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PUERTO RICAN WOMEN IN PURSUIT OF THE PHD:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERSISTENCE

by

CYNDIA MORALES
B.A. SUNY Binghamton, 2006
M.A. St. John's University, 2008

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational and Human Sciences
in the College of Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Major Professor: Rosa Cintrón

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon of Puerto Rican women who have achieved a Ph.D. degree. The researcher utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the social aspects that influenced Puerto Rican women to persist in their doctoral programs. Due to the national pool of potential participants, interviews were conducted with Puerto Rican women using video chat software. The researcher utilizes 5 tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the framework for this study, in an effort to address the varying aspects that contribute to the persistence of Puerto Rican women in graduate study, despite the challenges often cited in the literature as deterrents to academic achievement. The participants' experiences are examined on an individual, interactional, and institutional level, in order to gain insight into their persistence. This study captures the stories of Puerto Rican women raised in the mainland U.S. as well as those raised on the island itself. Ultimately, this study addresses two main gaps in the literature: (1) research is lacking on Latinas who are successful in higher education, and (2) traditional research tends to describe Latino/a academic achievement as a collective, with little attention given to the cultural distinctions of Latino subgroups in their educational trajectories.

Those who know me, know that I did this for three reasons: my parents, my island, and my 'hood. This is for my mother and father, Dr. Luisa Nieves-Morales and Dr. Ernesto Morales, whom although did not achieve a doctorate degree, are experts of love and integrity. My achievement is their achievement. This is for my beautiful island of Puerto Rico. I am proud to be the daughter of such a strong, prodigious culture and history. This is for Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn- the streets that raised and shaped me. You all were my motivation and to you I owe my success.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

According to the 2010 Census, 308.7 million people resided in the United States, of which 50.5 million were of Hispanic or Latino origin. Latinas/os comprise the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the United States, representing 16 percent of the population in 2010, up from 13 percent in 2000 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). The Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million (43 percent) between 2000 and 2010. Puerto Ricans, the second largest Latino subgroup (representing 9 percent of the total Latino population), grew by 36 percent between 2000 and 2010, increasing from 3.4 million to 4.6 million (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011).

Although the U.S. Latina/o population continues to experience tremendous growth, the educational attainment of Latinas/os lags far behind the national average. *The U.S. Female Educational Pipeline by Race: 2000* revealed that among 100 Latinas who begin elementary school, a little more than half will graduate from high school, 11 will receive a college degree, and less than one of the original 100 will complete a doctoral degree (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). To contextualize this finding, the same report indicated that among 100 females in other racial and ethnic categories, 0.3 African American, 0.4 Native American, 0.6 White, and 1.4 Asian American females will complete a doctoral degree. In order to fully comprehend the underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education, it is critical to examine their trajectories throughout the

educational pipeline (K-12) according to their situational context (Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solórzano, 2006).

Unfortunately, traditional research has tended to collectively describe the disparities Latinas/os face in schooling with little attention given to the cultural distinctions of Latino subgroups in their educational trajectories. More research is necessary in order to understand the varying experiences of Latino subgroups in their educational pursuits. This examination is especially critical with regard to the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S., given the unique political status held by members of this subgroup that is not shared by members of other Latino subgroups. Although the Jones Act of 1917 established that all Puerto Ricans are born citizens of the United States, Puerto Ricans tend to rank lowest in educational attainment when compared to that of other Latino subgroups (Maldonado, 2006). These trends hold regardless of gender; however, the current study will specifically illustrate the experiences of Puerto Rican women.

Puerto Rican, low-income, urban girls comprise one of the groups most negatively impacted by the unequal nature of schooling achievement and opportunity in the U.S. (Dow, 2007). Puerto Rican girls are less likely to finish high school, attend post-secondary education, and obtain a college degree than their White, African American, or Asian American counterparts (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002, Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Despite the troubling statistics about the educational achievement of Puerto Rican girls despite their long presence in United States schools (Nieto, 2000), there is a dearth of research that focuses on their perspectives and that reveals the details

of their educational experiences. The current study addresses this deficiency in the literature and presents the experiences of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs through an examination of social context and its impact on graduate education.

For the purposes of clarity, although the focus of this study is Puerto Rican women, the terms *Latina/o*, *Hispanic*, and *Chicana/o* will also be referenced when reviewing the work of previous authors. Such terms are used interchangeably in the literature when speaking of Latina/o subgroups as a collective and are used when referencing preceding works. However, when necessary to generalize, *Latina/o* is the preferred collective term in this study, defined as referring to people with roots in Latin America (Beam, 2009). The term *Hispanic* is not used outside of referencing others' work, as it refers to people whose culture and heritage have ties to Spain (Hispanic, 2013), negating the indigenous and African influences of the culture. *Chicana/o* is defined as a person of Mexican descent, born and residing in the United States, who possesses a political consciousness of himself or herself as a member of a historically and structurally oppressed group (Rinderle, 2005). This study does not provide an in-depth exploration of the political, historical, and social dimensions of these labels; authors such as Gracia (2000) have provided in-depth discussions of such identity terminology.

Although the Puerto Rican experience is usually included in discussions regarding *Latinos* and *Hispanics* in higher education, the totality of such discussions may not be applicable to Puerto Ricans. Therefore, although Chicana and Puerto Rican women may share similar experiences in academia, the contexts of their situations differ geographically and politically. Nevertheless, a broad understanding of Latinos in higher

education is necessary, but only as a means to target more detailed circumstances. The specificity of these issues can not only be translated into a tangible understanding of the underrepresentation of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs, but also give way to an understanding of the aspects that contribute to a successful Puerto Rican doctorate. This knowledge can then be used to inform practices that tailor to deterrent deficiencies which hinder academic attainment for Puerto Rican women.

Latinas continue to represent the lowest percentage of female earned doctorates in the United States (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992, 2000). *The Survey of Earned Doctorates* provides insight as to female doctorate production from 2000 to 2010 in U.S. universities. According to the *2010 Survey of Earned Doctorates*, only 1,328 of 22,505 doctorates were earned by Latinas. To contextualize the numbers, 68 doctorates were awarded to American Indian women, 1,468 to Black women, 4,768 to Asian women, and 12, 789 were awarded to White women. These data provide background information and a fundamental basis to the current study. Reviewing these data supports a better understanding of the racial and ethnic breakdown of female doctorate production from 2000 to 2010 in U.S. universities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the unique situational context of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs.

Statement of the Problem

Castellanos et al. (2006), in referencing the 2002 Survey of Earned Doctorates, noted that 61 percent of doctorate recipients were White, 20 percent were Asian, and

Latinos and African Americans were tied at 5 percent each. Principles of equity would seem to suggest that all things being equal, the earning of doctorates by different race and ethnic groups should be proportional to their representation in society at large. In other words, if Latinos represented 16 percent of the population in 2010, they should also have represented 16 percent of earned doctorates that year. The pool of Latina/o PhDs has remained notably small over the last 30 years, far behind the rapid growth of the general Latina/o population (Henderson, Clarke, & Woods, 1998). Although there was an increase in Latina earned doctorates from 2000 (4.9 percent) to 2010 (5.9 percent), this increase is only slight. With the exception of Native American women, Latinas continue to represent the lowest percentage of female earned doctorates in the United States (Castellanos et al., 2006; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992, 2000).

Unfortunately, the further breakdown of that 5 percent by nationality for Latinas is limited. Of that 5 percent of total earned doctorates in 2000 earned by Latinas, most were earned by individuals in a category called "other Latina," which includes individuals self-identified as Cuban, Hispanic, or Other Hispanic. Chicanas constituted 1.6 percent of the overall total. Puerto Ricans only comprised 1.2 percent of the overall total; since this percentage includes doctorates awarded on the island of Puerto Rico itself, the number of mainland Puerto Ricans who achieve a doctorate is likely much lower. Data on Puerto Rican doctorate production almost always is inclusive of doctorates earned at universities on the island of Puerto Rico, disregarding the differences in context between island and U.S. mainland Puerto Rican women. This sort of analysis

is lacking and has been called for by researchers as highly important (Watford et al., 2006).

The current study argues that the discrepancy in Latina representation in academia is clearly reflective of the inequalities perpetuated by a dominant ideology that has handicapped minority students for generations—a pervasive set of beliefs that broadly serves the interests of the dominant class. These beliefs are then adopted by subordinate classes, who in turn are prevented from formulating any effective opposition (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). Therefore, it is critical to understand to what extent this dominant ideology has shaped both the structure of academia and the social stature of Latina/o subgroups in order to map out a “success formula” that can address the socially-constructed inequalities that continue to affect Puerto Rican women. It must be acknowledged that although several deterrent aspects (i.e. first-generation status, discrimination, financial aid, etc.) are shared across Latino subgroups, they are experienced on varying levels. It is also necessary to understand that although countless Latinas are caught in a cycle constructed by the dominant class, many manage to break that cycle and achieve a doctorate despite the elements working against them. Therefore, a thorough examination of the influences that contribute to the success of Latina doctorates is justified.

An overwhelming majority of the literature available on Latina collegiate experiences has mainly focused on why Latinas are not successful in their educational pursuits. Bettie (2003) suggested that the reason why research generally tends to highlight negative patterns and typically ignores the positive outcomes is precisely

because the positive results are exceptions to the established rule. She examined girls from working-class origins who were what she called “upwardly mobile middle class performers.” In analyzing the experiences of these “success stories,” she identified two main questions: (a) *why* are these girls exceptional and (b) *how* do they do it? Morales (2008) posited that the focus on positive and successful Hispanic students should be continued and that by exploring those who have been successful, a deeper understanding of their achievement processes can be attained. The shift in research from the so-called “failures” to the “successes” of Latinas acknowledges the need for tangible implications. Therefore, the two aforementioned questions by Bettie fuel this study, consequently addressing this shift in the literature.

When taking into account the inequalities that deprive most Puerto Rican women from attaining a doctoral degree, the notion of resilience may explain how those inequalities are often overcome. McMillan and Reed (1994) identified five factors in their concept of resiliency: (a) high educational goals, (b) support and encouragement from parents, (c) intrinsic motivation, (d) internal locus of control, and (e) high self-efficacy. Zalaquett (2005) concurred, finding family support, high value of education, and responsibility toward siblings to be vital in the academic success of Latina/o college students. Furthermore, Ceballo (2004) found (a) parents’ emphasis on higher education, (b) the establishment of autonomy, (c) nonverbal support from parents for higher education, and (d) the importance of mentors and role models to be important factors in high academic achievement. Finally, Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that some

students accredited their decision to pursue higher education to the instrumental role played by school personnel (e.g., teachers).

In the current study, the resiliency of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs is considered on both an institutional and individual level. At the institutional level, this study narrates the experiences of Puerto Rican women according to the contexts of their respective doctoral programs. At the individual level, this study refines the social characteristics that serve as positive contributions toward completion of a doctoral program. Within these levels of personal experiences, I explore the commonly identified themes of (a) family, (b) mentorship/support, and (c) identity, as they have been highlighted in the literature as playing a motivational role in Latina attainment of a doctorate degree. Although these issues may apply to other females of distinct ethnic and racial groups in higher education, the intersection of race, class, and gender is highly magnified for Puerto Rican women in comparison to other Latina subgroups, making their resilience much more impactful.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions clarify various terms used within the current study.

- *The Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (CEP)* was founded in 1973 at Hunter College (CUNY). “Centro is a research institute dedicated to the study and interpretation of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States and produces and disseminates relevant interdisciplinary research” (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2010, para. 1).

- *First-generation college student* is defined as a student for whom neither parent earned a bachelor's degree.
- *Mentoring*, as defined by Moore and Amey (1988), is a form of professional socialization whereby a more experienced (usually older) individual acts as a guide, role, model, teacher and patron of a less experienced (often younger) protégé.
- *Persistence* was described by Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, and Terenzini (2003) to refer to the progressive reenrollment in college, whether continuous from one term to the next, or temporarily interrupted and then resumed.
- *The Puerto Rican Studies Association for Research Advocacy and Education, Inc.* (PRSA) was founded in 1992 at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. Its purpose is to “bring scholars, educators, public policy experts, artists, community activists and students from diverse fields of knowledge whose work focuses on Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the United States” (PRSA, 2012, para. 1).
- *Resiliency* is defined as “the ability to cope with adversity and overcome the most challenging circumstances” (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005).
- *Self-efficacy* was defined by Bandura (1997) as is an individual's own perception of his or her ability to carry out the necessary actions to reach a certain outcome.
- *Success (or successful)*, in the academic context, is defined as having completed a doctoral program, usually through the achievement of a PhD degree.

Research Questions

The current study addresses four principal research questions in order to capture educational biographies shaping doctoral obtainment:

1. Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies?
2. What life experiences are narrated within issues of class and gender by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?
3. How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience?
4. Are issue of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?

Significance of the Study

Studies on the academic progress of Latinas/os are imperative. Latinas/os are currently represent the largest ethnic minority group in the country; furthermore, predictions assert a steady increase in decades to come, designating the success of this ethnic group as fundamental to the overall economic well-being of the U.S. Sufficient evidence has indicated that America cannot become the world leader in college degrees by 2020 or have the globally competitive workforce of the future without a tactical plan for increasing Latino college completion (Santiago, 2011). To disregard the call of this research agenda would yield a drastic, negative outcome in the near future.

The significance of the current study is justified by three major reasons. First, the Latino population is growing rapidly and will make up a greater percent of the U.S. population by 2020 (Santiago, 2011). More research is necessary in order to identify the influences that promote the professional preparation of this growing ethnic group, as the overall well-being of the country is subsequently dependent on its success. The second reason for significance is that few studies focus solely on the experiences of Latinas in graduate education (Gandara, 1982, 1995, 1996; Reyes & Rios, 2005); even fewer studies specifically examine Latinas in doctoral programs (Achor & Morales, 1990; Flores, 1988; Gonzalez, 2006). Finally, the literature that is available specifically focuses mostly on the Chicana experience in doctoral programs. The experiences of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs, a different subgroup with a distinctive collective history, have yet to be thoroughly examined.

Although Chicana and Puerto Rican women share similar oppressive experiences, geographic and political differences must be acknowledged. In the U.S., the Mexican population is prevalent in the West, while the Puerto Rican population has established itself primarily in the East. This fact serves as sufficient reason to scrutinize a possible difference in the understanding of societal functions and trends. Most importantly, the political statuses of these two groups in the U.S. are significantly different, as Puerto Ricans have been considered citizens since 1918, while segments of the Mexican population are not citizens by proxy. Gracia (2000) cleverly asked, "What do Chicanos, Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, and so on have in common?" He answers his own question by stating that the Hispanic/Latino community in the United

States does not share commonalities and that in actuality, further divisions can be made among subgroups themselves. Although this study does not support the idea that Latino subgroups share nothing in common, it does recognize that distinctions are necessary to retrieve the most accurate information about similarities and differences. For these reasons, this study will solely explore the experiences of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) first appeared in the realm of Critical Legal Studies in U.S. law schools in the 1980s. In its original form, CRT examined the intersection of race, law, and power. It proposes that White supremacy and racial power are maintained over time (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). CRT is now translated into various fields of study, most notably in the social sciences and education.

CRT in educational research centers the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of oppression manifest in the educational experiences of people of color (Huber, 2010). Daniel Solórzano (1997, 1998) identified five tenets of CRT in education, which are used to guide this study: (a) intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, (b) challenge to dominant ideology; (c) commitment to social justice, (d) Centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) interdisciplinary perspective.

