a better doctoral student.”

On another note, mentors played a key role in helping support participants. Luisa experienced that a mentor would assist with her throughout the program.

Having a mentor was helpful because I could see that I could get to my goal in future. Also, getting the feedback and having a good relationship with my mentor, has been helpful for me to as a strategy to move through the doctoral program.

Next, participants were supported by other Latinas around them who influenced them to achieve their goals. These women came from various backgrounds, cities, and neighborhoods and yet their experience of what it means to be a Latina student in a doctoral program are similar. The culmination of the experiences found that they encompassed strength and pride in their culture. They also found opportunities to celebrate their heritage in which they passed down traditions that rejoiced in family members, language, food, and music. Being a Latina meant that they are responsible to

their family and community. They shared great pride to be able to be the sole Latina in their family to be in a doctoral program and it added to their strength and value in their experience. Most participants described their resiliency that has helped them navigate through some of the challenges in the doctoral program.

Imelda recounted that she gets the emotional support from other Latina doctoral students that surround her in different cohorts.

I looked up and down many cohorts before me and cohorts above me. But in my cohort, there's three females and three males. It's really interesting, we have a broad group and then the cohort above me, there are a lot of Latinas.

Additionally, Carla found that she naturally gravitated towards other Latina doctoral students, “And I think that was just kind of gravitating to, you know, we had a lot in common as far as our cultures were concerned.” Luisa would often visit with other Latinas in the program and they would offer advice. Victoria communicated that she collaborated most with her cohort members who were Latinos. “I immediately gravitated to the other Latinas and the Latinos in our group and we forged faster friendships.”

Participants also illustrated how cohort members and classmates were supportive during the doctoral program. Carla acknowledged, “Then we built these little communities of networking where we had people spend time learning together. It was just kind of everybody pushing each other and it just gave you that sense of being a family.” Frida narrated how her peers would give her feedback on her writing. She shared,

I would get the feedback and they would tell me, you did a great job, you did this, this and that. It was okay, I'm not doing as bad as I think I am and I guess I may

get emotional, with my writing. They see the effort that you put. Or someone else sees the effort that you put into it.

Rosita noted that her classmates have “propelled and pushed and, you know, I think we do our best together to keep things entertaining. Ask questions, and answer questions.” Rosa experienced that those ahead in the program have been supportive and served as sources of support to her. Victoria discussed that her cohort has a strong bond and they all support one another in and out of the classroom. She added, “Now, there are four of us who are part-timers who have taken literally all of our coursework together. We're always texting each other, hey, what's going on? What are we doing? Why am I crying? And that's been super helpful.” In addition, she shared that Latinas within different cohorts of the doctoral program would often meet for casual outings such as dinner, drinks, or planning a weekend trip. They wanted to create a space of safety for other Latinas in the doctoral programs.

In a really supportive way, with the intention of we're all going to graduate, like less than 1% of Latinas get like a doctorate, we're going to do this and we are going to support each other through this program, we're going to make sure that we all finish.

Carla described her cohort members as a family, “It was just kind of everybody pushing each other and it just gave you that sense of, okay, we're a family. We got this. We're in a cohort. We got this, we can move on in and do this.”

Participants all shared the reasons they were able to continue as they encountered life events. The life events centered around medical events, COVID-19, and stress. The focus of the fourth research question was to learn about the strategies participants used

and supports they reported needing as they encountered impactful life events during their doctoral studies. The participants' descriptions of supports and strategies that they reported needing as they encountered impactful life events during their doctoral studies were clustered into four themes: Grit, Resilience, Self-care, and Social Support Network. Participants had the power to make choices in their life and used these supports and strategies to increase their grit and resilience while enrolled in a doctoral program. Participants also relied on self-care and their social support network to provide them strength in many ways. While they were presented with challenges and life events, it did not stop them from being able to bend, and not break with allowing the possibility to grow from adversity.

In this chapter, I was able to articulate the ways in which the life events faced by Latina students impacted their transition and progression in a doctoral program. Rather than life events motivating forces for their enrollment, I discussed the impact of influential forces that compelled them to begin seeking change in their lives, resulting in their enrollment. Next, I shared the participants' life situations, and how life events played a positive or negative affect on their progression either positively or negatively. Finally, I discussed supports and strategies reported depending on as they encountered these impactful life events.

V. DISCUSSION

This qualitative phenomenological study documents the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. The primary research question guiding the dissertation is: What are the experiences faced by Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, what supports and strategies do they report needing? This question is supported by four sub questions. The conceptual framework supporting the study design built on transition theory and community cultural wealth. Therefore, this closing chapter presents a discussion of the dissertation key findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and for future research. The chapter also interprets study findings in relation to the conceptual framework that includes Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and Yosso's (2015) model of community cultural wealth. Complementing Schlossberg's theory, the study also drew on a broader understanding of life events with a primary emphasis of Hultsch and Plemons's (1979) life events and life span development theory. The chapter concludes with tensions, challenges, and reflection on the research.

Review of Study Highlights

The focus of the first research question was about the influential forces that caused the participant to begin a doctoral program. The themes included personal fulfillment, wanting a better life, and obligation to give back. First, Personal fulfillment was based on participants' accounts of their upbringing and how they were raised with a strong family work ethic which led them to be motivated to begin a doctoral program. This personal fulfillment will contribute to motivating them towards life purpose and meaning in their lives. Second, wanting a better life meant wanting to improve their

current situation which focused on career pursuit or advancement and sharing one's voice with others. Third, personal fulfillment encompassed the urge to find something significant or worthwhile in their life choices and the sense that pursuing a doctoral degree could lead them towards enlightenment.

The second research question centered on learning more about the participants' description of themselves and their life situation as they transitioned into the doctoral program. The themes included financial decisions, multiple commitments and obligations, and Latina family values. First, participants described their life situation such as being financially supported by family and relying on financial aid to cover the expenses of the doctoral program. Also, participants detailed their finances and how they had to consider the doctoral program as a calculated risk to provide their family with future financial stability. Second, participants reported their multiple commitments and obligations and how participating in the doctoral program led them deal with managing numerous roles and lack of time for all requirements of their daily lives.

The third research question focused on learning about the life events that impacted the participants' progression in a positive or negative way. The themes include medical events, stressful events, motherhood, relationship strain, and COVID-19. Participants discussed how medical events hindered their ability to perform. Next, they shared the stressors of not only engaging in a doctoral program, but also finding time for other obligations such as employment and spending time with family. In addition, motherhood was another theme that illustrated the joys and challenges of being a doctoral student and mother. Next, participants described how the doctoral program affected their personal relationships. Lastly, participants described how COVID-19 affected their

learning due to social distancing.

The focus of the fourth research question was to learn about the supports and strategies that participants report needing as a result of the impactful life events that occurred throughout the doctoral program. The themes included grit, resilience, self-care, and social support network. The doctoral program demanded significant time, energy, and commitment and the participants faced many challenges because of their life events. The participants described these themes as the driving force that kept them motivated and focused to persist in the doctoral program.

The women in this study were vulnerable and shared what has been their experience in a doctoral program. They expressed stress during critical times, grit throughout the duration of the program, and described how they developed their own resiliency, strength, and emergence of self as a Latina woman who can overcome challenges. They are stronger because of their support network and explained that family is at the core of their support and challenges, but mostly have expressed gratitude for having family and friends who love and support them.

Study Findings in Light of the Study Framework

The research study was guided by the overarching research question: *what are the experiences faced by Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, and what supports and strategies do they report needing?* The participants described how they encountered influential forces that prompted them to search for a doctoral program. The findings suggest that there were various experiences that each of them faced as they transitioned in and throughout the doctoral program.

The following figure serves as a visual representation model focusing on four

stages of transitioning in and through the doctoral program. These include the participants' view of the doctoral experience based on their progression in their studies. At times, the stages overlap or allow the participant to move back and forth according to their life situation and life events. Around the four phases of transition are the cultural assets that the participants exhibited including four types of cultural capital including familial, resistant, navigational, and aspirational. Participants were able to access these forms of capital as they transitioned through their doctoral studies.