The first tenet, intercentricity, asserts that race and racism are pervasive and permanent. It also integrates race and racism, while focusing on the intersections of

racism with other forms of subordination. The second tenet, challenging the dominant ideology, addresses the traditional claims of the educational system, such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race theorists argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Calmore, 1992; Solórzano, 1997). The third tenet, commitment to social justice, challenges individuals to visualize social justice as the fight to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination while empowering groups that have been subordinated (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The fourth tenet, centrality of experiential knowledge, is legitimate and appropriate, as well as critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. CRT in education views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experiences of students of color by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, and narratives (Olivas, 1990). The fifth, and last tenet, acknowledges the strength drawn from multiple disciplines, epistemologies, and research designs (Scheurich & Young, 1997). CRT in education challenges traditional, mainstream ideologies by analyzing racism and other forms of subordination in educational, historical, and interdisciplinary terms (Garcia, 1995; Olivas, 1990).

Latina Critical Race Theory

A secondary conceptual framework for this study is that of Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which is essentially a theoretical branch extending from Critical Race

Theory (CRT). LatCrit examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit can be used to reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging the Latina/o experience with issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. Thus, LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the specific experiences of Latinas/os through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The specific relationships between the proposed research questions of the current study and the combined theoretical framework, both CRT and LatCrit, are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationship of Research Questions to Theoretical Framework

Research Questions	Theoretical Framework
1. Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies?	Race, Racism, Color-blindness
2. What life experiences are narrated within issues of class and gender by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?	Race, Racism, Dominant ideology, Meritocracy, Color-blindness, Neutrality
3. How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience?	Experiential knowledge, Meritocracy
4. Are issues of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Ricans in doctoral programs?	Social justice, Equal opportunity

Response to Duplicate Work

Exactly one month after my dissertation proposal defense, I attended a dissertation writing workshop at the University of South Florida (USF). During a brief conversation with a doctoral student from another institution, I became aware of the dissertation work, *A Narrative Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates*, which was published in 2010. I had not come across this work during my extensive review of the research beforehand, but I instantly knew that I had to report this new finding and incorporate it into my current work.

My initial reaction was of mixed emotions. At first, I became concerned that this previous work would mirror my current work too closely, but fortunately that feeling did not last too long. I then realized that although similarities between the two works would definitely occur, significant differences were bound to exist as well. As a result, I

thoroughly reviewed selected segments of the dissertation, including the (a) research questions, (b) theoretical framework, (c) methods incorporated to carry out the study, (d) final sample of participants, and (e) recommendations made by the researcher. I will now explain how Rapp's (2010) work differs from my current dissertation work.

In terms of theoretical framework, Rapp (2010) utilized a phenomenological framework, whereas I have utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which has shaped my research questions to address the five tenets of CRT in education. As for the specific research questions, Rapp (2010) posed two general questions related to Puerto Rican doctoral graduates. On the other hand, the research questions in the current study are much more specific, targeting particular concepts. A comparison between the two sets of research questions is located in Appendix H.

The methodology incorporated by Rapp (2010) appeared much more exploratory in nature. She conducted two interviews with the participants of her study, as well as an analysis of books and articles. She described the first interview as "a detailed discussion about what they experienced during the doctoral attainment process," in which she asked about frustrating and helpful aspects of the process. The second interview was utilized as a follow-up session to allow for further elaboration on answers to questions asked during the first interview. The current study incorporates only one interview per participant but utilizes a more exhaustive set of interview questions. Both interview protocols are included in Appendix H.

The way in which the sample for Rapp's study was acquired also differs greatly from the methods employed in the current study. Rapp (2010) acquired her participants

by purposive snowball sampling, starting first with word-of-mouth communication, then reaching out to Latino social clubs via the Web, and then finally doing a search of possible Puerto Rican surnames (e.g. Rivera, Rodriguez, Gonzalez, Torres, etc.) via university directories. On the other hand, the current study identified six specific professional organizations to solicit for collaboration and forwarding of the Participant Recruitment Letter. Those six organizations were Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Puerto Rican Studies Association (PRSA), Association of the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), National Association of Student Personnel (NASPA), and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). The education-centric professional organizations were selected, due to the high number of Latina doctoral graduates in the field of Education, noted in the 2010 Survey of Earned Doctorates. Of the six aforementioned professional organizations three were cooperative in disseminating my participant recruitment information: Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Puerto Rican Studies Association, and the Latino Knowledge Community of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

For Rapp's study, the participants themselves had attained their doctoral degrees in the 1980s and 1990s. Participants in the current study needed to attain their doctoral degrees between the years of 2002 and 2012; furthermore, this degree specifically needed to be a PhD in Education. Rapp (2010) did not specify a certain criterion regarding specific type of doctoral degree attained. The participants in Rapp's study varied in discipline: bilingual developmental psychology, counseling psychology, sociology, political science, social welfare, and a distance program.

Lastly, Rapp's study incorporated both males and females. My study only examined the experiences of women. In addition to having graduated with a PhD in Education in the past ten years, participants in the current study had to claim dual Puerto Rican lineage as well as first-generation college student status. Rapp (2010) did not outline a specific criterion of this nature, other than being of Puerto Rican descent and having achieved a doctoral degree of some kind.

To conclude, these two studies may have similar elements, but the various differing aspects help make the current study a separate entity of scholarship. The same ideas and theories are constantly tested in varied ways, which is the case between these two studies. Replication can be an important tenet as well, which is something that Rapp (2010) requested herself:

I recommend that this study be replicated using the data of more recent doctoral graduates. One of the limitations of this study was the fact that some of the research participants graduated decades ago, which made it difficult for them to remember the nuances of their doctoral experience.

Although the current study is not necessarily an exact replica of Rapp's study, similar notions are being examined. Not only has Rapp's work served as a guide for me in my writing process, but also as a tool of validation. Any mirrored findings should serve as an indication of consistency and accuracy. Findings of difference would simply indicate another perspective. This situation is not only beneficial to all involved, but also the embodiment of the essence of research: building from previous work.

Transparency of Researcher

My interest in this study was born and shaped from chats I had with Puerto Rican women about their experiences in their doctoral programs. Furthermore, this work was inspired, in many ways, by the challenges I endured in my previous doctoral program. In this previous program, I attained successful completion of coursework, but not without having experienced multiple obstacles prior to completion.

The first year of my doctoral program was the most challenging. Originally from New York, I felt homesick. Although I had some family in the greater Orlando-Kissimmee area, I had never lived outside of the state of New York; therefore, relocation to a new area was a challenge in itself. As a first-generation college student, I was anxious about the expectations of doctoral study and my ability to meet those expectations. My cohort consisted of 11 members, of which I was the youngest.

During my first semester in my doctoral program, one of my cousins passed away from an overdose; he was only 27 years old. In the same week, my best friend's sister passed away from an asthma attack; she was only 17 years old. I grew up with both of them and was understandably devastated. I found out about the death of my best friend's sister approximately two hours before the start of class. Still experiencing the shock of this loss, I decided to ask my professor to excuse me from a presentation due that evening. "If you can't handle your emotions, you shouldn't be in graduate school," he responded to me.

In another course, the professor provided a copy of her curriculum vitae for each student on the first day of class. For the next hour and a half, she proceeded to discuss her

career accomplishments. This same professor proceeded to display individual midterm grades on the board at the front of the room, including student names. I was angry to see “Morales – D” posted for all of my classmates to see. We all knew that this action was a blatant violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), but no one dared report her. Besides, she was tenured; what repercussions would she face? Despite my outrage, I was advised by many to keep my mouth shut and my head down, because it was a battle I was sure to lose.

When the time came for me to take my comprehensive exams, I enrolled in an independent study course to prepare. The professor understood the purpose of my independent study and selected a few questions on which I could focus from the pool of potential questions. I received very little feedback and received an ‘A’ grade. I subsequently failed my comprehensive examination—not once, but twice. When I sought feedback on my comprehensive exam the first time, I was advised to “go back and study everything.” The following semester I failed another comprehensive exam and was given the same study-related advisement when addressed by the grading committee. In addition, I was asked by one of the professors if I had participated in the study group that had formed. “What study group?” I responded. Apparently, my classmates left me out of the preparation festivities.

When I tried to seek an appeal to re-take the exam a third time, I was told by the Graduate Coordinator that I could only petition for an appeal by providing documentation of a learning disability. I immediately became depressed. I couldn’t understand what was being asked of me, but was so desperate to continue my journey to the PhD, that I went

through with a psychiatric evaluation. I thought that my 3.7 GPA at the time would suffice as evidence that I was fully capable, but I stood corrected. My evaluation indicated that I experience very high levels of anxiety under testing situations.

My feelings were mixed as I underwent this ordeal. I felt confused, sad, and angry. At first I thought that all of my experiences were common manifestations of the graduate school experience. However, through conversations with professors outside of my department, I understood that some of my experiences were far from typical. At night I prayed and cried to God that it not be the end of the road for me; I was so close. I had come so far. It was traumatizing for me to have to sit in a psychiatric office with a White woman who observed me as I played with blocks.

With the exception of the one minority professor in the department, I did not feel as if I was understood by the faculty. He was the “token” minority who was asked to lead all of the diversity tasks for the department. Also of Puerto Rican descent, he understood my “puertoricanness” and my struggle to conform to the culture of the academy. I would burst into his office in tears, complaining about how fake my peers were in the classroom: they never showed the strength to admit that they did not understand a concept, nor did they want to admit to not completing an assignment. Everyone else always seemed to be smiling and on top of things; on the other hand, I always seemed to trail behind, trying my best to catch up to my classmates. Unfortunately, this minority professor held little clout at the time, as he had not been granted tenure.

I felt as if the rest of the professors in the department lacked a sense of cultural empathy for their students of disadvantaged background; ironically, this particular field is

expected to promote understanding of such contexts. The one minority professor always made time to see me and greeted me happily as I ran into his office. He demonstrated much head nodding, smiling, and most importantly, listening. In my heart, I felt that he wanted to see me succeed.

Nonetheless, after a few weeks of counseling, I consulted with my outside dissertation committee member at the time about my situation. She suggested that I consider applying to the doctoral program in Higher Education and Policy Studies (HEPS). A few months prior to this recommendation, I had attended a get-together of her graduate students and instantaneously received a good vibe. Because this faculty member was a Puerto Rican woman, I felt I could let my guard down in her office and that she had my best interest at heart. I reviewed the information for the program and immediately felt it was a match. I was lucky in that my fellowship program was extremely supportive and willing to transfer my funds elsewhere. Had I not been accepted into the HEPS program, I would have tried to seek admission to another university; considering my failures of my comprehensive exams, admission elsewhere would not have been an easy feat. Without the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship program, my journey to the doctorate would have ended immediately.

I could not help but wonder how many other Puerto Rican women had faced a similar situation as mine. I felt that my experiences of isolation and insecurity would make a great dissertation topic. I still wondered for a while when that decision had been made to not allow me to earn a PhD. Looking back, I think the decision was made the day I was accepted to my original program. My first doctoral program accepted me without

any internal funding, which for many scholars is an action equivalent to rejection. I had not realized at the time that that program was not a good fit for me in terms of the culture of the department. My identity and my background were not appreciated as assets to the department.

In my opinion, the combination of my New York upbringing and my “puertoricanness” was perceived as a threat to the department. I did not fit the model graduate student sought by my original department. My rough exterior labeled me as troublesome. My courage to continuously bring up the race card was seen as an exaggeration. I had become the “angry woman of color” who uncovered the obvious inequities in the academy. In general, New York carries some status and prestige in most settings, but I think that my upbringing in one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in New York had an attached stigma.

My social science courses in college first prompted me to realize that I am a first-generation college student, of mainland Puerto Rican, inner-city, and low-income origin. I was raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York. I am fortunate enough to have been raised by both parents, who always encouraged me to go as far as I could in my studies, despite our disadvantaged status. My mother was born in Puerto Rico and arrived to New York State in 1957; she first worked as a baby-sitter for her brother and later transitioned to a job in a factory. My father also arrived to New York around the same time and commenced work in landscaping. With the industrial fall in the 1970s, my mother was left without a job. Because she had no education, special skills, nor command of the English language, she had no choice but to stay home.

Since my mother was unable to work anywhere else, my father was left to maintain the household. My older brother and sister were each already married at this time and had their own responsibilities. They both graduated from high school in Puerto Rico, but the idea of continuing on to higher education was never presented to them. They immediately joined the work force; my sister became a bank teller and my brother worked as a security guard. Living off of my father's paycheck alone was practically impossible, so my mother was advised by my aunt to seek governmental assistance. She resisted at first, but eventually figured it was the only way she could help my father cover household expenses. We received food stamps and a little monetary assistance. As a child, I was also provided with Medicaid to cover my healthcare. This assistance helped us make ends meet—as long as my father was paid on time, which did not always happen. However, he would never complain to his boss, as he did not want to run the risk of getting fired.

As a child, I was also entitled to free lunch at school. I remember my mom always used to wrap up a roll of pennies for me to take to school so I could purchase treats during lunch at Ms. Perez's candy stand. I would get a square box of peanut M & M's for \$0.35 and three long pretzels for \$0.15. The school lunches varied. Lunches of pizza, raviolis, or cheeseburgers made me happy, but the food was not too pleasant at other times. "Get your milk and a fruit!" the lunch attendants would yell. My elementary school was lucky enough to have a dedicated staff that seemed to really care about the students. The problem was lack of funds and the outside surroundings of the school.

We always seemed to be missing something. Our books were always torn and worn out, our crayons were always broken, the markers were always dried up, and if our teacher was absent, the class would be split up into different classrooms, because no substitute teachers would dare enter our Brooklyn neighborhood. P.S. 59 is located within the dead center of project housing. To make matters worse, the different project housing complexes held rivalries. When we were let out of school, oftentimes fights or shootouts would occur. We would either run and hide behind cars or run home, if we were close enough. This scene did not change much in middle school. Some type of drama always took place.

My academic life finally started to improve by the time I reached high school. I applied and was accepted to Richard R. Green High School of Teaching (HST) in Manhattan. It was a 40 minute commute by train, but I refused to attend my zoned school, Eastern District High School. The school had a horrible reputation and kids went there to fight, not get an education. At HST, I was able to enroll in Advanced Placement English and History courses. I was a dedicated student and through hard work, despite the social disorganization of my primary schools, was lucky enough to push through and grasp some sort of knowledge.

I felt good until my senior year, when I received my first wake-up call. I never doubted that I would attend college. Eagerly, I ran to the counselor's office and asked how I should go about applying to Binghamton University. Binghamton seemed to be a hot topic at school, so I figured I would give it a try. My counselor said to me, "I think Binghamton is a reach school for you; you should try Farmingdale Community College."

I heard those words 10 years ago, yet I can still feel my heart drop every time I recall that conversation.

Not only did I get accepted to Binghamton University, but I also gained acceptance to fourteen other schools. I made photocopies of all of my acceptance letters and gave them to my counselor. I thanked her for her help and got ready to start the next chapter of my life. That was all thanks to a Puerto Rican visiting counselor from the Harlem Center for Education, who saw me leave her office crying. He pulled me to the side, asked me what was wrong, and said to me, “Don’t worry about it. I’m going to help you.” Three years later, I earned enough credits to graduate with my BA in Sociology. I continued to further my education, earning a master’s degree at St. John’s University and beginning my doctoral study at the University of Central Florida in 2008.

I have provided all of this background information to make a major point: many of the struggles I have faced in recent years were derived from my disadvantaged roots. The fact that I never had access to a full box of crayons and that my mom was never able to help me with my homework while growing up have contributed to who I am today. Everything has a meaning and must be taken into consideration. Limited access to crayons may not appear to be a strong example, but the reality is that one must start with the most basic elements. Small issues usually reflect bigger issues; to state the obvious, nobody gets to the top without a solid foundation.

My status as a first-generation in college, mainland Puerto Rican gives me a solid background for gathering rich data, because I am part of the target group of the current study. It was evident that my respondents were open to speaking to me about their issues,

because they may have been under the impression that I could relate, whether or not this assumption actually holds true. Differences do exist among Puerto Rican women, especially as related to generational and class differences. I am convinced that many of these differences have shaped my academic path; I have a deep solidarity with others who understand the background from which I have come.

Summary and Organization of the Study

This current study examines the experiences of Puerto Rican women who have achieved a Ph.D. degree. Data were collected for this qualitative study through the utilization of interviews; analysis was conducted through the lens of Latina critical race theory, nested in critical race theory. Findings are meant to provide a holistic understanding of the social context of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs, as current research has only thoroughly analyzed that of Chicana doctoral students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Few studies have focused solely on the experiences of Latinas in graduate education (Gandara, 1982, 1995, 1996; Reyes & Rios, 2005). Fewer studies have specifically examined Latinas in doctoral programs (Achor & Morales, 1990; Flores, 1988; Gonzalez, 2006). This reality is disturbing considering the scarce representation of Latinas/os in the ranks of professors, researchers, and public intellectuals (Wilds, 2000). PhDs transmit knowledge and shape society; therefore, the fact that Latinas are underrepresented in earned doctorates indicates that the policies that are currently in place continue to perpetuate a White male-dominated society.

Juxtaposing the unique and vital roles of PhDs in the United States with the representation of Latina/o PhDs produces not only a negative image of American inclusiveness but also a policy issue in need of attention (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Increased diversification of university environments, production of new knowledge, and democracy and social justice in American society are the necessary elements to secure a pipeline for the production and success of Latina/o doctorates.

Existing research regarding Latino/a academic achievement is mostly centered around the Latino/a undergraduate experience. Much of this research may provide assistance in understanding the experiences of Latino/a students at the graduate level, but empirical support is needed to understand the experiences of Latino/a students in the unique context of Latino/a subgroups engaged in graduate education.

History of Graduate Education

Brubacher and Rudy (1997) stated that the impact of German university scholarship has played one of the most significant roles in the establishment of American graduate education. These authors asserted that German universities gained worldwide fame for their success in joining teaching and research, as well as for their ambitious goal of producing knowledge in addition to praxis. Americans who matriculated in German universities in the 19th century were impressed by the German practices and methods of work, subsequently advocating such an outlook in American universities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). This full-blown desire to transform established patterns of American higher education is what led to the establishment of wholly independent graduate schools in America.

American universities adapted two foundational concepts modeled after the German system: *Lehrnfreiheit* and *Lehrfreiheit*. *Lehrnfreiheit* (“freedom of learning”) allowed university students to enroll in whatever courses they wished, when and where they liked, with no formal attendance requirements or examinations until the final degree examination. *Lehrfreiheit* (“freedom of teaching”) gave university professors the freedom to investigate any and all problems in the course of their research and to reveal their findings in teaching and in published works, regardless of the outcome. The creative scholar and the original investigator was the center of true admiration in every field of professional endeavor (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

According to Brubacher and Rudy (1997), John Hopkins University represents the most significant novelty in graduate instruction initiated during the period between the

Civil War and World War I. John Hopkins University was thought to exemplify a new kind of university, a nonsectarian institution dedicated to autonomous search for truth. It was the first institution of higher learning that allowed scholars to combine teaching and creative research in specialized fields.

Other well-known institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Columbia had become universities, while John Hopkins had begun as one. The success of Johns Hopkins inspired other institutions to seek research scholars for their own faculties; the success of this renowned university came to hold a special significance throughout the world as symbolizing the development of advanced scholarship and teaching in America. In the latter part of the 19th century, Clark University, the Catholic University of America, and the University of Chicago followed John Hopkins's lead and were also founded as universities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

Although the PhD degree emerged at John Hopkins University as the primary reward for graduate study, the first American PhD was awarded by Yale University in 1861 (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). The training of PhDs is a necessary condition for university status; without a graduate school of arts and sciences, a university would be a college (Rosovsky, 1990). PhD training is a fundamental and necessary condition, as training and educating future generations of scholars and practitioners is one of the most critical activities dedicated to the survival of the university.

PhD vs. EdD

It was not until 1900 that the Association of American Universities clearly defined the minimum standards of the PhD degree to which all accredited institutions were to adhere: academic residence, examinations, and dissertation. After many years of defining and developing graduate education, other graduate (terminal) degrees also emerged, such as the Doctor of Arts and Doctor of Education. Harvard University was responsible for introducing the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree in 1920 as a higher degree for practicing educators in 1920 (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

In *Envisioning the Future of Doctoral Education*, Golde and Walker (2006) stated that education has struggled to strike a balance between its practice and research. The authors define the EdD as preparation for managerial and administrative leadership in education, with its focus being the preparation of practitioners who can actively use the existing knowledge in the field to solve multifaceted educational problems. Golde and Walker further explained that the PhD in education remains the traditional academic degree that aims to prepare researchers, college teachers, and scholars in education. Ultimately, however, they conclude that the requirements for the two programs are strikingly similar.

Intersection Theory and Academic Integration

Patricia Hill Collins, a renowned sociologist, suggests that people experience oppression on three planes: “the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systematic level of

social institutions (Collins, 1998). She situates these three planes as “sites of domination and potential sites of resistance.” The multiplicity of oppressive structures such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity that exist for Latinas encapsulate nuances that give way to a complex consciousness simultaneously informed by history, human agency and the hegemonic power structure (Gonzalez, 2006). This complex consciousness can be further explained through intersection theory.

Macionis (2011) defines intersection theory as the analysis of the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage. The intersectionality of race, class, and gender is important when exploring the experiences of Latina doctoral students. The varying levels of intersectionality are also to be taken into account when analyzing the differing experiences of Latino subgroups. These divergent levels of intersectionality among Latino subgroups should be examined from an individual, interactional, and institutional perspective as it relates to graduate education. Race, class, and gender will be explained individually; furthermore, the interplay of these three ascribed characteristics and their collective influence on Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs will also be noted.

Race

Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2009) identify three distinct minority status orientations among Latino college students, which they say influence Latino students’ academic achievement in different ways. Although their study focused on undergraduate Latino students, this study argues that the three orientations (assimilation,

accommodation, and resistance) remain very much applicable at the graduate level. Each orientation will be discussed briefly and assumptions will be drawn with regard to how each orientation could potentially influence Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs.

The assimilation orientation refers to the intentional or unintentional renouncement of one's own ethnic distinctiveness in favor of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are more consistent with those of the mainstream (Berry, 2001; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). The notion of conforming to mainstream ideals as a mechanism to improve social mobility is not a new phenomenon. Many Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs may desire acceptance as a true academic or a future colleague, resulting in the renouncement of their origins and conformity to mainstream behavior. The key to this orientation, however, is the genuine belief that Latinas who obtain a PhD will be treated as equals to their mainstream culture counterparts. These women are often applauded for "playing by the rules," but often experience a rude awakening when encountered with the unspoken realities of the academy.

The second orientation is accommodation, in which one retains beliefs and practices that may mark a person as ethnically distinct from Whites, but do not conflict with mainstream sensibilities (Berry, 2001; Berry et al., 2006; Gibson, 1988; Kao & Tienda, 1995; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). This orientation reflects that of Puerto Rican women, who do not overextend themselves to mirror their mainstream counterparts in

their doctoral programs, but comply with the hierarchy's hidden agenda. This orientation may be best explained by the colloquialism, "fake it until you make it."

The final orientation is resistance, which entails a strong sense of ethnic distinctiveness (Berry, 2001; Berry et al., 2006; Lee, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). This last orientation type reflects the experiences of Puerto Rican women who lead a double life. They strongly identify with and are loyal to their origins, but are not pleased with the expected desire to conform to the graduate school culture. They are likely to address inequalities that are evident and often avoided in the academy, which often saddles these individuals with the labels of "troublesome" or "radical."

The aforementioned orientation trio is only one way to approach the role of race in the academy. These orientations are dependent on varying dynamics at varying levels, especially with regard to the roles of faculty and staff in establishing campus climate. Gonzalez, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, and Navia (2002) and Morales (1988) documented challenges of hostile and racist academic environments. They stated that a lack of mentorship and role models (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; Gonzalez et al., 2002; Solórzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993) may be valid reasoning for the inability to cope with microaggressions, defined as subtle displays of racism that are more difficult to recognize or analyze than overt displays of racism (Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Lachuk, 2011).

These orientations may be heightened according to institutional type; for instance, the climate at a predominantly White institution may differ from that of a Hispanic Serving Institution. More research is needed regarding whether either of these

orientations are more common among certain Latino subgroups, and whether they are considered a positive or negative factor in the completion of a doctoral degree for Latinas. These orientations are also dependent on how these women are academically socialized.

Academic socialization hinders Latina agency through a systematic and covert acculturation process which Gonzalez (2006) refers to as being socialized into the academy. The academy works within these academic socialization processes to systematically and covertly challenge the cultural foundations that Latinas bring with them to the institution. One important factor in overcoming these hostile institutions is Latinas' rejection and resistance of institutional messages about their academic unworthiness (Morales, 1988); this issue can be appropriately addressed through a discussion on affirmative action.

The role of affirmative action and the perceived stigma it carries in the U.S. is of much concern in the effort to increase the number of Puerto Rican doctoral students across the country. Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn (2004) identify three legal rationales in their discussion of affirmative action: (a) color-blind, (b) diversity, and (c) remedial. They also assert that race, racism, and White privilege shape each of these rationales. Racism has been defined as a false belief in White supremacy that handicaps society; a system that upholds Whites as superior to all other groups; and the structural subordination of multiple racial and ethnic groups (Lorde, 1992; Marable, 1992; Pierce, 1995). White privilege is defined as a system of advantages resulting from a legacy of racism, as well as benefiting individuals and groups on the basis of notions of whiteness

(Leonardo, 2004; McIntosh, 2004; Tatum, 1997). Yosso and associates' three rationales can also help explain the role of both race in the academy and the experiences of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs.

The color-blind rationale is centered on the idea that White students are denied admission to universities because under-qualified Black and Latina/o students supposedly "take" their entitled spot (Yosso et al., 2004). Yosso et al. (2004) asserted that conservatives challenge affirmative action based on a color-blind rationale, insisting that race-neutral admission policies ensure meritocratic, fair access to higher education. Bonilla-Silva (2006) argued that with regard to access to higher education, race-neutral policies are nonexistent. The basis of his argument is centered on four central frames of color-blind racism. Of the four frames, he mainly focuses on abstract liberalism, which he argued constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology: permitting Whites to use the frames in ways that justify racial inequality. This may explain the graduate programs across the U.S. in which a sole doctoral Latina student, if any, is found.

Abstract liberalism involves the usage of ideas associated with political liberalism (such as equal opportunity, the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (i.e., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts that by framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, Whites can appear "reasonable" and even "moral," while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva's views certainly appear to be in line with those of Yosso et al. (2004) in asserting that White privilege is a system of advantage, which supports the

construction of color-blind stories about race in higher education. These stories reflect the failure of affirmative action to address the underrepresentation of Puerto Rican women in in doctoral programs.

The diversity rationale is said to produce three beneficial outcomes: (a) cross-racial understanding that challenges and erodes racial stereotypes, (b) more dynamic classroom discussions, and (c) better preparation for participating in a diverse workforce (Yosso et al., 2004). This rationale is accredited with assisting Whites in becoming more racially tolerant. The outlined purposes of the diversity rationale are challenged by the “diversity defense” of affirmative action, which is in many ways regarded as a profoundly conservative argument, preserving the status quo in higher education (Karabel, 2005). The conscious rejection of arguments that claim that the very criteria used to measure merit perpetuate racial and class privilege eschew justifications of affirmative action as an appropriate remedy for past and ongoing discrimination. The diversity defense obscures some of the primary reasons that leading colleges and universities adopted affirmative action in the first place: to right the wrongs of the past and to integrate the elite of the future (Karabel, 2005).

As it relates to the diversity rationale, Karabel (2005) states that only in certain historical moments—especially in periods of social crisis, when the legitimacy of the system itself is in question—will the elite colleges reach out beyond the privileged to the disenfranchised. These colleges take such action not because the visible presence of previously excluded groups adds to the diversity of their students’ educational experience, but because it reinforces a belief, crucial to the preservation of the social

order, that success in America is a function of individual merit rather than family background (Karabel, 2005). Karabel further asserts that only a redefinition of the concept of merit that acknowledges the profound differences in educational opportunity holds a real possibility of bringing more than token class or racial diversity to the Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, again negating the positive effect of affirmative action in higher education and more specifically in doctoral programs.

In the remedial rationale, race-based affirmative action is said to be used as a remedy to compensate for past and current racial discrimination against students of color (Yosso et al., 2004). Karabel (2005) argues that both the origins and the institutionalization of race-based affirmative action may be traced to the recognition by the elite colleges that the continued exclusion of a highly visible and restrictive segment of the population would undermine the legitimacy of the nation's major social institutions. Therefore, the remedial rationale is utilized as a vehicle of political correctness and to avoid a tainted reputation, not for the betterment of underrepresented groups nor to fulfill the ideal mission of affirmative action. Undoubtedly, the analysis of the experiences of Latina doctoral students should definitely consider whether these students are truly welcomed, or whether they simply help to ensure the department's reputation as equal opportunistic.

To conclude, even though legal racial apartheid no longer is a norm in the United States, the habits that uphold and maintain institutionalized White supremacy linger. Therefore, the redesign of social systems first requires the acknowledgement of their colossal unseen dimensions (Rothenberg, 2005). Rothenberg (2005) asserted that for

Whites to acknowledge they have unearned privileges and to ignore their significance forms the root of the fear and anger that surfaces during discussions of affirmative action. Regretfully, the three aforementioned rationales that challenge the success of affirmative action will not facilitate Latinas' experiences in doctoral programs until White supremacist ideals perish. These rationales become even more complex when class is incorporated into the equation.

Class

The concept of class refers to the enduring and systematic differences in access to, and control over, resources for provisioning and survival (Acker, 2006; Nelson, 1993). Although many U.S. citizens conceptualize education as the means to social status, it is also true that class determines the quality of education one receives, resulting in the types of opportunities made available in the long run. The economic challenges that many Latinas face while in graduate school often originate from low socioeconomic origins (Gandara, 1982, 1995). Many Latina graduate students were raised in a single-parent home in which the mother was the only provider, often unable to provide strong financial support to daughter(s) in graduate school. Consequently, many Latinas feel compelled to help out financially at home while in graduate school. The desire to provide such assistance adds additional stress to these doctoral students due to the redirection of time and energy away from studies and instead towards economic matters. This reality reflects a failure of the social structure.

It is important to address the social and institutional structures that hinder Latina graduate educational attainment. Karen (1991) documented the lack of academic preparation and skills due to poor K-12 education as a challenge faced by Latina graduate students, which is vital when examining Latina success in doctoral programs. Since new knowledge must build upon prior knowledge, the deprivation of basic essential learning tools throughout K-12 education eventually builds up and in graduate school. Many urban, first-generation, low-income Latinas are simply not provided the resources for a strong academic foundation at an early age, which may increase difficulty in understanding fundamental graduate school mechanics.

Again, these resources must be made available at the early stages of academic socialization. Julie Bettie (2003) examined the lives of young Chicana girls and found that many of them had been tracked to a vocational curriculum.