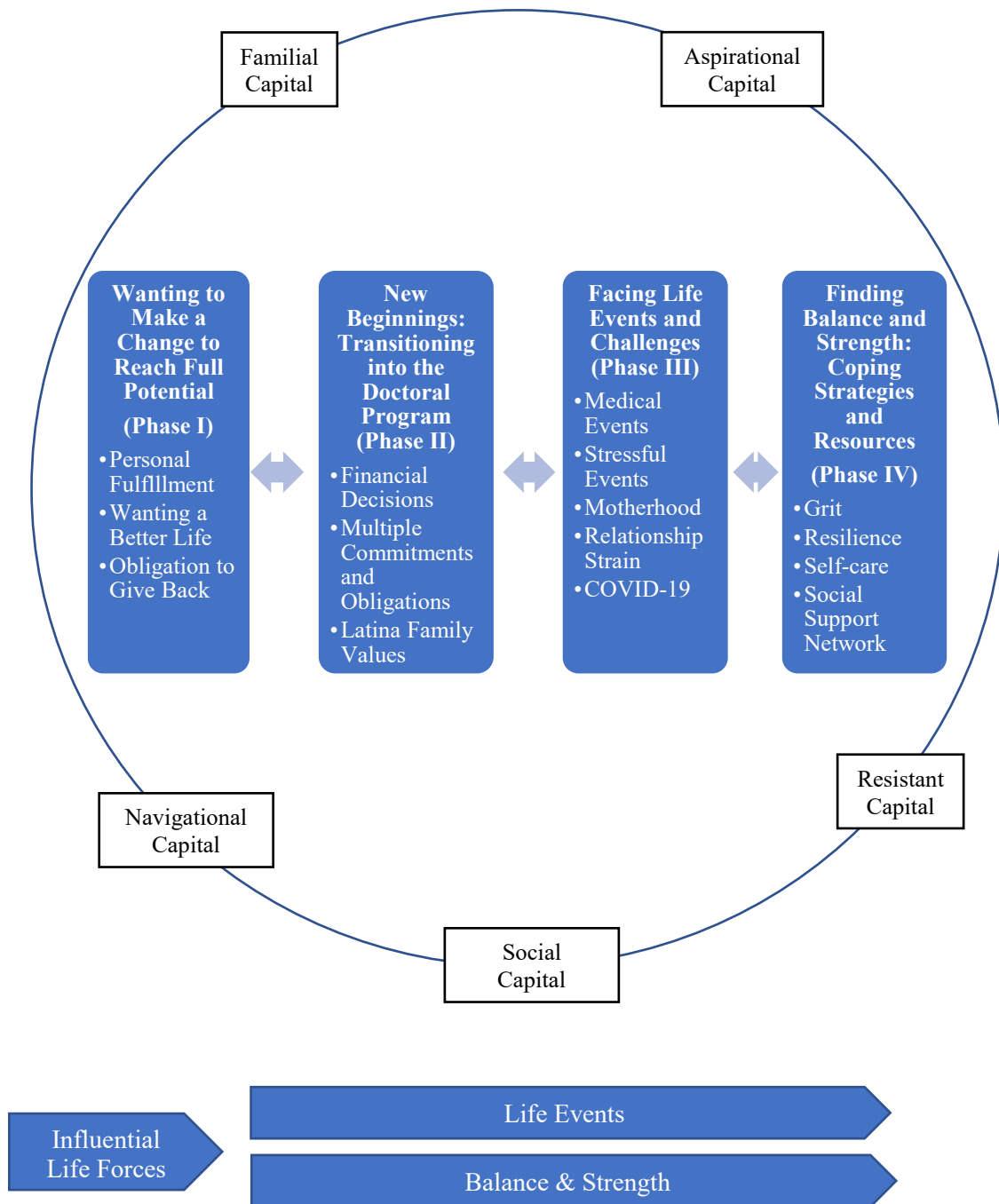


Figure 2

Phases of Transition

Phase I: Wanting to Make a Change to Reach Full Potential

Phase I is described as wanting to make a change. Participants were asked to explore the life events that influenced their decision to begin the transition into the doctoral program. Significant life events did not seem to play a significant role in the onset for applying to a doctoral program, but clearly were present throughout the progress in the doctoral program. In this phase, rather than life events, participants described influential forces that compelled them to begin seeking changes in their lives.

Participants entered the doctoral program at various stages in their lives. Each participant had multiple influences or reasons to enroll in the doctoral program. The influential forces that participants experienced served to motivate a change in their lives. The first major theme of the study focused on the influential forces that served as a catalyst to the participants that prompted them to seek out a doctoral program. In particular, they described how they re-evaluated their current life progress to decide to turn to a doctoral program. The influential life events included desiring advancement or stability in career; experiencing limitations in their current career path; feeling an obligation to give back; or wanting a better life, personal fulfillment, or accomplishment. The study indicated that all nine participants returned to a doctoral program for career related reasons and for personal satisfaction or accomplishment. The data supported Brown and Watson (2010) and highlighted the central importance of achieving a doctorate to gain employment as a key factor in participants' decision to undertake doctoral study. Participants wanted to have a doctoral qualification for gaining employment or job promotion. In addition, participants also strived to complete the doctorate as a lifelong goal that sets them apart from others.

Another trigger event or influential force was the motivation towards personal fulfillment. Personal fulfillment was important because they wanted to achieve their life goals of completing a doctorate and being a scholar in their field of interest. They desired this goal and believed that if they focused on this goal, it might increase their quality of life. They also pursued the doctoral degree because it was meaningful and satisfying on a personal level. This was anchored in the belief that attaining the doctoral degree will give them the highest level of sense of worth and achievement. It will also give them the feeling that they added to the value of their field and contributed to society as a whole.

Another major influential force was the desire for financial security. All participants described wanting a better life and having peace of mind when it came to their finances and future. Nearly all participants desired more financial security for their families. They did not want to worry about how their income can cover household expenses. Several participants cared for children and parents and desired additional income due to wanting financial security. Whatever the reason, each participant was looking for the best way in which to help provide for their family.

Similarly, participants searched for a greater purpose in life in which they wanted to change the lives of other people around them. This journey of the Latina study participants supports Zell's (2010) research finding that Latino students must find a "deeper motivation to concretize a life purpose" (p. 176) that keeps them persevering towards their goals. All participants sought their own purpose which is unique and special to them. They all shared how their time on this earth is undetermined and during that time, they wanted to focus on the important things in their lives that gives meaning and happiness. This purpose grows from their connection to others. González's (2007)

concept of purpose of life supports the findings in this study in which Latinas state that the purpose of their doctorate was to help them prepare to be of service to the community. Participants described their connection to their purpose by persisting in the program for the benefit of family members, parents, children, friends, and community members.

All participants wanted to follow their higher purpose and have a sense of meaning in their lives. Some participants wanted to be able to speak their own truths. Sofia mentioned that she was looking for her purpose,

The North Star represents me and my journey. It may not always be the brightest, but on a clear night, I can see it. There are sometimes I forget that it's there because I get lost in the chaos and disruption of life. I just have to take a moment and close my mind to all the challenges and believe that it will guide me through.

In addition, finding their voice was significant because participants wanted to learn something new about themselves. They also believed that one day their voices will be able to speak not only for themselves, but for others around them. Several participants wanted to find their voice to make a change and serve the people. For some, finding their own voice was simply about developing confidence and using their voice to share thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

Participants were also searching for a way to give back to their community. The majority of participants shared that they had an obligation to give back to family members, friends, and community members. Padilla (1985) highlighted that an "ethnic consciousness" manifested in students having a deep commitment to give back to their families and communities (p. 61). Participants believed that their completion of the

doctoral degree can benefit Latinas, but also the Latino community as a whole.

Participants in this study described being prideful of their roots and for being a member of a doctoral program since so few have ever been in this position. They felt as if it was their duty to serve as role models or just purely to show others that they can also visualize themselves in the same situation. Improving the status quo was a great reason that they selected to enroll in a doctoral program. They knew that few like them had a doctoral degree and they wanted to change that reality and contribute to improving the statistics on Latinas that complete doctoral degrees.

Phase II: New Beginnings: Transitioning into the Doctoral Program

Transitioning into the doctoral program was a new and exciting journey.

Participants had to prepare themselves for the emotional investment and how their lives may change. Participants also realized that the doctoral program would be a different experience than their undergraduate and their master's degree. They shared that this experience has pushed and challenged them beyond their limits, and they feel that they have grown personally because of the experience.

They often referred to the doctoral program as their job that requires perseverance and demanding work. Participants had to learn to manage their time wisely to ensure productivity. Each participant described the toll it took on their wellness. Previous research by Offerman (2011) concluded that women struggle more than the traditional doctoral student who is male in achieving a balance between study and personal time and additional responsibilities. Women experience greater conflict between their personal and professional lives (Giancola et al., 2009). Women are generally known to have more stressors related to role conflict (Brown & Watson, 2010). It is also because

of the amount of responsibility due to housework or family obligations.

All participants mentioned Latina family values and how family plays an integral role in their everyday life. Existing research on the experiences of Latinas in college highlights their connection to the family unit as a key component to their academic success (Sy & Romero, 2006). Bianca found that her relationship with her family was a key factor in her continuation in the program. She was grateful to their support, encouragement, and the way they took care of her which including cooking meals, cleaning, and maintaining the car. Similarly, in the *Good Daughter Dilemma*, Latinas pursuing higher education face a cultural value of *familismo* which emphasizes loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity (Vega, 1990). Luisa shared, “I would take up a lot of my mom's roles, because it just me and my dad when she was back in Colombia.” She found it frustrating to try to focus on the demands of school when she would often need to fill the role of her mother and commit to all the duties of the household like cooking and cleaning.

Family support plays a major factor in the success of the Latina student. Families can support and motivate, but loyalty and duty come first. Duty to the family was a fundamental principle for the participants and at times it conflicted with their academic expectations. Participants perceived that they were misunderstood when describing the pressure to put the needs of the family first. Participants often took a back seat to their needs while family was most important.

The Latina doctoral students wanted to pursue the degree because they wanted to honor their families including parents, siblings, and children. Ultimately, they wanted to have a better future. They worked hard every day because they viewed education as the

key to a better life and future. Participants also knew that personal and family sacrifice was the expectation throughout the transition into the doctoral program. The ability to meet their personal and cultural expectations of being a good parent was also sacrificed, the time away from a family was sacrificed due to the perceived greater good of needing to complete the doctorate to assist the family with future financial support. As suggested by Mansfield et al. (2010), caring for children or other family members including parents was both stressful and integral to a woman's identity and sense of moral obligation. The women viewed it as something that was central to their life and not something that could be set aside. Sofia spoke about her average day which consisted of work, doctoral studies, maintaining a home, and childrearing. She was often torn between spending time with her son or using her free time reading or writing. She often felt guilty that she was not as attentive to her son when he wanted to play or needed attention. She added, "At times, I would question my sanity, but then I just think of the reason that I am doing this and working so hard, that I can't quit."

Participants continued to describe themselves and their life situations as they have engaged in the transition. They added that they have been impacted by decisions that could place them in financial risk after enrolling in a doctoral program. All participants considered whether enrolling in a doctoral program was a good financial decision and worth the time, money, and investment. Participants decided to take the risk and then had to find a way to finance the program especially when programs encouraged the doctoral student to stop working full-time. Some participants decided to stop working and now they were unable to financially contribute to the household. Three participants chose to cut back from full-time to part-time work. All participants' households were impacted

financially once the participant decided to enroll in a doctoral program.

Most participants needed financial support for tuition, books, and living expenses. Financial support was often provided by family members. Most participants received financial assistance from parents, partners, and other family members due to cutting back from full-time to part-time employment. Some participants left their employment prior to beginning the program. Family members often made sacrifices on behalf of the participants to offer them the opportunity to live in their home or provided the participants money for tuition and living expenses.

Other financial support included financial aid which was critical for the participant to cover the cost of the doctoral program. All participants relied on financial aid such as scholarships and loans. In the interviews, participants did not report any other forms of financial aid such as grants. Many participants expressed that they would not be able to afford the doctoral program without loans. Participants were willing to take the financial risk of additional debt with the expectation that it will pay off in the future. Participants hoped for financial security after completion of the doctoral degree.

Phase III: Facing Life Events and Challenges

Commitment to the doctoral program was typically displayed by students regardless of the demands. Participants shared their commitment, obligations, and responsibilities to achieve their educational goals. Many doctoral students have multiple responsibilities and roles they play in their everyday lives. Sy and Romero (2008) found that although connections to the family unit can enhance education success, family obligations “can sometimes conflict with school demands placing Latinas in a cultural bind.” In the case of Carla, she was a wife, mother, and worked full-time in addition to

being enrolled in the program. Carla described how it was difficult to manage her responsibilities and her roles became entangled. She shared, “I’m trying to kind of balance that out and get everything done. It seems like one is meshing into the other since work doesn't seem to end these days at five o'clock and then school doesn't seem to end at nine o'clock, so everything's just kind of meshing.”

Participants described their level of commitment by investing time and energy into their studies and they often had limited time to spend with family. Other participants described not having much of a social life because of the demands and expectations of the program. A few participants described that they had to sacrifice the possibility of a relationship, marriage, or children because the doctoral program was their priority. Throughout it all, the participants remained committed to their goal and how it assisted them to persist every day.

Participants experienced challenges, failures, family crises, and normal life events that served as bumps on the doctoral road. Adversity and challenges led the participants to cope, survive, and thrive in the doctoral world. Challenging experiences allowed the participant to feel as if they could handle the experience on their own. Not only did the participants cope, but they also thrived in the way that they changed these challenging experiences to a positive transformation in which they were able to adapt with strength and wisdom from the experience. Frida described the language barriers that she faced throughout her transition into the program. She noted, “I take longer to do a lot of my stuff because I still think in Spanish. I’m trying to translate everything or trying to double check everything that I'm doing it right. So, it takes me more time.” This challenge was time consuming, but she was determined to translate it appropriately and would often ask

for feedback from friends and peers. Frida's challenge led to higher functioning in development of new skills and knowledge to handle problems and seek her own solutions. Gardner (2009) suggested that challenges are part of the doctoral students' experience. It is a rite of passage as you transition in and work towards completing the degree. Rosa believed that regardless of how much preparation she had for the doctoral program, she understood that challenges would be part of the process. She shared, "I was prepared for the intellectual demands, but not the emotional demands of the doctoral program." Next, she described that she found the courage to take a step forward and learn more about herself. Rosa showed true courage in the emotional change and how she is turning into a different person because of her experience.

Walker et al. (2008) acknowledged that the doctoral journey is daunting and seen as a complex process of formation. Study participants evolved through development of intellectual skills which also adds to their growth in their professional identity. Additionally, participants displayed a strength or mental toughness that when confronted with challenging experiences, allowed them to persist and navigate a way towards solutions or overcoming barriers to their problems. They made a choice not to quit and took every day on its own merit. They were able to put things aside and ensure that a new day will be better than the last. The only way that the participant knew whether they were thriving or flourishing is after the difficult situation. They offered reflection in the critical incident technique and interviews and discussed how these challenges resulted in a toughness that guided them towards their path towards completion. Luisa described the elevated level of stress she felt because she was "pulled in a lot of different directions" She stated that she sacrificed her well-being because of the demands of the program. The

findings suggest that participants experienced high levels of stress throughout the transition into the doctoral program.

Gardner (2009) noted that there are a variety of challenges that graduate students encounter during their doctoral journey. Bianca shared:

I experienced challenges when I was managing everything during that first year, especially when I was coming and going everywhere. I was getting home really late and really tired and struggling to keep up with everything. And just at times, feeling a bit discouraged that my goals were taking long to reach.

Because of the challenges, participants learned to cope and how to adapt to these challenges that occurred around them. Bianca added, “Now I feel like I have a way better handle on that. Maybe, in part because I am managing my time better. And I am really enjoying the online learning, just because it gives me more time for self-care.”

Walker et al. (2008) shared that the personal lives of doctoral students are also affected by the requirements of life and doctoral education expectations. While the participants knew that the experience would not be easy, nothing could prepare them for the emotional toll it took on them and their families. As Imelda shared, “There were times when my life was really tough where I was thinking that I was being too selfish, like with my time. Am I not giving enough time or giving enough support as a wife, as a team member of this family to take care of our children?” After the death of a family member, Imelda decided to take some time to be with her family and to support her husband who was dealing with grief. She added, “maybe I need to take a semester off to spend more time with my family and to be a better partner and mother.”