Differential skills are learned across academic and vocational curriculums. Where college-prep students learn “critical thinking, problem solving, drawing conclusions, making generalizations, or evaluating or synthesizing knowledge...[i]n vocational track classes students are required to learn only simple memory tasks or comprehension (Oakes, 1985; Persell, 1976).

Bettie recalled that “las chicas,” having either been chosen or tracked into non-college prep courses, showed little interest in the formal curriculum offered at the school, finding a variety of ways to kill time. This illustrates the ideology of “educate the best, forget about the rest.” The “rest” frequently come from families of a low socioeconomic status.

Bettie (2003) suggested that working-class students and students of color are tracked into the vocational curriculum, thus institutionalizing race and class inequalities.

Many Latinas are able to break away from their tracked future and attend college; some even make it to graduate school, but the experience of being tracked has long-term psychological effects that plant the seed of doubt and can complicate Latinas' experiences in their programs. However, the alternative argument is that such an experience can motivate Latinas to move forward while enrolled in doctoral programs.

Being a first generation college student can undoubtedly determine the kinds of experiences Latinas have academically. Bettie (2003) describes walking toward the counseling office with a Latina student named Flor to find applications for junior college. Flor utters, "I don't know how to do this. No one in my family's ever gone to college." The student then explained that her parents couldn't help her with her homework because her academic progress had already exceeded theirs. Likewise, they did not know anything about college applications, SATs, college-prep courses, or the difference between a university and a junior college. According to Bettie, the issue is one of social and cultural capital, where working-class parents lack the social networks, skills, and knowledge to enable their child. At the graduate level, this phenomenon means that the parents of first-generation college students do not know about the graduate school application process; the GRE; academic conferences; and expectations, such as publications. As a result, the experience becomes even more of a struggle, further isolating Latina doctoral students.

Another important matter that holds much relevance to the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs is that of "code switching." The act of code switching occurs when students perform class identities that do not correspond with those of their families of origin, so a negotiation exists between their inherited identity from home and

their chosen public identity at school. For the Mexican-American girls in Bettie's (2003) study, this negotiation was quite complicated. They struggled with the meanings of and links between class mobility, assimilation, and racial identification politics. Income, the kind of work performed by their parents (such as agricultural or warehouse work), generation of immigration, skin color, and Spanish fluency were key signifiers that became the weapons of identity politics used to make claims of authenticity and accusations of inauthenticity.

According to Bettie (2003), research that refuses a class reductionist analysis and gives autonomy to race and ethnicity as a distinct axis of inequality has greatly contributed to our understanding of minority achievement by exploring school success or failure in terms of students' perception of schooling as an additive or subtractive mode of acculturation (Gibson, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999). Bettie argued that these studies have not addressed or explored the meaning of class difference between and among students of color as it is experienced in the peer culture. Additionally, these studies have failed to provide continued attention to the possible effects on achievement of class difference across race and ethnicity. The present study acknowledges the value of doctoral students' perception of graduate education as well as the impact that class, in terms of being a first generation college student, holds on achievement.

Bettie (2003) asserted that many scholars have written about the pain that working-class, upwardly mobile people experience when leaving their community behind, as well as the difficulty of finding ways to reconcile the discord between class background and present status due to mobility. Although community may play a

motivational role from a social justice perspective, more research is necessary to address the possibility of guilt as hindrance to Latinas pursuing more advanced work. The impact of the psychological effects of leading a life in two different social classes should also be more closely examined, specifically with regard to achievement of a doctorate.

As related to upwardly mobile Latinas, Gandara (1995) identified several contingencies that lead specifically to Chicana mobility; however, these contingencies may also apply to other working class Latina subgroups. These contingencies include, but are not limited to: (a) the extra effort to move off the vocational curricular track; (b) geographic location of schools, in terms of attending schools in better economic shape that provide access to a college-preparatory curriculum; (c) positive peer and sibling group influences; (d) social isolation as a consequence of some stigma; (e) phenotypical differences; (f) the ability to maintain dual identity; (g) parental encouragement, especially from mothers; and (h) children making use of their time to study, instead of working to contribute to family expenses. She also highlights the necessary link between individual circumstances and structural opportunities. Most of these identified contingencies are no less important at the graduate level; in fact, they may even be more intensified, given the heightened expectations and formal environment of doctoral study. Many of these contingencies outlined by Gandara may prove substantially challenging with the incorporation of the gender structure.

Gender

Women at all levels of the university hierarchy can experience institutional and interpersonal sexism (Vaccaro, 2011). According to Risman (2004), the gender structure differentiates opportunities and constraints based on sex category, and thus having consequences in the individual, cultural, and institutional dimensions. First, the development of gendered selves makes an impression at an individual level. Culturally, men and women face different cultural expectations in an interactional sense, even when they fill identical structural positions. Finally, institutional domains feature explicit regulations regarding resource distribution and material goods based on gender. These dimensions will guide the gender component of intersectionality for Latina doctoral degree attainment.

The idea that gender is a constitutive element of social structure has been enormously influential; it is now quite commonplace to speak of all manner of social institutions and practices as gendered (Britton, 2000). The U.S. and other nations perpetuate a male dominated society that has constructed inequality through the acknowledgment of difference. Lorber (1994) argues that gender is an institution embedded in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations. According to Lorber “the continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be subordinate to men as a group” (p. 33). This viewpoint is exceptionally evident than in academe, where those in the highest rankings are typically male and their secretaries are most likely to be female.

Risman (2004) conceptualizes gender as a social structure, but when trying to understand gender on the interactional and cultural dimensions, the means by which status differences shape expectations and the ways in which in-group and out-group membership influence behavior need to be at the center of attention. Too little attention has been paid to how inequality is shaped by such cultural expectations during interaction. The most notable and underlying factor Latina doctoral students face is discrimination based on class, gender, race, and ethnicity (Castellanos, 1996; Ibarra, 1996; Solórzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993). As previously mentioned, not only do many Latina graduate students experience hostile and racist academic environments at the department level (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; Gonzalez et al., 2002; Morales, 1988; Solórzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993), but they also may experience tokenization by peers (Gonzalez et al., 2002), marginalization by professors and departments, and low expectation from professors (Solórzano, 1993).

For women, an important issue in overcoming hostile institutions is through the interactional experience of gender when connecting with their male mentors (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; Singh & Stoloff, 2003; Solórzano, 1993). Research is limited in terms of the interactional dynamics, but it is reasonable to suggest that culturally empathetic professors or instructors can have a positive effect on Latina graduate students. In many cases, the number of Latina students in doctoral programs is so low that one of the initial obstacles for Latinas is learning to deal with the lack of contemporaries. In addition, Latina graduate students may also fear that communicating differences in opinion may be taken as radical or rebel-like. This fear is taught through interruptions of their talk and is

known as either verbal hygiene (Cameron, 1995) or silencing (Fine, 1991). The interaction of race, class, and gender can be detrimental to Latinas' graduate experiences. If instructors are cognizant and considerate of these sorts of struggles Latinas have to face on a regular basis, a potential increase in the number of Latinas in the educational pipeline could occur.

Latinas often find themselves as prisoners to the expectations of their gender identity. Family support is of central importance, particularly the emotional support from the student's immediate family (Gandara, 1982; Gonzalez et al., 2002), partners (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995), and strong mothers who guide and serve as models of success (Gandara, 1982). The role of the family is an important influence to examine when discussing Latina doctoral attainment. Research is limited on first-generation Latina graduate students as family representatives, but it is reasonable to suggest that their achievement of a certain level of knowledge and status prompts family members to call upon them to rectify familial issues.

The notion that Latinas traditionally desire large families and place a great cultural importance on motherhood also exists. Many Latinas believe that bearing large numbers of children will fulfill their expected role as women and ensure they receive emotional and instrumental support in old age (Giachello, 1994). These notions may hinder academic achievement. Because family holds an equal or greater amount of leverage as education, academics become placed on the back burner more often among Latinas than among females from other ethnic or racial groups.

Family responsibilities are also documented in the literature as a challenge to academic achievement, particularly among students who experience isolation from families because of cultural dissonance arising from the clash between family and university cultures (Gonzalez et al., 2001). The research of Gonzalez et al. (2001) shows that Latinas are often expected to play active roles in the family; this personal responsibility can usually contribute to academic difficulties. This strong cultural notion and family influence can serve as a rationale for the low percentage of Latinas who have attained a doctorate degree. To be fair, however, it is likely that family can also serve as an immense support system for Latinas in doctoral programs.

In addition to family obligations causing a challenge to persistence in doctoral study, Latinas' self-perception in the White male-dominated world of academia provides a challenge as well. The presence of gender identity is exemplified a variety of fashions, ranging from subtle to evident. Research findings from the literature show that being grounded in one's cultural background and identity is important to success in graduate school (Castellanos, 1996). Women of color have particularly unique ways of staying true to themselves while navigating through the demands and expectations of the dominant culture. Jenny, an African American professional in Weitz's (2001) study explained:

my hairstyle expresses my individuality as well as my value of my heritage and my pride in what is distinctly me, distinctly mine...I consider myself in a constant state of protest about the realities of cultural alienation, cultural marginalization, cultural invisibility, discrimination, injustice, all of that. And I feel that my hairstyle has allowed me, since I started wearing it in a natural, to voice that nonverbally. And that has been a desire of mine, to do that.

This notion of staying true to oneself and “fighting the man” in subtle ways may be very common among many Latinas in graduate school and should be further examined in future studies. Puerto Rican and Dominican women seem to be increasingly embracing their African heritage and claiming their identity as “Afro-Latina.” This proclamation is utilized as an acknowledgement of the inclusiveness of the struggle. Undoubtedly, the intersection of race, class, and gender serves as a detriment to success in graduate school, but it is also evident that many Latinas have somehow discovered ways to persevere despite the odds. One factor that may offset the negative effects of institutional and interpersonal sexism is the development of supportive relationships with other women on campus (Vaccaro, 2011). The retention strategies that facilitate the persistence of Latina women in doctoral programs, despite the odds, merit further investigation.

Retention

Retention Theory

The persistence of underrepresented minority students is dependent on several dynamics, including the critical retention strategies employed by colleges and universities. Most colleges and universities have a retention plan of some sort, which describes in detail the ways in which the institution plans to minimize the attrition of students. Some plans are generalized to the entire student population. Others are designated to a particular group of students (i.e. underrepresented minorities). Either way, many of these retention plans are rooted in the most prominent retention theories in

higher education. This section will review some of those prominent theories as they relate to Latina doctoral persistence.

When delving into retention theory, the starting point for such a vast literature is the work of Vincent Tinto. However, throughout the years, Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) has received much criticism from a number of contemporary scholars regarding his student departure theory; these disagreements have specifically focused on the separation and transition stage, as well as his concepts of academic and social integration. Contemporary scholars have presented future directions designed to take retention theory to a higher level, placing the emphasis on the kinds of theoretical foundations and methodological approaches needed to more fully understand and facilitate the retention process for minority students in an increasingly complex and multiracial institutional environment.

Tierney (1992), Attinasi (1989, 1994), and Kraemer (1997) have questioned the validity of the student integration model to fully and appropriately capture the experiences of non-White students, given that the model is based on an assimilation/acculturation framework. These authors shed light on the fact that the researchers who began studying student retention were primarily White, and that they did so prior to the time that minorities had become a critical mass on college campuses. Because of this, it must be understood that much of the widely acclaimed research on student transition, departure, involvement, and learning was based on white male students (Tierney 1992; Belenky et al. 1986). Therefore, traditional research produced a monolithic view of students devoid of issues of race/ethnicity, culture, gender, politics, and identity (Hurtado 1997).

Consequently, the notion that minority students lack expectations and motivations regarding learning has persisted for decades. Likewise, this notion has ignored how systematic inequities, racism, and discrimination have worked against minority populations. Simultaneously, it was believed that minority individuals were engaged in a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty and deprivation, and that the only way for them to avoid societal alienation was by becoming fully absorbed (assimilated) or adapted (acculturated) into the dominant culture (Hurtado, 1997). Hurtado (1997) defined assimilation as a process requiring separation. On the other hand, acculturation was defined as a cultural adaptation that requires minority individuals to break away from their traditions, customs, values, and language in order to find full membership in the predominantly White American society. Some minority students opt to join academe with the condition of maintaining their culture of origin; such situations merit a discussion of biculturalism and dual socialization.

Valentine (1971) proposed the employment of a bicultural educational model, which receives validation when students are simultaneously enculturated and socialized in two different ways of life. For Valentine, biculturation helps explain how students learn and practice both the mainstream culture and ethnic cultures at the same time.

Diane de Anda (1984) elaborated on Valentine's (1971) concept of biculturation, citing six factors that affect biculturalism:

- (1) the degree of overlap of commonality between the two cultures with regard to norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and the like;
- (2) the availability of cultural translators, mediators, and models;
- (3) the amount and type (positive or negative) of corrective feedback provided by each culture regarding attempts to produce normative behavior;
- (4) the

conceptual style and problem-solving approach of the minority individual and their mesh with the prevalent or valued styles of the minority culture; (5) the individual's degree of bilingualism; and (6) the degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority culture, such as skin color and facial features (p. 135).

De Anda (1984) provided some additional insight regarding the importance of overlapping cultures to the concept of dual socialization, stating that:

dual socialization is made possible and facilitated by the amount of overlap between two cultures. That is, the extent to which an individual finds it possible to understand and predict successfully two cultural environments and adjust his or her behavior according to the norms of each culture depends on the extent to which these two cultures share common values, beliefs, perceptions, and norms for prescribed behaviors. (pp. 135-136)

Finally, de Anda argues that convergence between the two worlds could allow individuals to function more effectively and less stressfully in both worlds.

Some scholars have argued that dual socialization does not occur naturally in a college environment containing values, conventions, and traditions that are unfamiliar to largely minority first-generation students. They have stated that even when researchers study minorities, they often fail to challenge the philosophical assumptions made in traditional paradigms that are usually grounded in or developed from studies based on full-time, traditional-age, residential, middle-class, White, male students. Furthermore, scholars may often fail to consider current research that presents a more comprehensive and contextual view of minority student lives and educational experiences.

Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2001) suggested that educational persistence and retention is about support. As a process of helping students to persist in

their educational experiences, retention is linked to the fundamental ideas of match and fit. Retention does not only encompass persistence in formal education, but also in the potential involvement of students in the “hidden curriculum” of higher education. The authors also suggested that graduate students who have common experiences or face common issues may come together to nurture and sustain one another. Self-help and mutual support enables graduate students to interpret their experiences in the institution and to become sensitive to how well they are regarded or disregarded. Furthermore, this kind of support may also substitute for social action in the institution that enables students to address inequities or discrimination.

Moxley et al. (2001) assert that to promote retention and persistence of students, higher education must appreciate the diversity of educational opportunities available to students. Appreciating diversity encompasses (a) different ways that students can take advantage of educational opportunities, (b) variations in student demographics and backgrounds, (c) the methods by which students undertake their educational careers, and (d) the unique paths students take to learning and achieving educational outcomes. Students bring into educational settings considerable diversity in terms of age, gender, class, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and learning orientations. Language customs, traditions, and ultimately culture combine to produce classrooms in which students from very diverse backgrounds introduce different perspectives into postsecondary education as they interact with their peers, professors, advisors, and administrators (Moxley et al., 2001).

Finally, retention requires a psychosocial perspective that must address the personal and social needs that all students experience in their respective quests to achieve success in the educational situations of their choosing (Moxley et al., 2001). Some graduate students may find a way to address their personal needs to explore their social identities through papers, presentations, and dissertations throughout their doctoral program. Explaining the significance of one's story via graduate work is a strategy that encourages coping and persistence as expectations take on a whole new meaning. Student retention and persistence are relevant in the light of equipping students with a broader conception of their education beyond simply getting a degree or adequately meeting academic requirements (Moxley et al. 2001).

Despite aforementioned questioning by some scholars as to the applicability of Tinto's (1993) approach to theorizing retention as applied to non-White students, his model does provide some insight on how to approach and understand the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs. Tinto elaborated on the importance of creating supportive student communities for students of color and adult students, both of whom may experience difficulties making the transition to college and becoming incorporated. Chickering and Gamson (1987) provided a series of principles aimed at providing good undergraduate education, including (a) student-faculty contact, (b) cooperation among students, (c) active learning, (d) prompt feedback, (e) time on task, (f) high expectations, and (g) respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. These principles are distinct elements that together reflect a supportive student community.

Although the work of these authors is telling of the undergraduate experience, support and community are certainly relevant at the doctoral level as well.

Another critical factor to consider when examining persistence and retention is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual's own perception of his or her ability to carry out the necessary actions to reach a certain outcome. Furthermore, Bandura stated that individuals acquire a perception of their ability to perform a particular task or deal with a particular situation based on past experience and observation. As the individual recognizes his or her competence and gains self-confidence, that individual will demonstrate higher aspirations for persistence, task achievement, and personal goals (Braxton, 2000).

The notion of capital, promoted by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is a sociological concept imperative to the discussion of college student persistence. Bourdieu (1973) argued that certain educational market laws guide the arrangement of educational establishments; specifically, educational establishments are usually arranged hierarchically in a manner that mirrors existing social classes. In addition to the understanding of capital, an understanding of the role capital plays in social reproduction is also pivotal. Full understanding of graduate student persistence from a social reproduction perspective must include an account of what is happening at both the individual and institutional levels in the persistence process.

Over the years, Bourdieu (1973) identified multiple types of capital, including economic capital, such as money and material objects, as well as cultural capital, which encompasses informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, linguistics, educational

credentials, and lifestyle preferences. He continually refined his concepts and elaborated upon his original concept of cultural capital, first adding social capital, then symbolic capital. Many other types of capital followed, including artistic, intellectual, and credential, amongst others. For Bourdieu, the two primary types of commodities used in the social reproduction process are cultural and economic capital. Capital has a cumulative effect: the greater the early accumulation, the easier it becomes to expand one's personal holdings (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Understanding cultural capital is the key to comprehending Bourdieu's work, as it is a symbolic resource valued by members of the upper class but is not taught in schools (McDonough, 1997).

In an educational context, Bourdieu (1973) stressed the importance of educational institutions serving as intermediary agents thorough which individuals optimize existing capital to accumulate greater shares of economic and cultural capital later in life. He argued that schools reproduce and legitimate existing class structures by transforming class distinctions into distinctions of merit. Given that cultural capital tends to be cumulative, it is not surprising that students with higher initial levels of cultural capital, often acquired from primary socialization in the family, tend to be able to use the initial familial investments of cultural capital to gain further cultural wealth through the secondary socialization process in schools (Bourdieu, 1973; Mehan, 1992). Due to cultural capital, college attendance for many students is not a matter of conscious choice, but rather a part of their own cognitive schemes shaped by their home and community environments. Unfortunately, students with lower levels of capital, often those from

lower socioeconomic upbringings, are less likely to believe that they are entitled to a college education. Their thoughts of going to college therefore become miniscule.

McDonough (1997) suggested that educational organizations are involved in the process of social reproduction. The basic hierarchical institutional order remains preserved while the status quo is socially reproduced. This pattern of organizational behavior provides some initial indications that postsecondary institutions, as with individuals, can use their greater access to economic and cultural resources to protect their positions of status and socially reproduce the existing order.

Bourdieu (1973, 1977) argued that people from a similar class background share a common conscious or unconscious understanding about the world. A social reproduction perspective suggests built-in organizational mechanisms result when an institution pursues its own agenda for social reproduction. Often, students from lower socioeconomic classes feel geographically constrained, are of the belief that they cannot meet admissions standards, or cannot afford other colleges (McDonough, 1997); therefore, they are less likely to feel they have a wide range of options in terms of colleges to attend. Students with relatively low levels of cultural capital may still persist and graduate, but will have a more difficult doing so in an environment that has developed an organizational habitus around attracting, educating, and graduating students with access to higher levels of cultural capital. The quality of undergraduate preparation also affects the quality of graduate programs to which students are admitted. Students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as first-generation college students,

tend to enroll in schools of less prestige, which often limits their eventual prospects for a fruitful graduate school experience.

First-Generation Students

Various definitions of first-generation college students can be found in the literature. Warburton, Bugarin, and Nuñez (2001) defined these students as those for whom “neither parent had more than a high school education. Thus, the student was a member of the first generation in the immediate family to attend college (p. 5).” Federal TRIO programs are educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The U.S. Department of Education’s (2013) TRIO website defines a first-gen student as one for whom neither parent has earned a four year college degree. It is important to understand the experiences and retention strategies tailored to first-generation students, as they are twice as likely as students whose parents earned bachelor’s degrees to drop out of college before their second year at four-year institutions (Yeh, 2010). This is important to note, as many Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs identify as first-generation college students.

Higher education continually attempts to identify effective means for retaining traditionally marginalized populations, particularly first-generation college students of color from low-income backgrounds (Conley & Hamlin, 2009). Research has shown that first-generation college students tend to be less academically prepared (Choy, 2001), have lower SAT scores (Bui, 2002), get lower grades (Pascarella et al., 2003), and have higher rates of attrition (Ishitani, 2003) than those whose parents have some college

experience. Harrell and Forney (2003) delved deeper into the matter, describing students whose parents have earned a bachelor's degree as typically sharing a distinct set of characteristics as compared to first-generation peers. These shared characteristics include (a) earning higher SAT or ACT scores, (b) having a background in more rigorous high school coursework, (c) maintaining a higher college GPA, (d) being White, (e) coming from an upbringing in a higher socioeconomic status level, (f) not needing to take as much remedial coursework in the first year of postsecondary education, and (g) working toward a bachelor's degree with more continuous enrollment pattern.

D'Allegro and Kerns (2010) assessed the relationship between parental education level and college success indicators at institutions of low selectivity. They determined that the success of first-generation students differed from that of non-first-generation peers. First-generation students generally do not lack in ability, but often feel less prepared for college and have a greater fear of failure than students whose parents have earned at least a bachelor's degree (Bui, 2002; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Warburton et al., 2001). In addition, Pike and Kuh (2005) suggested that first-generation college students tend to have lower levels of academic aspiration, which also contributes to academic difficulties. Ultimately, the research community has concurred that parents without college experience are less likely to have academically-related discussions with their children before college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000) and are therefore less likely to talk about academic issues and challenges with their children once the students actually enter college. In support of this finding, Kao (2004) concluded

that parents who do not have knowledge about college attendance and expectations will not be able to pass this information on to their children.

Conley and Hamlin (2009) called for additional research to identify strategies that can measurably mitigate the feelings of marginalization and inadequacy that certain students encounter as they try to reconcile previous life experiences with life as a college student. First-generation college students undergo enormous transformations as they negotiate the difficult transition into the culture of academia (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). They confront all the anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of any other college student; however, their experiences often involve cultural, social and academic transitions as well (Pascarella et al., 2003; Rendon, 1993). Parents of students in this particular population are usually not prepared to handle such transitions. Purswell, Yazedjian, and Toews (2008) effectively captured this notion, stating that the parents of first-generation college students are often a source of emotional support but are not likely to provide equivalent academic support because of a lack of understanding of the expectations in that area.

Using the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) and social capital theory (Coleman, 1988), Purswell et al. (2008) examined academic intentions, parental support, and peer support as related to self-reported academic behaviors among a sample of 329 first- and continuing-generation college freshmen. Their findings suggest that parental and peer support are less prominent for first-generation college students in predicting the extent to which they performed academic behaviors. Therefore, they advised colleges that in order to better serve these first-generation college students, they

need to be aware of the different set of life experiences they collectively face. Regarding peers, Hertel (2002) suggested that first-generation college students perceive more social support from non-college-attending friends than from those who attend college, but that non-college attending friends would be less likely to provide encouragement and understanding in specific academic behaviors. The field has acknowledged that social support is essential to academic success and that key agents contribute to a supportive learning demeanor in students. Parents and peers are two very important agents; however, faculty and staff are perhaps the most important agents. Unfortunately, despite the detriment caused to students by a lack of faculty or staff mentorship, this occurrence is often cited as one of the prime reasons why students from disadvantaged backgrounds discontinue their educational trajectories.

Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008) found that first-generation, working-class students are intimidated by the idea of seeking out faculty for support, resulting in a lack of support from their faculty. They suggest the following actions:

- inform faculty about how they are perceived by first-generation, working-class freshmen;
- having faculty hold out-of-class meetings with first-gens, individually or collectively, to discuss the students' collegiate success;
- supporting new and tenured faculty in their efforts through additional professional development as mentors
- in an opportunity to extend the community of the classroom, academic departments should sponsor and support faculty engagement with pre-professional or social clubs

These recommendations would be most effective prior to or during the students' first collegiate year, as Ishitani (2003) stated that first-generation students are less likely to be

retained through the first year. Strategies for engagement to ensure the success of first-generation students should begin well before students are considering college enrollment (Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004); furthermore, high schools must encourage planning for college as early as ninth grade (Adelman, 2006; Cushman, 2007).

Through a \$100,000 year-long Project Compass planning grant from the Nellie Mae Foundation, Lyndon State College established a task force to collect data and identify strategies for improving the success of first-generation, low-income students (Dalton, Moore, & Whittaker, 2009). A professional development series was implemented related to best practices in pedagogy; assessment; advising; and meeting the needs of first-generation, low-income students. An implementation grant was then awarded to Lyndon State College, in which the following strategies were implemented:

- data management and evidence development, which allowed for the determination of trends, the predictability of persistence, and the identification of effective interventions;
- an early alert system, helping to streamline the responsiveness to faculty and staff most closely connected to first-generation, low-income students;
- a college advising and mentoring pilot, designed to address the needs of first-generation, low-income students by reducing inconsistencies in advising and support;
- a pilot program to create learning communities;
- various basic skills pilot courses that combine remedial and required-level courses in both math and English, ensuring students do not fall behind on required credits by the end of their first year;
- professional development in the form of visits from nationally-recognized retention specialists;
- enhanced campus communication through kickoff events recognizing the importance of all members of the college community in contributing to student success; and

- community and high school outreach through the establishment of working relationships with regional high schools, technical centers, economic development agencies, and the private sector.

While many statistics are available on the characteristics, lower success rates, and barriers associated with low-income, first-generation students, few studies have examined the causes and strategies that contribute to their college success (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Leadership experience, ability to cope with racism, and demonstrated community service have also been found to positively predict GPA for first-generation students of color (Ting, 2003). First-generation students benefit more from engaging in peer interactions and participation in academic and extracurricular activities than other students, in terms of their critical thinking, degree plans, internal locus of attribution for academic success, learning for self-understanding, and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Mainstream retention theories (e.g., Tinto, 1993) have been widely criticized as culturally biased or unrelated to underrepresented student populations. However, Tinto (2006) has recently called for continued research on the retention of low-income college students, particularly focusing on the influences and strategies that enhance their education and graduation prospects. While recognizing the importance of certain types of cultural and social capital in contributing to educational success, Maldonado, Zapata, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) asserted that simply acquiring this capital will only result in maintaining the status quo. Their model was created for underrepresented populations and contains many components applicable to the socioeconomically and educationally marginalized students that were the focus of Yeh's (2010) study on the impact of service-

learning on the retention of low-income, first-generation students. The impact of service-learning merits extensive examination as it speaks to the commitment to social justice tenet identified by Solórzano (1997) in CRT.

Conley and Hamlin (2009) examined a semester-long, first-year seminar program which combined a social justice-oriented curriculum with service-learning for first-generation college students from low-income urban areas. Their study was based on the belief that it is necessary to “bridge” the communities of origin of these students with their academic communities to forge meaningful connections between two disparate worlds; furthermore, any attempt to foster social awareness and commitment must first critically engage these students in an examination of power, privilege, and difference. As Conley and Hamlin stated, “to do so means to specifically address the very cultural conflicts, tensions, or marginality most of these students are certain to experience upon entering college.” The authors found that this combined pedagogy afforded low-income, first-generation students opportunities to openly examine unacknowledged binaries, which guided much of their day-to-day thinking. Ultimately, their findings advocate for a first-year seminar experience in the form of a justice-learning curriculum that can influence the academic and civic engagement for students of color classified as low-income, first-generation college students.

The Leadership for Social Justice Seminar, described in Conley and Hamlin’s (2009) study, is a three-credit course introducing students to a college-level depth of critical thinking through a detailed examination of social justice, as well as the mission and values of the college. The objective of the course was to give students rich academic

content designed to engross them in the academic life and mission of the college. The students were engaged in service-learning activities specifically linked to their academic work utilizing a framework of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and ongoing reflection. This 10-hour service-learning component further enabled students to learn about social justice collaboration with a varied range of community partners. This type of seminar allowed for four aspects of learning that are not usually introduced to first-generation, low-income students pre-college but are of great necessity during college years: (a) critical thinking, (b) acknowledgement of social justice issues, (c) familiarity with the culture of the institutional setting, and (d) networking.

The pre-college curriculum is mostly based on memorization for standardized exams, negates that social justice issues exist, and largely ignores that there is in fact a culture that nurtures the “traditional student.” Networking with community partners can further facilitate this knowledge and increase the likelihood of producing well-rounded, successful students. Conley and Hamlin (2009) outlined other causes that can contribute to high-achieving disadvantaged students:

Curricular activities such as readings, guest speakers, extensive reflective writing, in-depth discussion, and small group work initiated throughout the semester-long course were designed to help students become aware of power structures that disadvantage groups of people; explore the systematic nature of socioeconomic inequities; learn about organizations working for social justice; and develop a personal sense of responsibility for social justice as well as strengthen the attendant skills needed to move from understanding and awareness to action.

Conley and Hamlin asserted that in order to effectively implement a justice-oriented curriculum, instructors must encourage students to critically situate themselves in

contemporary society. “Social justice originates with lived experience and works to foster a critical perspective by contextualizing seemingly individual oppression within hegemonic structures, both societal and cultural (Young, 1990)”; nowhere is this more evident than in the discussion of race and ethnicity in college.

Ethnic Minorities

Numerous studies have demonstrated that minority students face many obstacles in addition to those faced by other students entering the university (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Tinto, 1987). The college retention for Hispanic students in particular continues to lag behind those of White Americans (The Education Trust, 2006) and remain an issue nationwide (Seidman, 2007). If equity is truly an important goal of education, something must be done to increase the retention of Hispanics in higher education (Harrell & Forney, 2003).

Research has revealed that many Hispanics will represent the first generation of their family to attend college and that a relationship between minority status and low-income levels exists (Harrell & Forney, 2003). Latinos often choose to help out with family chores and spend time with their families before doing their school work; this is due to strong values of family interdependence (Fulgini & Tseng, 1999; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). At the same time, however, expectations from family members that one should attend college may also encourage Latino students to persist in higher education. This is often attributed to the endorsement of cultural values, which places a great deal of emphasis on meeting the demands and expectations of others (Markus &

Kitayama, 1991). Niemann, Romero, and Arbona (2000) found that cultural factors, such as strong ethnic loyalty, may also increase the individual's perception of conflict between relationships and educational goals, as minority students may feel torn between two worlds that hold distinct expectations and therefore may experience stress in an effort to find balance.