The challenges participants faced in their doctoral journey included time

constraints and time management. Those participants who viewed themselves as being able to manage their time effectively and find a school, work, and life balance, felt less stress than those who struggled to find a balance. Rosita mentioned that she feels less stress when she is organized. She added, “I’m very much like a planner. I like to think ahead, and I give myself the time I think I need to make sure it's successful.”

The Latinas in the study discussed respecting their culture and traditions. They realized that their family provided them traditions, values, and the expected role of the woman to be responsible for the household. Even though family and parents were often supportive, at times, participants felt that their family would have preferred that they were earning income and assisting with providing for the family rather than continuing their education. Family members often did not understand the need to continue seeking another degree when they may already have a steady income. Participants described that family members often needed them to fulfill obligations in the home. Parents who expect daughters to continue contributing to the demands of the family while enrolled in higher education, place a high demand on her to fulfill multiple and sometimes competing obligations (Sy & Romero, 2006). Latina doctoral students often find themselves in a bind to please their family and the demands of the doctoral program. Several participants experienced the concept of *marianismo* in which the woman’s primary role is that of caring for home and family, but with the influence of education, they were changing the expectations of the family. The participants described that they wanted a successful future and wanted a better life for themselves and their family.

Phase IV: Finding Balance and Strength: Coping Strategies and Resources

All participants shared that they encountered challenges throughout the doctoral program. Grit played a significant role in participants' perseverance and resilience. As participants discussed obstacles in the doctoral program, they were shown to display grit as a character trait because it helped them push through their troubles. Participants discussed failures and setbacks yet had the courage and strength to overcome them and tried not to let it affect their studies. The participants also displayed *ganas* which is a value universally used in the Latina culture to describe the desire to succeed through strength and determination. *Ganas* is a cultural construct that is similar to grit and in some literature, it is used interchangeably (Rodriguez et al., 2013). *Ganas* is meant to describe the desire to attain a life goal fueled by passion and determination to achieve it. Easley et al. (2012) stated that *ganas* was a source of motivation for Mexican heritage students and may be a significant reason when they excel when the expectation is that they will fail (p. 174-175). In addition, they found that there are multiple components of *ganas* which include: parental struggle and sacrifice, strong family values, admiration and respect of parents, desire to repay and pay forward, resilience and willingness to persevere. Participants in this study described how they were proud of their accomplishments thus far. Also, they wanted to be a role model to others around them to break the stereotype of the Latina woman and to also serve as an inspiration to other family members and friends to aspire to their goals and dreams.

Moreover, grit and *ganas* led the participants to resilience. The findings suggest that each of the participants experienced resilience after a life event or challenge. Resilience has been known to be a process rather than a fixed attribute (Alva & Padilla,

1995). Further, resilience had two sets of criteria including positive adaptation and overcoming adversity. Windle et al. (2011) defined resilience as “the process of negotiating, managing, and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma” (p. 2). The participants described that they had to rely on themselves to be able to get through the challenge. They were able to persevere and take a step closer towards attaining the doctoral degree. Resilience is likewise supported by the literature about Latina students in higher education. Studies show that Latina college students show a sense of drive and determination towards completion of the degree (Perez & Cortes, 2011). Resilience also contributes to Latina student success through aspirational capital, familial capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). All participants demonstrated aspirational and familial capital. At times, resistant capital was demonstrated with a few participants in which they wanted to prove wrong the individual who did not believe in their skills and abilities. Carla worked hard to prove wrong the high school counselor who believed that she was only capable of being a secretary. She wanted to challenge that idea and work hard for herself and her family and to prove to everyone else she was capable of more.

All the participants described themselves and identified as Latina. In addition, they also connected their values to the Latin culture. Their Latina identity contributed resiliency and it influenced them to apply and enroll in a doctoral program even though they knew that it would be a difficult journey because of the many obstacles, roles, and family responsibilities. Participants discussed their culture and expressed pride in the values and beliefs such as *familismo* and how their family contributed to their resilience. The participants appreciated parental and family support and involvement and attributed these to instilling a sense of cultural pride to foster resilience. They also appreciated that

the family provided great strength and support and taking the opportunity to have hope and faith when faced with challenges.

Through their family experiences, the participants were taught about *marianismo* and to prioritize the needs of others above their own. The participants expressed that they have learned to prioritize self-sacrifice over self-care. Self-care occurs when a person is engaged in an activity that involves taking care of their mental, emotional, and physical health. Participants described that because of the demands of the doctoral program, they often did not include time to practice self-care. Self-care can be various things dependent on the individual, but to the participants it included: rest, sleep, eating healthy, exercise, and spending time with friends and loved ones. As participants transitioned into the doctoral program, their self-care suffered, and they compromised their sense of worth. As time progressed and participants felt as if they were able to handle the competing priorities better, they began to spend more time on healing themselves and addressing their own needs.

As participants transitioned into the doctoral program, they became aware of how important social support influenced their persistence towards completing the doctoral program. Gardner (2009) noted that supportive relationships are crucial to the overall success of the graduate students. Many participants discussed how family members were a source of encouragement and moral support that enabled them to remain focused on their studies. All participants indicated their family was integral to their success in the program. Even though they did not contribute academically, participants described that knowing they were behind them was a source of strength that allowed them to continue.

Participants also experienced supportive relationships with fellow students either

in the same cohort or who were admitted in different years. Flores-Scott & Nerad, (2012) acknowledged that fellow students are vital to attaining success in doctoral education. Gardner (2007) suggested that there is a mutual benefit for doctoral students to learn from one another and help feel connected specifically when working independently. He also advised that the ability to connect and interact with others is a necessary academic skill. Nearly all participants described having a learning environment that resulted in engagement, collaboration, and creating a safe space. Rosita's experience was that she liked being able to talk to other students who understood what she was going through. Rosita felt better about the interaction with a faculty member who failed to remember her name after discussing the incident with a peer in her course. She shared, "I felt a little better when it wasn't just my perspective and that I wasn't just being sensitive to it." She realized that it was not personal and did not let it affect how she interacted with that professor from that point forward.

Faculty members, mentors, and advisors also served as a support network to participants throughout their studies. Their role was significant because they contributed to the participant learning experience including having a person that taught them about their careers and futures. Walker et al. (2008) discussed how the relationship between advisors and graduate students were consistent with the apprenticeship model because of how the advisors teach skills and values of the profession. Participants had positive connections with faculty members, mentors, and advisors. Golde and Walker (2006) believed that these relationships are beneficial when the student is motivated to learn alongside the faculty member who guides the intellectual process.

Gardner (2009) acknowledges that psychosocial development occurs throughout

the doctoral student experience as the student gains competence in their field and establishes a professional identity. All participants described positive experiences and support systems. Victoria shared that she felt supported throughout the program and yet challenged with faculty providing her the best feedback to improve. She also appreciated that faculty were firm and structured, but also personable and approachable. Also, one of her faculty members serves as her mentor for a practicum and offers her regular feedback. She added, “he does not worry much about the little stuff but is always willing to give feedback. And, always willing to ask questions and that helps me move forward.” Nearly all participants mentioned institution wide support systems as having a positive effect on their doctoral experiences. Luisa described that during the second year of her doctoral program, she walked into her advisor’s office and shared how overwhelmed she was feeling. She added, “I remember becoming emotional, crying on the couch in her office. I recall her passing me a tissue box and letting me take time to compose myself so I could articulate how overwhelmed I was feeling about classes.” With the assistance of her advisor, Luisa was able to reduce her course load and readjust her courses to begin them further in the program which would still allow her to graduate on-time with her cohort. In addition, she recalls that her advisor offered additional supportive services available to her.