Despite these difficulties, many Latino students are retained and are able to persist. The literature highlights two main reasons that allow for this phenomenon to occur: the influence of the mother and personal desire to advance. Wohlgemuth et al. (2007) stated that Latina students' retention in particular, was found to be influenced by the mother's role in the student's home, the mother's support of her daughter's educational goals, type of parenting received, type of schooling (integrated vs. segregated), marital status, number of children, and sex-typed roles. In reality, many adolescents from minority backgrounds are committed to getting an education as a way to improve their lives and avoid the difficult lives their parents have led (Lopez, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The profiles of these students merit further examination, as it is sure to affect the academic adjustment of these students at the college level.

Phinney, Dennis, and Gutierrez (2005) conducted a cluster analysis to identify the college orientation profiles of 115 Mexican and Central American college freshmen from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds and to examine the relationship between profiles and academic outcomes. Participants in this study were surveyed on personal and cultural types of motivation and college degree goals, degree confidence, and college self-efficacy. Three clusters of students were identified based on cultural and

motivational characteristics: (a) family group, (b) committed group, and the (c) default group.

Phinney et al. (2005) arrived at several conclusions. First, the family group combined a strong sense of family interdependence with high motivation for attending college for both family and personal reasons. However, the committed group, in contrast to the other two groups, expressed the strongest positive attitudes about being in college and desire to complete their degree, but indicated the lowest default motivation. Finally, the default group showed the highest level of default motivation, which means that they lacked any clear purpose in attending college. More studies such as the Phinney et al. (2005) work would prove beneficial in unmasking the inequities in a supposedly equal and standardized educational system. It is imperative to understand the background of students and how these backgrounds impact their motivation and success in their studies, but it is equally important to understand the origin and purpose of the university and how it shapes the experiences of disadvantaged students, many times resulting in their expulsion.

When entering large mainstream universities, minority students are, in many ways, entering a society modeled upon a White, western tradition (Fitzgerald, 1993). The university climate includes normative structures, reward and sanctioning systems, certain activities of emphasis, and a valued style of campus life. The climates of predominantly White institutions of higher education have consistently been identified as White, male, middle-class settings that value individualism and competition. Such climates are often unyielding to individuals who have different values or approaches (Gloria & Pope-Davis,

1997; Watson et al., 2002). This sort of university climate derives from, and is perpetuated by, the reality of White privilege in U.S. society. White privilege serves as a large part of the hidden infrastructure of American society; it directs, drives, and often determines critical outcomes in an invisible and subtle fashion, such as employment, housing, education, and even interpersonal relationships. In order for White privilege to exist, a counterbalance, a system that disadvantages others, must also exist. This counterbalance is typically known as racism (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010).

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010) explore how White privilege and racism function in adult education graduate programs regarding admissions, retention, and curricula. The authors asserted that because graduate students tend to be more connected to their programs than to the larger university, it is especially important to understand the impact of social community and support to the graduate students who may be members of disenfranchised groups. Therefore, they affirm that personal experiences of racism and white privilege affect retention. Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey also believe that only a recognition and acceptance of this fact will help those who participate in the graduate admissions process to create change, stating that “faculty need to develop strategies for increasing retention among students from underrepresented groups.” They offer some recommendations specifically for faculty, with hopes of rectifying the troublesome experiences many students of color experience.

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010) presented a variety of conclusions. First, a cohort model can be of utility for all races, but this model has specifically been accredited with the success of graduating students of color. Second, faculty need to

engage actively in outreach and mentoring, especially for first-generation college students and students of color. Third, workshops or retreats concerning racism and White privilege might help White faculty and students examine the methods they use to protect White privilege and unintentionally promote racism.

Furthermore, according to Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010), “Issues of race and the contributions of people of color should be taught across the curriculum. It is not only the responsibility of faculty of color; it is especially imperative that white faculty take this action.” Adult learning and development courses should discuss how racism and White privilege affect the transaction of teaching and learning. These courses should also include models of racial identity development. Program planning courses need to include scholarship that discusses race and White privilege in the program planning process. This third recommendation is by far the most important strategy if institutions of higher learning are truly committed to remedying the discrepancies in educational attainment across race. Such a pledge would impact both the culture and the climate of any college or university.

The transition to the university for minority students is usually a complicated one. Often times they must adapt to a foreign culture that represents a part of society that has historically demonstrated significant hostility toward minorities (Phinney et al., 2005). The task can then take two routes, either one of succumbing to the fixated culture by way of assimilation or through learning to navigate the foreign culture by what has been noted in the literature as “code switching.” The concept of code switching is the process in

which students go back and forth between their intellectual self and what they feel is their true self. A discussion on discourse is critical to understanding such phenomenon.

Many minority students are not familiar with the linguistic styles or levels of academic discourse required by the university (Martin & White, 2005). The university, like many other cultures, has its own unique and specialized discursive practices; as such, it is a “discourse community” (Bizzell, 1992). Some minority students come to college lacking literacy in academic discourse and the “codes of power” (Delpit, 1995); however, they need to be full participants in the academic discourse community. Dealing with the conflict of one’s personal cultural values and those of the university environment, known as cultural incongruity (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996), adds to the unique experiences of Latino students. A decreased sense of cultural congruity contributes to decreased academic persistence decisions for Latino/a undergraduates (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005). The relationship between culture and its impact on educational pursuit is a vital component with regard to retention.

Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco (2005) examined the degree to which perceived educational barriers, cultural fit, and coping responses predict the psychological well-being of 98 Latina undergraduates. Consistent with previous research (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Vazquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 1995), they found the two most frequently used coping responses were (a) talking with others about the problem and (b) taking a positive action plan. Since Latinas have been identified as invisible within the university setting (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Rodriguez et al., 2000); and their personal values often conflict with university values, they can experience additional stress (Gloria

& Rodriguez, 2000; Mena et al., 1987). This finding also underscores the need for the educational system to involve parents and families in Latina/o students' higher education. It calls for student affairs professionals (specifically, university counseling center counselors) to include parents and extended family members in student programming and interventions. By doing so, the institution acknowledges that Latinas often look to their families when making life decisions, such as college attendance or long-term educational attainment), as a function of their strong family and community values. Psycho-educational support groups in the residence halls or Latina/o-based organizational meetings are one way to allow Latinas to learn from each other, gain support, and develop space where they can create positive and planned actions for dealing with barriers, cultural incongruity, and well-being (Capello, 1994); Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). The promotion of active coping responses may enhance students' willingness and ability to seek help, (either from family or student affairs professionals), which influences their college experience (Zea, Jarama, & Bianchi, 1995). All of the aforementioned recommendations are resourceful in application, but a theoretical approach is also necessary to generate continued strategies that speak to the needs of students in respective times.

Tinto (1993) later elaborated on the importance of supportive student communities for students of color and adult students who may experience difficulties making the transition to college and becoming incorporated. In order to create a supportive student community, however, scholars who wish to investigate how minority students make the transition to college should be familiar with the concepts of

biculturalism and dual socialization. Tinto added that for some students, it is essential that a minimum percentage of the student body come from their specific racial or cultural group for them to feel comfortable.

For many minority students, not being around their “own kind” makes them susceptible to stereotype threats from non-minority students, causing them to retreat back to familiar grounds where academic goals are not of high priority. Myths and stereotypes continue to prevail for racial and ethnic groups simply because there is a void in the incorporation of roles, characteristics, and perceptions of these subgroups. Terenzini et al. (1994) found that “friends who did not attend college could complicate the transition by anchoring students to old networks of friends and patterns of behavior rather than allowing them to explore and learn about their new college environment.” Both bases are critical when considering minority student retention and both can be remediated through mentorship.

Morales (2010) conducted a qualitative study with 15 first-generation Dominican male college students, where he explored how their informal mentoring relationships influenced their academic progress, standing, and retention. His findings proved the valuable place of mentors as social capital for at-risk students. Mentors provide students with insider academic information, legitimizing their academic and professional goals and transforming their immigration experiences into academic inspiration. He provided the following recommendations to universities targeting the retention of Hispanic immigrants:

- Low SES Hispanic immigrant college students may particularly benefit from being mentored by college faculty and administrators who have the

time and are eager to share insider knowledge. Whether it is academic knowledge (e.g., how to write a research paper) or procedural information (e.g., access to internships and graduate programs), exposure to these human resources may prove invaluable for this population.

- In counseling and in guiding these students, potential mentors should be aware of their power to legitimize student goals and aspirations through positive encouragement and support. Mentors must not take for granted that these students possess sincere confidence in their abilities to overcome obstacles and achieve in academic and professional realms. Relatively simple words of encouragement from mentors whom the students view as accomplished and knowledgeable can go a long way towards building invaluable internal locus of control.
- Finally, instead of looking at students' immigrant statuses as problems that need to be fixed, mentors may effectively build on that status, turning it into a strength. By acknowledging the courage, will, and effort that often characterize the immigration experience, mentors can help these students feel pride and use that as a motivating force (Morales, 2010, pp. 399-400).

The research community has agreed mentorship is the key at any level of education, but given the exclusiveness of the graduate student pool in U.S. society, it is critical to examine the experiences of ethnic minorities at the graduate level, as they become less and less visible throughout the educational pipeline. One of the most influential aspects of any doctoral student's experience is the relationship with his/her adviser/mentor. For Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs this may or may not pose a challenge as faculty ranks are still dominated by White males.

Mentoring research has predominantly explored the experiences of White Caucasian protégés; therefore, the experiences of protégés of color along with the experiences of those individuals who mentor them merits further investigation (Ortiz-Walters, & Gilson, 2005). In an academic context, mentoring has been determined to provide protégés with three distinctive forms of support: (a) psychosocial support, (b)

instrumental support, and (c) networking support (Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001). The experiences of protégés of color need to be further examined, especially with regard to the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship according to race and ethnicity.

Having a relationship with a mentor who is also of color may prove to be of value for protégés of color because of the comfort and interpersonal attraction that is present when people share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds. Interpersonal comfort has been designated as a feeling parallel to trust, where parties believe they can converse freely with one another and express their views and opinions without consequence (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Interpersonal comfort is of particular importance for protégés of color who may not immediately notice the similarities between themselves and their mentors (Thomas, 1998). Protégés of color are likely to experience diversified mentoring relationships that have been described as lacking in comfort levels; therefore, interpersonal comfort is critical for these individuals (Ragins, 1997).

Mentoring may be critical for students from particular racial and ethnic backgrounds, but the existent quandary is that most of their mentoring will come from those of a different appearance (Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, & Williams, 1999; Thomas, 1990). Although the interpersonal comfort may be limited, having a mentor who is not of color may prove to be useful for protégés of color in other ways. White mentors are oftentimes more integrated into prominent networks and could serve to endorse a protégé's career (Dreher & Cox, 1996). Mentors of color are often perceived by their students as having limited authority compared to their mainstream colleagues (Murrell & Tangri, 1999); as a result, students may opt for networking opportunities in lieu of

interpersonal comfort. Such support includes introductions to journal editors, department heads, and prominent researchers (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005).

Due to the history of race relations in the U.S., stereotypical expectations, and a lack of shared experiences, many people tend to feel less comfortable with one another in a cross-race relationship (Smith, 1983; Thomas, 1989). The lack of interpersonal comfort may result in protégés receiving less support; in addition, both parties may not develop a strong bond. Hence, relationship satisfaction may also be adversely affected.

A lack of closeness in a relationship may result in a mentor, particularly one who is dissimilar on either surface or deep-level characteristics, being less willing to take risks on behalf of a protégé (Thomas, 1998). Commitment represents a willingness to remain in a relationship despite interpersonal challenges and has been found to contribute to the well-being of each partner (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999). Individuals who are committed are more likely to make accommodations to meet the other's needs. Additionally, individuals who are committed experience more satisfying and mutually beneficial relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993); research suggests that this is more likely to occur if mentor and protégé share similar characteristics (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005).

To conclude, Stanley and Lincoln (2005) highlighted ten 10 considerations with regard to cross-race mentoring:

- Cross-race mentoring requires extra sensitivity.
- Cross-race mentoring takes some familiarity with research topics that are often taken up by scholars of color.

- Cross-race mentoring may begin with an “assignment,” but it is built on a relationship.
- Cross-race mentoring requires work on both sides—including deep reflection on the meaning(s) of White privilege; the assumption of White seniority and “voice,” and departmental and college mores, traditions, and values.
- Cross-race mentoring requires assuming some responsibility for the mentored individual.
- Cross-race mentoring is a multifoliate activity, addressing needs expressed by the individual mentored but also those of which the individual might not be aware. This can lead to conflict when constructive feedback is not considered supportive by the protégé.
- Cross-race mentoring may often mean expressing views that the scholar of color feels strongly about but might be afraid to raise in public meetings.
- Cross-race mentoring involves sharing opportunities for professional development and promotion, as well as pointing out landmines in the academic landscape.
- Cross-race mentoring is not academic cloning. It is the giving of self, expertise, and experience to help others achieve their goals.
- Finally, cross-race mentoring requires the majority faculty member to become sensitive to issues that might have seemed unimportant in the past (pp. 48-50).

These points illustrate important features that could determine whether or not Puerto Rican women persist in their doctoral programs. Advisors and mentors play a key role in the success of doctoral students. A more in-depth discussion regarding the retention of graduate students is necessary to further understand the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs.

Graduate Students

Rates of doctoral student attrition in the U.S. are not easily calculated (Allan & Dory, 2001). The high student attrition from doctoral degree programs in the United

States remains a troubling aspect of higher education (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). The attrition rates that have been reported vary. Nettles and Millett (2006) reported attrition rates in doctoral education ranging from 40 percent to 70 percent. Creighton (2008) and Golde (2005) indicated that the completion rates of doctorates stands between 50 percent and 60 percent. Ultimately, half of all students who begin a doctoral program ultimately fail to complete their degree (Bair & Haworth 2004; Gardner, 2008).

The decision to pursue a doctoral degree is a highly complex and individual one (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). One challenge for researchers interested in the doctoral student experience involves the dynamics that influence student enrollment, progress towards the degree, and degree completion. One issue that may contribute to doctoral program attrition is the length of time it takes to complete the degree (Storms, Prada, & Donahue, 2011). Of those who do not complete the doctoral program, more than a quarter drop out after completing the prescribed coursework, but before finishing their dissertations (McIlveen, George, Voss, & Laguardia, 2006). According to Single (2010), onerous comprehensive exams and language requirements can serve as a deterrent to graduating. Specifically within the social sciences, students are most likely to opt out at the midpoint between coursework and dissertation writing—essentially, the time during which are engaged in the aforementioned requirements.

Most classical retention literature has focused on undergraduates. However, this focus has started to include some attention to retention at the graduate level as well. The retention of first-generation, ethnic minorities at the graduate level is even more pressing. Poock (1999) stated that the term “underrepresented” includes first-generation students as

well as those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In general, graduate schools and individual academic programs should strive toward an inclusive graduate student body (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). Programs and universities can build a more inclusive graduate student body through the promotion and implementation of mentoring.

Scholars have reached the general consensus that faculty-graduate student mentoring relationships are a significant aspect of the graduate education experience that can help to foster student success (Heinrich, 1995; Patton, 2009; Patton & Harper, 2003). Such relationships benefit students in numerous ways, including increased employment opportunities (Bova, 2000; Bova & Phillips, 1984; Cameron, 1978), development of professional skills (Bova & Phillips, 1984), and professional growth (Harris & Brewer, 1986), among other positive outcomes. Undoubtedly, research on faculty-graduate student relationships has provided extremely valuable insights about effective practices that foster the success of both graduate students in general (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Wilde & Schau, 1991) as well as the specific group of underrepresented students (Patton, 2009; Swail et al. 2003). The broadly perceived roles and responsibilities of faculty members in a graduate student mentoring relationship are still in need of further discussion (Lechuga, 2011).

Mentoring relationships between faculty and students are particularly important in graduate school, as they are the vehicles from which students are socialized into their respective disciplinary cultures (Becher, 1989). Research has demonstrated that faculty-graduate student relationships play an integral role in shaping graduate students' research

training, their professional identity, and career dedication. Additionally, they provide socialization into academe (Bova, 2000; Harris & Brewer, 1986; Schroeder & Mynatt, 1993).

Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) emphasized the significance of mentoring, explaining that “the cultivation of developmental or mentoring relationships between graduate students and their professors is a critical factor in determining the successful completion of graduate programs.” Anderson and Shannon (1988) defined mentoring as

a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development.

Holley and Caldwell (2012) added that while doctoral students typically work with an advisor during the dissertation process, a mentoring relationship provides personal and professional support that extends beyond the traditional advising affiliation.

Rogers and Molina (2006) echoed the importance of faculty mentorship for graduate students in psychology, stating that departments and graduate programs in psychology at predominantly White institutions may not know how to create educational and training environments that are perceived as welcoming and sustaining by students of color. One component that cannot be disregarded in any graduate program is the research aspect. For many graduate students of color, this is the first time they are able to explore their experiences and many develop their research identities as such.

Other researchers have found that the quality of the relationship between the candidate and the advisor is of pivotal importance to completion of the degree (Zhao,

Golde, & McCormick, 2005). Di Pierro (2007) explored the training received by dissertation advisors; they found that very few doctoral programs train advisors on how to support doctoral students in the dissertation phase.

Negroni-Rodríguez, Dicks, and Morales (2006) used the advising model at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work (UCSSW), to examine various advising strategies for Latino/a graduate students. UCSSW houses a Puerto Rican/Latino Studies Project (PRLSP) which allows Puerto Rican/Latino faculty to provide mentoring as well as formal and informal advising to Latino/a students. It is the only program of its kind in schools of social work in the U.S. The program features five objectives:

- recruit and retain Latino/a students;
- establish Puerto Rican/Latino courses as part of the social work curriculum;
- provide social service agencies with consultation on Latino/a client systems;
- offer support to Latino communities; and
- gather, utilize and disseminate information about Latino/as.

Such a project would be greatly beneficial at any college or university, as the number of enrolled Latino students is rising across the U.S. Furthermore, as the literature has indicated, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans often have the most difficulty in higher education (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

The model for advising Latino/a students presented by Negroni-Rodríguez et al. (2006) is comprised of five components: (a) the institutional commitment and support, (b) the learning environment, (c) the advisor, (d) the advising process, and (e) the mentoring relationship. Institutional commitment, the first component, emphasizes a

commitment to diversity in general as well as a specific commitment to Puerto Rican and Latino issues. The learning environment component accentuates Latino/a culture in the form of culturally sensitive teaching styles and approaches that have been shown to facilitate Latino/a student participation and successful performance. This component also calls for culturally competent support services, such as tutoring.

The advisor-centric component features four qualities that Latino/a students expect from their advisors: (a) knowledge about Latinos/as, their needs and common problems they face; (b) knowledge about social work practice with Latinos/as; (c) awareness of the importance of *confianza* (trust) in developing a relationship with the advisee; (d) allowances for frequent contact with the advisee; and (e) awareness of the role of language in the learning process (Negroni-Rodríguez, Dicks, & Morales, 2003).

The component addressing the advising process provides a series of roles advisors should carry out, including (a) advocating on behalf of advisees; (b) connecting advisees with other Latino/a students and alumni; (c) facilitating and encouraging advisees' access to opportunities; (d) supporting advisees with academic and personal matters; (e) supporting the initiatives and efforts of Latino students in the school community; (f) collaborating, celebrating and promoting relationship-building; and (g) supporting and collaborating with Latino/a student organizations. Advising Latino/a students may require more advocacy efforts than usual. Advisors' advocacy may include (a) clarifying cultural differences; (b) enhancing mutual understandings; (c) bridging cultures; (d) educating other faculty on the needs of Latino/a students; (e) encouraging faculty to be supportive of issues related to language, learning style, and culture of Latino/a students; and (6)

providing consultation and resources, such as videos, articles, and seminars. Advocating for more bilingual and bicultural staff, tutors, mentors, and role models for Latino/a students may also be necessary (Negroni-Rodríguez et al., 2006).

The final component proposed by Negroni-Rodríguez (2006) stresses advisors become mentors who serve as additional family members to their students and become

part of the support system of the Latino/a students in the school community. They show students that they care in the following ways: (1) calling them by their names; (2) treating them with attention, consideration and respect; (3) being available to them as needed; (4) getting to know them as persons and (5) letting them know the advisor as an individual.

Overall, effective advisors could drastically decrease the attrition rates in graduate programs.

Nettles and Millett (2006) maintained that “a mentor is a person (a faculty member) who the student seeks to emulate professionally, and a person the student chooses to work with and learn from during the research process.” Many synonyms exist for the word “mentor:” coach, guide, role model, peer advisor, and sponsor, among others (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). The successful mentoring relationship is characterized by trust, honesty, a willingness to learn about self and others, and the ability to share power and privilege. Stanley and Lincoln (2005) asserted that mentors also must learn how to recognize their protégés’ strengths and weaknesses, nurture their autonomy, treat them as individuals, capitalize on their skills, and create opportunities for challenge and growth.

Doctoral students are more likely to persist to graduation and report higher degrees of satisfaction with their programs when they engage in meaningful relationships

with faculty mentors or advisors (Bair & Haworth, 2004). Regardless of a mentor's origin, doctoral student engagement with a mentor offers the opportunity to interact with role models and garner support for professional development and socialization experiences (Holley & Caldwell, 2012).

The challenges of developing successful relationships can be particularly severe for minority or underrepresented students, many of whom struggle to find faculty mentors and professional guidance (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Minority doctoral students encounter many of the same obstacles as their majority-race peers. However, they also face both feelings of isolation and a lack of minority role models (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Gender can also influence the types of mentoring interactions students prefer (Hagedorn, Maxwell, Rodriguez, Hocevar, & Fillpot, 2000). Schroeder and Mynatt (1993) revealed how female graduate students often felt ignored, invisible, and dismissed by their male faculty advisers. According to Patton and Harper (2003), underrepresented graduate students have difficulty finding suitable mentors with similar backgrounds who can provide the proper academic and social support because of their small numbers. Therefore, socialization in doctoral programs is quite the challenge for Puerto Rican women.

Gardner (2008) suggested that a doctoral student's decision to persist in or depart from the degree program stems from socialization. Socialization is the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization (Kuh & Whitt, 1988;

Merton, 1957). Unsuccessful socialization contributes to the decision to depart from the degree program (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010).

In *Three Magic Letters: Getting to PhD*, Nettles and Millett (2006) discussed socialization in doctoral programs. The authors suggested that socialization is important at every level of education, but given both the restricted range of grades that students receive in doctoral programs and the individual tailoring of doctoral student work, the indices of socialization in graduate school are especially important gauges of student progress and achievement. Nettles and Millett argued that the socialization process is important because student socialization contributes to their performance, satisfaction, and success in doctoral programs. Thus, the socialization of the growing and diverse population of doctoral students in the United States is a much vaguer constituent of graduate education than suggested by statistics, in terms of enrollments and numbers of doctoral degrees awarded. Nettles and Millet concluded that as university graduate program enrollments grow and become more racially diverse, the variation in the socialization of students from different backgrounds who are expected to provide academic and research productivity and leadership in the nation and around the world becomes increasingly intriguing.

Gardner (2008) stated that understanding how contextual factors, such as discipline, department, and institution, influence the socialization process is integral to better understanding how these contexts influence students' retention and success. Golde (2005) described the process of graduate school socialization as one "in which a

newcomer is made a member of a community—in the case of graduate students, the community of an academic department in a particular discipline.” She continued,

The socialization of graduate students is an unusual double socialization. New students are simultaneously directly socialized into the role of graduate student and are given preparatory socialization into graduate student life and the future career common to most doctoral students.

However, despite preparatory socialization, some underrepresented minority graduate students still often feel like a “square peg in a round hole” and have a hard time fitting in.

Gardner (2008) proposed that lack of fit with the culture and nuances of graduate school may serve as the key influence causing large numbers of underrepresented students to either leave their degree programs or to not optimally participate from the very beginning of their journeys. Since the inception of graduate education in the U.S., the target population has been best described as largely young, White, single, and male, resulting in a normative type of “mold” that has persisted in many fields. The lack of diversity in graduate education has been a growing concern in the U.S. in the past several years. This concern has resulted in the creation of several initiatives and granting agencies to grow recruitment and retention programs for women and students of color across disciplinary lines (e.g., National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering; National Science Foundation). Saenz (2000) presented five measures deemed helpful in increasing the degree of diversity in a department’s students:

1. It is essential that recruitment and retention be espoused as a value by several members of the faculty.

2. Culturally diverse faculty members may be highly effective in mentoring and encouraging culturally diverse students.
3. Faculty members may improve their department climate for diversity by adapting their teaching methods to the cultures of their diverse students.
4. Some adaptations of classroom procedures may help students adapt to the university.
5. Another aspect of a program's climate is the social and academic integration of students in the program (Looney, 1994).

For underrepresented students, the experience of graduate education and its normative socialization patterns may not fit their lifestyles or the diversity of their backgrounds. One way by which academic programs and departments can try to reduce these resulting feelings among students of not fitting the proverbial "mold" and instead produce an ethical climate is through the enforcement of a cohort model that can generate a sense of belonging among all students.

Schulte (2002) compared the perceptions of cohort and non-cohort graduate students on the importance of the ethical climate in the retention of students within academic programs. In Schulte's study, a cohort was defined as a group of students who began and completed a program of studies together, engaging in a common set of courses, activities, and learning experiences (Barnett & Muse, 1993). Furthermore, the term "ethical climate" was defined as the application of the following principles: (a) respect for autonomy, (b) non-maleficence, (c) beneficence, (d) justice, and (e) fidelity, within faculty-to-student, student-to-faculty, and student-to-student interactions and

relationships (Brown & Krager, 1985; Kitchener, 1984). “Some of the reported benefits of graduate student cohort groups include positive student interactions and relationships, a sense of community and affiliation, and a strong student support system (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Bratlien, Genzer, Hoyle, & Oates, 1992; Hill, 1995; Kasten, 1992; Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 1996; Teitel, 1997).” It was found that both cohort and non-cohort graduate students perceived ethical climate as an important factor in the area of retention. Schulte recommended that administrators of academic programs should consider the cohort model as it promotes positive ethical climate, and in turn, the retention of students. Specifically, doctoral students who are members of cohort groups persist at higher rates than those not in cohort groups.

Regardless of cohort status, there are retention strategies that should be implemented across the board for graduate students, especially for graduate students of color. Practitioners should also be mindful that these approaches are contingent upon discipline. Graduate students in the sciences are prime vehicles through whom faculty accomplish their research agendas.

Murakami-Ramalho, Piert, and Militello (2008) used personal narratives and collaborative portraits to illuminate the complexities of developing a research identity while journeying through a doctoral program. Their study was inspired by Delgado Bernal (2002), who stated that “although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings.” One’s research identity is a resourceful outlet for advocacy and can contribute to the retention of doctoral

students by allowing them the opportunity to vent frustrations. However, the key factor that holds the greatest amount of emphasis involves advisement and mentorship.

Students often leave their programs without announcing their intentions, rarely resulting in any follow-up by faculty (Kraska, 2008). Lovitts (2001) reported that underrepresented groups may exceed the 50 percent attrition rate. Furthermore, students drop out of doctoral programs for many reasons other than academic (e.g., personal, financial, professional). PhD students face many challenges during the period between completing course work and completing the dissertation (Kraska, 2008). Lovitts, as well as Gardner (2008), noted that conducting independent research is difficult for many students.

Overall, the ethical climate of graduate academic departments is a graduate student retention factor that administrators and faculty members can directly influence (Baird, 1990; Schulte, 2001). Schulte (2001) examined graduate student and faculty perceptions of the ethical climate and its importance in the retention of students. Her study (a) assessed graduate faculty and student perceptions of the ethical climate of a Midwestern metropolitan university, (b) determined if there was a difference between graduate faculty and student perceptions of ethical climate within graduate academic areas, and (c) assessed the perceived importance of the ethical climate of a graduate academic area in the retention of students within that area. Results of the study indicated that a positive ethical climate was perceived by both faculty and students to be an important factor in the retention of students within graduate academic programs.

Ultimately, administrators and faculty must designate ethical climate as a crucial factor in retaining graduate students within academic programs.

The maintenance of diverse perspectives of all Americans is imperative to compete in a global society. Societal and economic benefits exist that are associated with developing the leadership potential, creative abilities, and talents of Hispanic youth. Tapping into this talent pool will assure our continued ability to excel in an increasingly competitive global market (Harrell & Forney, 2003).

Existing educational scholarship identified several retention strategies for assuring the success of first-generation, ethnic minority graduate students, including a strong emphasis on a culturally empathetic curriculum as well as culturally empathetic faculty and staff. Both curriculum and faculty speak to the climate of an institution and can transform the academic culture if policies are implemented to enforce a diverse perspective.

Social support through mentorship programs is another key recommendation that was uncovered through review of the literature. Faculty mentorship and advisement seem most influential in the academic attainment of underrepresented students. The production of more faculty members from diverse backgrounds is essential. Also important are the education of White faculty on the realities of disadvantaged students as well as the importance of finding alternative routes for the facilitation of their learning. The incorporation of a cohort model and family-related activities and workshops serve as extra ways to build a sense of belonging and encourage students to persist. Lastly, the biculturalism and ethnic loyalty that many minority students experience must be nurtured

as strengths. To conclude, first-generation, ethnic minority graduate students must be informed and taught to navigate the discourse that continues to dominate the academy; or else the status quo will persevere.

Summary

This chapter began with a general overview of the history of graduate education and proceeded with a discussion of contemporary issues in graduate educations. Other topics discussed were the intersection of race, class, and gender, as many Latina/o college students are not only ethnic minorities, but also first-generation college students (Rodriguez, 1996; Strage, 2000; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003) of low-income origin. The chapter ended with an extensive discussion on retention strategies for first-generation, ethnic minority, and graduate students. The ascribed status of many Latino college students can deprive them from completing college, as well as from proceeding to and subsequently completing a graduate program.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the social and educational experiences that contribute to the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral study. To gain understanding of this phenomenon, the concept of critical race theory and the role it might have played in influencing the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs will be examined. This chapter introduces the research design, rationale, and research questions, as well as the site description and the way in which participants were selected. It concludes with the procedures implemented for data collection, the interview protocol, and discussion on the methods the researcher utilized to analyze the data.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design of this study is exploratory and consists of qualitative research methods designed to identify the social and educational aspects that contribute to the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral study nationwide. The use of qualitative research methods permits the researcher to gain a deeper understanding and meaning of the Puerto Rican experience in doctoral programs.

Berg (2007) defined qualitative research as the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. The seven primary ways to collect qualitative data include (a) interviewing, (b) focus groups, (c) ethnography, (d)

sociometry, (e) unobtrusive measures, (f) historiography, and (g) case studies. This study implemented interviews to gather data.

Qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 2007). Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that qualitative research allows researchers to address the inner experience of participants, determining how meanings are formed through and in culture. Corbin and Strauss also asserted that qualitative researchers have a natural curiosity that leads them to study worlds of interest to which they otherwise might not have access.