While participants were searching for purpose and personal fulfillment, they were motivated by influential forces to enroll in a doctoral program. Participants understood that they wanted a better life for themselves and for family members around them. They sought changes to their lives and wanted to do something significant or worthwhile and wanted to be able to pave the way for others behind them to find motivation to aspire for

more education. The participants have embraced their journey including the difficulties with special reflection on the adversity throughout the doctoral process. This fulfillment is deeply personal for each participant and a reflection of who they were, are, and who they are becoming. While the doctoral journey continues, personal fulfillment is ongoing. They may one day complete the degree, but self-fulfillment changes as they work towards their dreams and goals for the future after the doctoral degree.

Connections with Conceptual Framework

The study supported Schlossberg's transition theory and aspects such as the 4S Model (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). For this study, I was able to apply the Moving In and Moving Through stages to guide the research. Since the participants were still in the program, I was not able to relate the study focus and findings to the Moving Out stage. While involved in the study, participants were able to self-discover how this process shaped their identity on being Latina. The participants described their life situations and their selves as they developed resiliency. They had a new level of understanding about themselves and how hard it must be for others like them to participate in doctoral studies. Essentially, this struggle has also contributed to their success and now have a deeper understanding on how to navigate the doctoral student experience.

In the study, all the transitions described by the participants as part of "Moving In" were anticipated, triggered by influential life forces. There were some hints in their life that something was missing. Participants described their experiences prior to enrollment, including influential life forces that influenced their decision to begin the transition into a doctoral program. Participants felt it was the best time to begin the

doctoral program. Most believed the decision to enroll was positive timing for them personally and professionally. They were looking for a change in their current situation that would allow them more personal fulfillment and a better life. All participants believed that they made the decision willfully to enter the doctoral program. Each participant chose to apply to their specific program and had the opportunity to turn it down if necessary. Most accepted the right program once it became available. Making the decision to enroll in a doctoral program seemed like the best logical step for them to make in their lives. Participants were ready for the opportunity to return to learning, but now aspiring towards a doctoral degree.

While Moving Through, all participants balanced multiple roles such as wife, partner, child, employee, and mother. They were often competing with multiple demands of family, home, and work and all participants shared that there was never enough time to do it all and still make the doctoral program a priority. Previously, Kanagala et al. (2016) found that for Latino students, transitions were not linear, and students were *entre mundos*- moving back and forth among multiple worlds which can include the family, barrio/community, native country, work, peers, and spiritual world. Throughout the transition, the participants in this study found a way to manage their multiple roles by utilizing their strategies. They developed these strategies because they had to be able to manage the program and their daily lives.

This study also drew on the Hultsch and Plemons theory on life events and life span (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). The participants described their life events that had the greatest impact on their doctoral program. Life events did not appear to play a role in the onset, but clearly were present throughout their progress in the doctoral program. The life

events most often described by participants were loss of employment and health/medical reasons. The next life event most often reported was changing employment or loss of income. Following, were stressful events often related to family demands. The stressful life events that participants experienced were related to their roles as mother, daughter, wife, partner, or employee. It appeared that these daily stressors played a more critical role in the mental and emotional wellbeing of participants than more major life events that have figured more prominently in literature on adult development such as marriage, divorce, having a child, or death of a loved one.

Additionally, the study demonstrated the applicability of Yosso's model of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Participants drew on aspirational, familial, social, resistant and navigational capital wealth and carried the skills with them to provide them strength throughout the struggles of the doctoral program. Community cultural wealth looks towards more asset-based views rather than seeing deficits in underrepresented and students who are at high risk. Participants were able to utilize their cultural wealth and excel in their doctoral education.

The participants acquired cultural capital wealth through family, education, and social experiences. Some of their most valuable assets are a function of the support, love, guidance, and validation they received; they were able to transition into the doctoral program with a keen sense of self. As participants struggled there were able to tune into their cultural capital. They also knew that they were not alone in this journey in the years ahead.

Aspirational capital and familial was most prominent in this study. Aspirational capital was present when participants continued to maintain hope despite the barriers

faced while pursuing a doctoral degree. The aspirational capital was inspired by a desire of self-accomplishment and also for family pride and recognition. The strong desire for a doctoral degree influenced participants to endure extreme challenges to accomplish their goal. Some of the life events that participants have experienced included stressful events, medical events, and relationship strain.

Family support was critical in order for participants to be able to apply and enroll into a doctoral program. The support consisted of financial and emotional support. Most of the participants contended that their relationship with their family played a key role in their transition and persistence in their doctoral studies. Participants mentioned that they grew up hearing about the value of academics and education and they always believed that this was crucial to being successful.

Social capital is the ability to build connections and have relationships with others. Participants described classmates and cohort members as important since they were working towards the same goal. In addition, being in a doctoral program was often lonely since most participants realized that many outside of their university relationships cannot comprehend the lifestyle of a doctoral student. They have made a conscious effort to build their social capital since they are the only ones who understand the demands and academic expectations of being a doctoral student.

Resistant capital is the ability to fight injustices in communities of color and secure equal rights (Yosso, 2005). Participants illustrated resistant capital when they persisted in an environment that is not usually designed for their success. They have the chance to be able to increase the opportunity to have more Latina students complete their doctoral degree. Navigational capital is a strategy that participants used to navigate social

institutions including educational systems (Yosso, 2005). Most participants were the first in their family to be enrolled in a doctoral program. They had to find a way to maneuver the system in order to fund their studies. Also, they found university resources that would assist them with community and financial resources.

Kanagala et al. (2016) expanded on Yosso's model and introduced four additional forms of cultural wealth, including *ganas*/perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal. Further, Kanagala et al. (2016) identified Latino/a cultural wealth as *ventajas* (assets or personal resources) and *conocimientos* (knowledge or awareness through life experiences). In addition, they uncovered an additional form or capital that is relevant to the findings. *Ganas* or perseverant wealth was displayed when participants refused to quit in the face of obstacles. They also recognized and embraced the sacrifices of all their family members, especially their parents, for being able to enroll in a doctoral program. Study participants also shared additional challenges which are specific to the Latinx community including immigration or undocumented family members, poverty, and attending schools that lacked resources.

This qualitative phenomenological study documents the experiences, challenges, and life events that Latina doctoral students face while pursuing a doctoral degree. The primary research question addressed the experiences faced by the Latinas as they transition in and through doctoral studies, and what supports and strategies do they report needing. The experiences of nine Latina doctoral students were explored using several data collection methods, including two separate semi-structured interviews designed to address the research questions, pre-interview questionnaire, a critical incident reflection, and the researcher's journal.

Analysis of data from the nine participants was guided by Douglass and Moustaka's (1985) theory for analyzing data in phenomenological studies. Four themes emerged from the analysis and included: a) wanting to make a change, b) transitioning into the program, c) encountering life events and challenges, and coping strategies and resources. In addition, study findings were interpreted using a conceptual framework encompassing Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) and Yosso's model of community cultural wealth (2005). Complementing Schlossberg's theory, the study also drew on understanding of life events with a primary emphasis of Hultsch and Plemons (1979) on life events and life span development theory.

A review of the literature revealed that researchers have determined that Latinas continue to be underrepresented in doctoral programs which may be influenced by the cultural notions of *marianismo* and *familismo* which put the needs of the family first before their own. A dominant message throughout the study was that the participants had to continue to uphold their familial roles and expectations regardless of beginning a doctoral program. *Familismo* was evident as the woman reported that they were struggling with being able to maintain balance because of their responsibilities as a doctoral student, family member, and at times employment. The participants reported that they have faced personal sacrifices such as prioritizing the needs of the family over their own regardless of their goal of completing the doctorate. An additional finding was that those who were not married and did not have any children faced the pressure of finding a husband and having children. Also, the participants who were wives and mothers faced additional pressure to fulfill simultaneous roles while trying to engage in their doctoral studies.

Participants also described that they had the expectation of *marianismo* and had to take a submissive role to uphold the familial responsibilities and roles. In the Latina culture, there are traditional gender roles in the family where women take on the roles of wife and mother. It is an obligation to fulfill the needs of the family and give the family the respect or *respeto*. Gonzalez-Ramos et al. (1998), discuss the cultural value of *respeto* which emphasizes obedience and dictates that children should be highly considerate of adults without any arguments or interruptions. Traditionally *respeto* begins at an early age and is the foundation for the way children respect their parents, as well as other family members and elders. The Latina doctoral student has a vast number of responsibilities and with that they play different roles in their everyday lives. The findings suggest that participants have an active role as student, but sometimes that role takes a backseat to the primary role in their lives which are wife, mother, daughter, sister, partner, etc. When this occurred, the Latina participants experienced stress and frustration especially when they were not able to satisfy everyone at the same time. At times, while they were assisting the family, they felt as if they were letting themselves down because of not being able to stay focused on the doctoral program.

Another dominant message is that the participants experienced stress that affected their well-being and led to a feeling of discomfort and tension. One factor of the stress was financial worries when they were trying to figure out a way to pay for the doctoral program. Another factor of stress was when they described feeling lonely or isolated since no one else in their family knew what they were going through and how to best support them other than providing motivation from the sidelines. Some participants also described having self-doubt with pursuing the doctorate and questioned whether it

was worth the time, effort, and money.

The next message in this study was that social support was important in terms of keeping the Latina student motivated and inspired to continue. The participants displayed resilience which came from support from friends, family, and faculty members. Also, the participants sought out other Latinas or other women of color in their respective programs. Some found it easier to achieve because there was already a small group established within their cohort or program which focused on their group identity. Others were able to find support systems elsewhere such as other mentors, faculty members, or friends.

Participants sought out this journey because they wanted to have a voice and a seat at the table to be able to add to research or literature on Latina women. While there have been some who have studied Latinas in a doctoral program, this current study expands the literature by highlighting the experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs in central Texas where many Latinx live. Participants also were united in the fact that they wanted to achieve this milestone not only for themselves, but for other women like them. They wanted to advance research to help other Latinas who were pursuing degrees.

Recommendations

The findings of this study support previous research and highlight recommendations for practitioners and institutions of higher education to support Latinas in the educational pursuit of the doctoral degree. Participants shared their experiences and challenges that future Latina students may encounter throughout the doctoral program. These findings support the need for stronger institutional support systems for doctoral students who have multiple commitments and obligations and play additional roles in

addition to that of doctoral student. Institutions can develop support programs to assist with the transition of Latinas into the doctoral program and support their unique experiences.

First, there should be more of an integration of the family unit with the institution of higher education. The role of the university should be reframed to be complementary rather than adversarial to the home unit since both settings are crucial for the development of the Latina doctoral student. Doctoral programs faculty and administrators may also learn to acknowledge the role that family plays in the lives of the Latina doctoral student and may want to begin organizing family-oriented events where families can learn more about the university. There should be more communication for families whose first language is not English to help them be more aware of the demands and expectations of a doctoral student including learning more about the requirements of completing the degree including, coursework, pre-dissertation work, presentations, meeting with faculty, and completing the dissertation. The family needs a better understanding on how the Latina doctoral student will progress in the program. Also, it may help to have other cohorts and family members sharing their experiences and how it affected them and how they were able to overcome the demands, expectations, and challenges.

Second, institutions should look more closely at the academic socialization of the Latina doctoral student. The socialization can occur with faculty members, staff, or students that are in the later stages of the program. Socialization is imperative because it allows the doctoral student to learn about their environment which includes goals and values of the program. Latina doctoral students can develop the skills and knowledge that

is necessary for her to have positive academic socialization which may lead to more success in the doctoral program. In addition, there should also be opportunities for faculty to work with Latina students and provide mentoring as soon as they begin the program. Latina doctoral students should conduct research with her faculty member to assist with planning the dissertation process from the beginning of entry into the program.

Also, universities should have more funding for projects and incentives and increased funding for fellowships and graduate assistantships. There should be targeted efforts to improve financial aid including scholarships and grants to recruit and retain Latinas. Additionally, there should members from the following list of organizations that meet with a group of Latina students to offer scholarships for Latina and Latinx students which include the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and La Unidad Latina Foundation. Since most of the financial support is for undergraduate and master's degrees, an additional recommendation is to increase the awareness within the organizations for financial support of doctoral students.

In addition, policymakers should consider reaching out to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) to help broaden the path for Latina doctoral students. Since HSIs are eligible for Title V grants they can expand educational opportunities by assisting with development of faculty, academic programs, and student support services. The state and federal level representatives could offer up more resources to these HSIs to target Latinas interested in graduate study. Since community colleges are often important to the Latina pathway, it may also be important to begin reaching out to Latina students at the community college level to introduce the idea of attending a doctoral program in the future.

Next, universities should also understand what organizations and resources are available that promote diversity and honor Latina values to be able to refer their students. They can provide and encourage Latina doctoral students to join professional organizations such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, Association of Latino Professionals for America, American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, or similar organizations particular to their field of study. The Latina doctoral student will invest in her own professional development and feel empowered to complete the doctoral program.

Following, administrators, leaders, and faculty in the doctoral program would benefit from attending cultural workshops that explain the concept of *familismo* and *marianismo*. They need to understand the roles these principles play in the development of the Latina doctoral student and how she will look to them to overcome the various hurdles of the doctoral program. In general, there should also be more workshops for faculty including supporting graduate students and their families, graduate students with children, first generation, etc.

Finally, the findings of the study suggest that Latina doctoral students will benefit from programs addressing their mental health and emotional needs. Universities can offer support groups on psychoeducational topics to provide a safe space for Latina doctoral students to learn about healthy coping and allow for validation of their experiences. Universities need to improve the ways in which Latina doctoral students learn of supportive resources and how to access them. These supportive services may include counseling services, student organizations, peers, and faculty. Supportive resources will most likely improve the transition into the doctoral program which may lead to a better

sense of belonging and connectedness to the university. Beyond that, faculty and members of the university can encourage Latina doctoral students to appreciate how important it is for them to take care of themselves as they pursue their studies. Universities have an ideal opportunity of promoting mental health awareness events such as Mental Health Awareness Month, Mental Wellness Month, and Stress Awareness Month.

Future Research

The topic of the experiences of Latina doctoral students as they transition in and through the doctoral studies is an essential area in doctoral education that would benefit from additional research. This study is a start, and it serves to create an opportunity for further exploration into many aspects of successful doctoral programs for Latina doctoral students. The sample was intentionally limited in this study and expanding the size of the sample in future studies will help to determine if similar experiences emerge as consistent from a larger or broader sample. In addition, given that this current study was conducted using purposeful sampling from five universities, future studies could include a larger number of universities from different regions, especially those where more Latinas live. Future research could also provide more information about Latina doctoral students in different disciplines.

This study also explored the perceptions and experiences of the support and strategies that Latina doctoral students reported needing. Future research should examine how universities determine programming to facilitate support systems and strategies for successful completion of the doctoral program. It may also be helpful to study Latina doctoral students at each stage of the transition as they are progressing through doctoral

studies. This way, it may allow them to fully recall all events that occurred throughout their transition.

Looking ahead, there could be many ways to improve research to examine the magnitude of life events impacting Latina doctoral students, such as using Holmes and Rahe's (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) technique of categorizing, where participants can assign a rating for the life events they may experience while in the doctoral program. Participants' perception of events based on their own experiences may differ from what a researcher learns in the research study. For example, the life event may be categorized into major, minor, and no event since not all transitions involve major life events.

Future research could also build on what we have learned about students and how COVID-19 has impacted their doctoral experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that more attention should be focused on the mental health and stress of the doctoral students particularly when faced with life events. There is a wider need to educate doctoral students about how to cope with stressors such as attempting to achieve work/life balance, financial worries, and time management. Universities may offer education programs on positive health strategies and effective ways to reduce and prevent stress or serious mental health programs associated with being a doctoral student. Students should also be able to access counseling on campus or virtually and be able to schedule an appointment quickly without barriers or delays.

Study Challenges

This section serves to identify and explain the tensions and challenges that occurred while conducting this research. The first challenge encountered during the study was recruiting research participants. Many potential participants expressed interest, but

due to overwhelming schedules could not commit to the study. I realize now that the Latina doctoral students I hoped to recruit were overextended. I should have made myself more familiar to the participants, or perhaps included some incentive for participation. Seeing an email from me, was simply another thing on their plate to accomplish. It was easier to express interest because of the topic, but due to the demands on their schedules, they sometimes decided to pass it up rather than scheduling an interview.

In addition, all participants had recently completed the first year of their doctoral program, but it may have been useful to have some participants that were in the beginning stages possibly first or second semester, as well as some at the candidacy and dissertation phases of the doctoral process. Such a study could have allowed for a nuanced understanding of students at different stages of the program. It appeared that the Latina doctoral students in the study often spoke about the previous semesters or years, and it may have improved their recollection if they were at that stage in the program.

The interviews took place during the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, participants were focused on their own safety and well-being and limited outside activities. Also, the universities that the participants attended were all conducting online learning and teaching. Participants were able to share experiences of their doctoral program but had already acclimated to online work. I came to recognize that most students shared stories of attempting to balance their lives, stress, and fatigue which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Finally, conducting videoconference interviews presented some challenges including internet connections that affected the quality of the participants' video and audio. At times, certain words were muffled when replaying an audio recording. Also,

some participants who had accents posed a challenge with the transcription. Some participants spoke Spanish when they were uncomfortable with how to best answer the question. Even though I am a Spanish speaker, I am wondering if some words were lost in translation.

Reflections on the Dissertation Journey

I began this research because I was interested in learning more about the life events faced by Latina doctoral students that impact their progression in a doctoral program. Mostly, I wanted to find ways that institutions of higher learning can support and retain Latina doctoral students. It was important because I wanted to see other Latina doctoral students enroll and hopefully complete their degrees. I aspire to change the number of Latina doctoral students and I would like to make a difference in my community. After working in higher education for more than 17 years, I still yearned for a better understanding about this population and how to find ways to support them during their transition and completion of doctoral studies. I was able to learn about the motivation and strength the participants possessed along with their ultimate commitment to making a change in their lives to improve their family and financial situation. I was honored to hear their experiences of struggle, turmoil, and sadness and yet, hear how they were able to find a way through and to find the light at the end of the tunnel. The participants opened their hearts and souls, and I was inspired to write their journey along with mine. As I interviewed them, they not only graciously offered their time and service, but they also provided encouragement telling me that I could finish. I found that we shared similar life stories and culture. They instilled in me the need to push forward and persist as they have done in their own journeys.

Because of this research study, I was able to learn more about Latina doctoral students and how motivated they are because of family, purpose, and a future career. I learned their stories on resilience regardless of challenges inside and outside of the classroom. I feel that I have become a better educator and counselor after hearing their experiences. The search for answers has guided me to more questions about the Latina doctoral student. I want to continue conducting research with this population and learn more about how best to support them. I want to contribute to the field of Latinx adult students in doctoral programs. In my current role, I hope to assist the needs of community college students and look forward to future study. I am grateful to this study, the participants, and my own support network that has aided me in completion of this research study. Hopefully, study findings will provide understandings for universities and practitioners to find ways to better serve Latina doctoral students and become a platform for future research to assist women pursuing a doctoral degree.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section of the dissertation proposal aims to provide clarification to the reader and facilitate understanding of the following list of terms and operational definition used throughout the document.

Adult student: a student who is 25 years or older (American Council on Education, 2005).

Familismo: the collective orientation in which family members are more oriented toward the needs of the family unit rather than to that of specific individuals (Landale & Oropesa, 2007).

Latina: Refers to females of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or Spanish culture or origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Latinx: A more gender inclusive term that pushes against a binary application of Latina/o. (Rodriguez, et al., 2018).

Hispanic/Latino/Latina: a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Machismo: a social construct that refers to standards of behavior in Latino males which includes masculine force or aggressive tendencies (Arciniega et al., 2008).

Marianismo: the concept in which women in the family will sacrifice needs and wants without hesitation and acts like servants to other members in the family (Falicov, 1998; Stevens, 1973; Sy, 2006).

Self-directed learning: process of learning through which individuals engage, with or without assistance from others, in determining individual learning needs, developing goals, identifying resources, implementing strategies and assessing learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975).

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

To:

From: a_f145@txstate.edu Andrea Flores,

MBA, MS BCC:

Subject: Research Participation Invitation: The Latina Doctoral Student Experience

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This research study will examine the experiences of Latina students enrolled in a doctorate program. The study will seek information about life events that led to you deciding to enroll in a doctoral program, life events or challenges you have encountered since enrolling and the factors helping you to persist in completing your degree. The information learned from this study will contribute to a better understanding of how to assist and support Latina doctoral students towards completion.

You are invited to participate in the study because you:

- Are at least 25 years of age
- Have self-identified as a woman
- Have self-identified as Latina, Hispanic, Mexican, or other Latin American descent
- Have been enrolled in a doctoral program for at least a year

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep your personal information private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. If you decide to participate, you will be assigned a pseudonym to retain confidentiality in this study.

If you choose to participate, you will first complete a pre-interview questionnaire (15 minutes) and return it by email. Next, there will be an initial interview of 60-90 minutes and a follow-up interview of 60 minutes conducted virtually using videoconferencing or phone calls. You will also be asked to write a brief written reflection on an event that happened during your educational journey (estimated time 30-45 minutes). At the follow-up interview, you will also have an opportunity to respond to my interpretations of your first interview, sent to you in advance. The interviews will take place via Zoom videoconference and will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only. The estimated maximum time commitment is 3.5 hours.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. There are no incentives to participate, but your participation can provide educators and administrators with insight into the experiences of adult Latina students enrolled in a doctoral program.

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact Andrea Flores, a_f145@txstate.edu.

This project 7415 was approved by the Texas State IRB. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Specialist 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

APPENDIX C

PRESCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions will be listed in Qualtrics. Please answer each question to the best of your ability. You are free to skip any question you may feel that is not relevant or uncomfortable to answer. All answers will be kept confidential.

1. First name
2. Current age
3. What type of degree are you pursuing? (e.g. Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.)?
4. How many semesters have you attended courses in your doctoral program?
5. What was your age during the first year of doctoral study?
6. Are you a first-generation college student?
7. How do you identify in terms of gender?
8. How do you identify in terms of race/ethnicity?
9. Do you currently have a spouse or partner?
10. Do you have any dependent children living with you? If yes, how many? _____
What are their ages? _____
11. Are you enrolled full-time _____ or part-time _____?
12. Are you employed? Full-time _____ or part-time _____?
13. What is the best way to contact you for an interview? _____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW ONE SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Please describe your doctoral experience, including your experiences and life events, perceptions of the program, challenges, support systems, and any significant moments that stand out for you.

1. Tell me a little more about yourself.
2. Are there any family members that live with you? How often do you see your extended family?
3. How involved is your family in your doctoral experiences?
4. What are some of the things that were going on in your life that contributed to your decision to begin a doctoral program at this time?
5. What strategies did you use in locating and deciding on a program?
6. How prepared did you feel to begin the program?
7. What sources of support helped you to begin the program?
8. How has being in the doctoral program led you to alter your lifestyle or roles?
9. Please describe a typical day in your life as a student from morning to night.
10. What sacrifices have you or those around you made to be here at this point?
11. How do you think your experiences as a doctoral student may have been impacted by your identity as a Latina?
12. Please tell me about one or two things that happened along the way which you think favorably impacted your progress as a student?
13. Can you tell me about one or two of the challenging experiences that you have had along the way so far in your doctoral program?
14. Who would you say has helped you succeed long the way? This can be people either within or outside the institution.
15. What strategies have you used to keep going when continuing has seemed difficult?
16. What do you wish you knew before starting the program?

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Thank you again for agreeing to do a follow-up interview. I previously provided you a summary of my interpretations for the first interview by email. To begin with, I would now like to take this opportunity to ask for your feedback.

1. Do you generally feel I captured the essence of your interview?
2. Would you like to make any clarifications, corrections, additions, or offer any other feedback on the content of the summary?

Critical Incident:

As we move along, I wanted to thank you for taking the opportunity to review the prompt for the critical incident. I appreciate you sending it to me.

OR

Before we begin the interview, I wanted to come back to the critical incident description. Given you did not have the opportunity to send it back before this meeting, we can complete it together orally before we begin the rest of the interview.

1. Next, we are moving into the second interview. Is there anything you thought about that you wanted to add from the first interview?
2. Has anything changed regarding your current doctoral experience since we talked that you think is relevant to your conversation?
3. How did you believe this degree would affect your life and those around you?
4. How has your decision to enroll in a doctoral program affected those around you?
5. In looking back, what do you think about your timing in beginning a doctoral program?
6. In general, how would you describe your educational experience so far?
7. Can you tell me about something that happened along the way that may have led you to question your decision to pursue a doctorate degree?
 - a. What was going on at that time?
 - b. What led you to continue rather than stopping?
8. What has been your experience with faculty members or mentors in your doctoral program and institution?
9. What recommendations do you have for programs, departments, universities, etc. about how to best support Latina doctoral students?
10. If you could change anything about your doctoral experience, what would it be?
11. What advice would you give to future Latina doctoral students?

[These are additional questions to ask if any participant mentions stopping out in response to Question 7 above].

1. How did you feel about leaving?
2. Do you think you being a Latina woman had any bearing on your decision to leave? If yes, please discuss how.
3. What is the reason you chose to return to continue?

Thank you again for your participation in this study. Please feel free to contact me if you have anything else you would like to share.

APPENDIX F

CRITICAL INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

Please take a moment to reflect on an experience that has been meaningful and impactful to you during your doctoral student experience. See the picture of the experience in your mind. As you describe the experience, please be as detailed as possible and include the following:

- a. Tell me about a particularly memorable experience or event that occurred in your life while you were enrolled in a doctoral program. Please describe your main recollections of the experience, including the setting and people involved.
- b. Tell me about people involved?
- c. Tell me about anyone who assisted you through the doctoral program?
- d. Please feel free to add any other details of the experience.

Now that you have reflected and described the experience in detail, please add the following:

1. What feelings and emotions are associated with the experience?
2. How do you believe this experience has changed you?
3. What made the experience more impactful than other experiences?

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: The Latina Doctoral Student Experience

Principal Investigator: Andrea Flores
Email: a_fl45@txstate.edu

Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Clarena Larrotta
Faculty Co-Researcher:
Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon
Email: jross-gordon@txstate.edu

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about your experiences as a doctoral student. In particular, the study will seek information about your reasons for deciding to enroll in a doctoral program, any life events or challenges, and the reason you continue to persist to complete your degree. You are being asked to participate because you meet the following criteria:

- Are at least 25 years of age
- Have self-identified as a woman
- Have self-identified as Latina, Hispanic, Mexican, or other Latin American descent
- Have been enrolled in a doctoral program for at least a year

PROCEDURES

Agreeing to take part of this study will require participating in the following activities:

- Pre-interview questionnaire with a few demographic questions (15 minutes)
- Initial interview regarding your experiences entering and navigating PhD studies as well as life events, challenges, and factors that have enabled you to continue to persist toward completing your degree (60-90 minutes)
- Complete a written reflection on a key life event that has impacted your entry or progression in PhD studies (30-45 minutes)
- Follow-up interview to discuss your reflection on key events. This interview will also serve to clarify and discuss information and topics that emerged during the first interview (45-60 minutes).

The estimated time commitment is approximately 3.5 hours. The interviews will take place via Zoom videoconference and will be audio recorded for

transcription purposes only.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

The only foreseeable or anticipated risk for this study is the emotions that may arise from the participant's experiences navigating the PhD studies, which is an extremely minimal risk for this study. If the participants feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions in the interview sessions, they will be offered the option to decline to answer or to opt out of participation at any time. If participants feel discomfort after participating in the interviews for the study, they will be advised to contact the University Health Services for counseling services at their respective universities. The researcher will assist participants in locating this information if necessary.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There will be no direct benefit from participating in this study although participants might find it personally rewarding to share their stories. Study findings will assist educators and administrators to gain insight on the experiences of adult Latina students enrolled in a doctoral program, and possibly to identify programmatic supports. Thus, the study may aid future Latina adult students to persist in doctoral programs. The information gathered from this study will be used to contribute to a better understanding of how to assist and support Latina doctoral students towards completion.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the participants' data private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in the questionnaire and interview responses will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with participants' permission or as required by law. No keys with identifiable information will be kept. The participants' names or the specific name of their affiliated organization will not be used in any written reports or publications, which result from this research. All data including interview recordings, questionnaire responses, transcripts, and interview will be stored and secured on the Texas State University backed-up and password-protected file sharing system, Shared Drive. Once data is secured in the password-protected Shared Drive system, all data stored on the computer will be destroyed. The primary investigator will keep all sets of data secured on the password-protected Shared Drive system for three years. After three years, all data in the Shared Drive system will be destroyed. The primary investigator (Andrea Flores) and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid or compensated in any way for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Andrea Flores, by email at a_f145@txstate.edu

This project 7415 was approved by the Texas State IRB. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project will be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses.

Printed Name of Study
Participant

Signature of Study
Participant

Date

Participant Signature
Authorizes the use of audio recording

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX H

MATRIX SHOWING ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PREPARED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview One

Background	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me a little more about yourself. 2. Are there any family members that live with you? How often do you see your extended family? (Familial capital) 3. How involved is your family in your doctoral experiences? (Familial capital).
Research Question 1 What life events influenced participant decisions to begin the transition into a doctoral program?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some of the things that were going on in your life that contributed to your decision to begin a doctoral program at this time? 2. What strategies did you use in locating and deciding on a program? (Navigational capital) 3. How prepared did you feel to begin the program? 4. What sources of support helped you to begin the program? (Navigational/social capital)
Research Question 2 How do participants describe themselves and their life situations as they have engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How has being in the doctoral program led you to alter your lifestyle or roles? 2. Please describe a typical day in your life as a student from morning to night. 3. What sacrifices have you or those around you made to be here at this point? (social capital) 4. How do you think your experiences as a doctoral student may have been impacted by your identity as a Latina? (Resistant capital)
Research Question 3 What life events impacted participants' progression in their doctoral program, either positively or negatively?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please tell me about one or two things that happened along the way which you think favorably impacted your progress as a student? (Navigational) 2. Can you tell me about one or two of the challenging experiences that you have had along the way so far in your doctoral program?

Research Question 4 What supports and strategies do participants report needing as they encounter impactful life events during the course of their doctoral studies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who would you say has helped you succeed long the way? This can be people either within or outside the institution. (Social capital) 2. What strategies have you used to keep going when continuing has seemed difficult? (Navigational capital) 3. What do you wish you knew before starting the program?
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Follow-up Interview

Member Check	<p>I previously provided you a summary of my interpretations for the first interview by email. I would now like to take this opportunity to ask for your feedback.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you generally feel I captured the essence of your interview? 2. Would you like to make any clarifications, corrections, additions, or offer any other feedback on the content of the summary?
Follow-up to Interview One	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there anything you thought about that you wanted to add from the first interview? 2. Has anything changed regarding your current doctoral experience since we talked that you think is relevant to your conversation?
Research Question 1 What life events influenced participant decisions to begin the transition into a doctoral program?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you believe this degree would affect your life and those around you? (Aspirational capital) 2. How has your decision to enroll in a doctoral program affected those around you?
Research Question 2 How do participants describe themselves and their life situations as they have engaged in the transition through their doctoral studies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In looking back, what do you think about your timing in beginning a doctoral program? 2. In general, how would you describe your educational experience so far?

<p>Research Question 3</p> <p>What life events impacted participants' progression in their doctoral program, either positively or negatively?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about something that happened along the way that may have led you to question your decision to pursue a doctorate degree? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What was going on at that time? b. What led you to continue rather than stopping? (Aspirational/Resistant capital)
<p>Research Question 4</p> <p>What supports and strategies do participants report needing as they encounter impactful life events during the course of their doctoral studies?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What has been your experience with faculty members or mentors in your doctoral program and institution? (Social capital) 2. What recommendations do you have for programs, departments, universities, etc. about how to best support Latina doctoral students? (Navigational) 3. If you could change anything about your doctoral experience, what would it be? (Navigational) 4. What advice would you give to future Latina doctoral students?
<p>Other</p>	<p>[These are additional questions to ask if any participant mentions stopping out in response to Question 3.1 above].</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you feel about leaving? 2. Do you think you being a Latina woman had any bearing on your decision to leave? If yes, please discuss how. 3. What is the reason you chose to return to continue?

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