In the current study, a semi-structured interview approach was taken in order to understand the social composition and the life experiences of these women. In doing so, the researcher could better understand the circumstances that have allowed these women to achieve the status of a doctor; the data collected were intended to defy traditional literature that has solidified the lack of Latina academic success. Therefore, instead of solely asking participants to highlight their academic struggles, they were also asked to speak to the positive elements that have contributed to their achievement. The qualitative use of semi-structured interviews explains in greater detail the major obstacles Puerto Rican women encounter while in a doctoral program as well as the coping mechanisms they implemented in order to persist and complete their programs. Primarily, this sort of approach allows for a much more detailed account from the Puerto Rican perspective in contrast to other Latina/o subgroups that may not be captured as well through the facts and figures of a quantitative approach.

Phenomenology Theory

In this study, the researcher studied the phenomenon of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs—specifically, the life experiences that influence the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs. In order to gain an understanding of this phenomenon, a phenomenological study making use of an exploratory and naturalistic design was utilized.

Researchers who use phenomenology are intrigued by how people experience their life and perceive the world. The goal of phenomenological research is to explain the life experiences of a person or people and to document this experience as the lived experience of the person described (Spiegelberg, 1984). Phenomenology is one of five different human science research approaches that utilizes qualitative research methods; the others include (a) ethnography, (b) grounded theory, (c) hermeneutics, and (d) heuristic research (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of a phenomenological researcher is to have a respondent revisit his or her experience in order to gain a comprehensive description that allows for conducting insightful analysis. Phenomenology studies focus on the totality of an experience and not just fragmented parts (Spiegelberg, 1984); furthermore, they search for the essence and significance of an experience rather than descriptions and dimensions (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, Moustakas (1994) stated that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to outline the significance of a respondent's experience.

There are four primary principles that together comprise phenomenological research: (a) epoche, (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) imaginative variation, and (d)

synthesis. Epoche is the need for researchers to circumvent the assumption that they are knowledgeable of the experience of any respondent. The process in which researchers describe the external and internal, as well as their relationship between phenomenon and participant, is referred to as phenomenological reduction. The third principle, imaginative variation, denotes the range of perspectives and frames of reference and allows the researcher to develop structural themes, ultimately resulting in the final stage of synthesis or meaning (Moustakas, 1984).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies?
2. What life experiences are narrated within issues of class and gender by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?
3. How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience?
4. Are issues of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?

Site Description

Because participants are located throughout the United States, the study was conducted using Skype, a Web-based video chat software. Skype was chosen due to the

various locations to which the researcher would have to travel to in order to conduct face-to-face interviews. Cater (2011) suggested the use of Skype as a cost-effective way to conduct interviews when interviewees are located in a wide geographic span, as it is an easy-to-use technological tool that allows researchers to accommodate differing schedules. The participants and the researcher were free to choose locations at their homes or schools that assured an ideal Internet connection and a position in which they could speak openly and confidentially with no or little interruption. Video chat allows the interviewer and interviewee to see one another while conversing, establishing rapport that enables the researcher to take notes on non-verbal observations as well. Consideration for using Skype as an acceptable medium to conduct interviews was validated through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher's institution, for previous dissertation work had been successfully completed by use of Skype.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were originally intended to be drawn from six professional organizations, but only three of the identified organizations were cooperative: Puerto Rican Studies Association (PRSA), *Centro for Estudios Puertorriquenos*, and the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). These organizations were selected due to the strong likelihood that they could produce a sizable sample of Puerto Rican women who have achieved a PhD degree. A description of the study was posted on the websites of the PRSA and the Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos, and the same description was sent out via listserv by the Latino

Knowledge Community of NASPA. These measures amounted to acquiring one participant. Two others were acquired by word-of-mouth, and the remaining four were acquired by snowball approach.

The population sample for this study consists of seven Puerto Rican women who (a) have two Puerto Rican parents, (b) identify as a first-generation college student, (c) received a PhD in a social science area, and (d) received her doctoral degree within the past 10 years. This study will only examine the experiences of those participants who have acquired a Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD). Other types of doctorates (e.g., EdD, JD, MD, PsyD) will be excluded.

Puerto Rican women who self-identified as Puerto Rican regardless of origin, whether it be the mainland U.S. or the island of Puerto Rico, were eligible to participate in this study. Participants who only have one parent of Puerto Rican descent were excluded from this study. The researcher contacted the *Puerto Rican Studies Association* and the *Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos* and requested they post the *Recruitment Letter* (Appendix C) on their website. Both parties agreed to cooperate, doing so in September and October 2012. The procedure for this stage in data collection followed the requirements of the IRB.

While many Latinas face many of the same challenges on their educational journey, Puerto Rican educational attainment was the central focus of the current study due to the limited amount of research available on Latinas in doctoral programs being framed around the Chicana experience. This study utilized a convenience sample, which was initially attained via the aforementioned organizations, but was also expected to be

attained through a partial snowball sampling technique. Potential respondents were contacted via e-mails in which the purpose and description of the study was explained.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to acquire participants for this study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) suggested that researchers are able to implement their judgment and choose a sample that will provide them with the most pertinent data via purposive sampling. Purposive sampling in this study facilitated the researcher to identify respondents who have essential and appropriate information and have been identified as representatives fitting the study's framework.

Establishing Rapport

Establishing rapport is an important aspect of the researcher-participant dynamic. Because the researcher is a self-identified Puerto Rican woman, the rapport was relatively easy to facilitate. Given the researcher's origin and membership to the PRSA and familiarity with the *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños*, access to a broader network of Puerto Rican studies centers and institutes was manageable.

Instrumentation

The Interview Protocol

An interview protocol (Appendix A) was used as the major form of instrumentation during the individual interviews of Puerto Rican women who earned a

PhD degree. The interview protocol utilized for this study consisted of two parts. The first part gathered demographic information about the respondent, which allowed the researcher to later focus on the emphasis of the study, as opposed to the descriptive features of respondents. The second part consisted of open-ended questions, allowing the participants to respond and communicate their thoughts and experiences based on the questions posed to them. A summary explaining the relationship between the research questions and protocol items is located in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Protocol Items

Research Questions	Theoretical Framework
1. Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies?	Interview Items 1 & 2
2. What life experiences are narrated within issues of class and gender by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?	Interview Items 3, 4, 8, 16, 17
3. How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience?	Interview Items 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19
4. Are issues of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Ricans in doctoral programs?	Interview Items 11, 14, 15, 20

Interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken at the researcher's discretion where deemed necessary. Interviews took place during August through November 2012. The interview protocol was established based on the researcher's

personal experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon, current literature, research questions, and input from the dissertation chairperson.

Interviews

Interviews, defined by Berg (2007) as a conversation with a purpose to gather information, typically come in three forms: standardized, semi-standardized, and unstandardized. Standardized interviews follow a structured schedule of predetermined interview questions. Semi-standardized interviews include a number of predetermined questions, but interviewers are allowed to digress and probe extensively on anything that may have sparked interest. Unstandardized interviews do not abide by a schedule of questions; interviewers must generate questions according to each individual situation and the purpose of the study.

Field Notes

Field notes are data that may contain some conceptualization and analytic remarks (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Field notes consist of documents, interview transcripts, pictures, statistics, and other material that become important enhancement tools to other methods of collecting data. A researcher may choose to take either descriptive or reflective field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Descriptive field notes are objective observations of what has taken place in the field, whereas reflective notes are subjective accounts of the interview experience. Descriptive field notes typically contain the observer's behavior, description of the physical settings, portrayal of the interviewee,

description of activities, accounts of certain events, and a reconstruction of dialogue. Reflective field notes may include reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflict, methods, analysis, and the observer's frame of mind and behavior (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). The current study implemented a semi-structured interview approach and incorporated some descriptive and reflective note-taking.

Data Collection

Potential participants were emailed the *Participant Recruitment Letter* (Appendix B) explaining the study and requesting their participation. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails were made to gauge the interest in participation and the availability of each of the participants and to schedule the interviews. Participants were then e-mailed the *Participant Confirmation Letter* (Appendix C) with the date and time of the previously arranged interview.

Before each interview began the purpose of the study and confidentiality measures were explained. All interviews were conducted using Skype, an Internet video-chat software that allowed the interviewer and the participant to see and hear one another while in entirely different physical locations.

Transcriptionist Background

The bilingual transcriptionist acquired for this study was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She moved to Boston when she was 18 years old to pursue her college preparation. Carmen started learning English around the age of 12, so her first language is

Spanish. She received a bachelor's degree in Child Development and Psychology followed by a master's degree in Occupational Therapy. She acquired both of her degrees while living in Massachusetts. In 2006, Carmen moved to Florida, where she works as a pediatric occupational therapist.

Carmen began sociological transcription projects during her undergraduate career. She became involved in several projects and transcribed all through the two years of her graduate program from 2004 to 2006. She recently began transcribing in November 2011 while on maternity leave. This arrangement allowed her to be home with her son, as she could transcribe during his naps in the early morning and late at night.

Carmen worked with professors at Temple University in Pennsylvania from 2002 to 2003, the University of Miami from 2004 to 2006, and recently the University of South Florida. She shared with me that her transcription work has led her to love the field of sociology. She went on to explain that her transcription work helped her with her transition to the United States. It allowed her to understand many of the feelings and thoughts she experienced regarding cultural awareness, sensitivity, and gender roles. Having been raised in Puerto Rico, she began to realize how different those concepts are across cultures. She stated that having this insight into the field of sociology has helped make sense of her experience of assimilation an adaptation to a different culture.

A professor in an outside department who has performed extensive qualitative work had utilized her services in some of his previous research projects and put me in touch with her. I felt very fortunate to have made that connection with her, because I know that her cultural background would allow her to connect to the data and illustrate

the true essence of how certain words and phrases were used. In her final e-mail to me, she stated, “Your project seems very interesting, and it’s re-inspiring my wish of pursuing my PhD to teach at the university/graduate school level.” I hope that this study will continue to inspire Puerto Rican women to achieve the highest level of education they aspire to as possible.

Data Analysis

The data was first organized using open coding to sort out general themes. Axial coding was then applied to relate concepts to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the open inquiry of the data, the researcher adhered to the four basic guidelines proposed by Strauss (1986):

1. Ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions.
2. Analyze the data minutely.
3. Frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical note.
4. Never assume the analytic relevance of any traditional variable such as age, sex, or social class until the data show it to be relevant.

Keeping these suggestions in mind, the researcher read each individual line of the transcription and highlighted anything she found to be notable. Second, the researcher re-read the transcription, assigning a code to the highlighted statements. Lastly, the researcher tallied the codes to discover which were most prominent.

Frequent reviews of the transcripts and comparison of the interviews facilitated this process. An open coding approach was deemed best, as the researcher worked to

group themes according to the five tenets of critical race theory and the four research questions. Another factor on which the researcher decided while coding the data was the construction of cases. In the process of gathering the data, transcriptions produce volumes of information. With seven interviews that ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 hours, the researcher generated a total of one hundred thirty eight pages of data. The researcher had to determine whether she wanted each completed interview to comprise a case for each research question, or whether she wanted emergent themes to serve as cases and include the information of all respondents in designated research areas. It was decided to utilize six emergent themes as the particular cases for this study.

Themes

The following themes have been identified as contributors to the success of Puerto Rican doctoral completion: (a) personal attributes, (b) familial inspiration, (c) community advocacy, (d) social and cultural capital, (e) discrimination, and (f) Latino/minority faculty and peers. It is important to note that some of these themes have also been used as contributors to the hindrance of achievement.

Interviews were organized and analyzed manually. To illustrate the findings, the researcher presented examples of supporting data in block quotations. To improve readability, the researcher utilized elements of structure (e.g., order of presentation, punctuation) and eliminated the repetition that occurs naturally as part of oral speech. Although quotes are presented in their original form, additional words are likely to be inserted for the purposes of clarification. The participants were assigned a pseudonym.

The original names of the participants, along with their assigned pseudonym, were stored in a separate document to ensure confidentiality. This document will be discarded immediately after the oral defense of this dissertation is approved. Participants were forwarded the transcripts of their respective interviews, allowing them the opportunity to make adjustments where they felt necessary. They were also forwarded the highlighted themes generated by the researcher for review. The generated themes were also reviewed by three expert reviewers for validation. These measures were taken in order to ensure the accuracy of the participants' stories.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research must obtain a level of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The four areas of trustworthiness are (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. The researcher did not encounter major obstacles with regard to gaining the trust of the participants. The researcher maintained a professional and respectful demeanor at all times. Other ways the researcher established trust was by smiling, frequent eye contact, active listening, and "small talk" before and after the interviews were completed.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Since this study required working directly with human subjects, approval by the university's IRB was sought before the actual commencement of interviews in order to ensure that this study was carried out in an ethical manner. There were several ethical

issues to be addressed in this project. First, the participant had the right to have all of the information pertaining to the study both upon agreement to participate and throughout its duration. The researcher had an ethical obligation to inform the participant of any changes that may have arisen while the participant was still actively involved, as this may have affected the participant's willingness to participate. The information reported in the *Explanation of Research* document included (a) who was conducting the study; (b) the title and purpose of the study; (c) what the participant was expected to do; (d) the expected length of time for participation; (e) incentives, if any; (f) expected risks and benefits, (g) a confidentiality statement, and (h) how findings were to be utilized. In this case, the findings are being utilized for the researcher's dissertation project and for future peer-reviewed manuscripts.

Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality is imperative for the purposes of this project. Given the fact that the participants were likely to disclose personal information during the interview, the researcher removed any identifying information from the transcribed data itself. The researcher assured the participants that anything discussed between them will be kept in strict confidence. This is especially important when securing the data. In order to ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were saved in one location. The document that indicates the pseudonym with the corresponding original name was stored in a separate location.

Interviews were audio-recorded and notes were made simultaneously. Audio-recorded interviews were erased upon the successful oral defense of this dissertation.

Ethical Research

The researcher ensured ethical treatment at all times during the course of the study. A semi-structured interview approach may allow for the learning of unexpected information. Any qualitative researcher may find himself or herself in a situation where the participant is in a dangerous, life-threatening situation (e.g., suicide attempt, physical abuse). It is the researcher's obligation to report such an occurrence in order to prevent tragic events from occurring. The participants of this study were made aware of this ethical obligation before the commencement of the study.

Originality Report

The University of Central Florida requires its students to present their dissertations to the website Turnitin.com upon completion of the document. Turnitin is a Web-based program matching the document to other previously submitted documents and Web sources to review work for originality. The maximum originality score allowed as indicated by the graduate advisor has been defined as a score not to exceed 10%. The initial submission of this work yielded a score of 40%. Once bibliographical material, quotes and matches of less than 1% were excluded, the score was reduced to 26%. Upon review of the Turnitin.com report, 25% was attributed to previously submitted work by this researcher. The final originality score was 1%.

Summary

The research method and design, along with the research questions used to guide this study, have been presented in this chapter. The site description, selection of participants, sampling method, and establishment of rapport were also discussed. The interview protocol was described in relation to each of the research questions and the procedures of the study including data analysis were explained. Due to the qualitative design of this study, trustworthiness was also discussed.

CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANTS' VOICES

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs through deep questioning of the participants regarding their respective experiences (van Manen, 1990). Both the personal and institutional experiences of Puerto Rican women in relation to their journeys in obtaining a doctoral degree were explored.

Conducting the Interviews

The phenomenological research design in this study employed open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. This approach yields to voices of these women and allows for a narrative analysis of their stories and experiences of being a doctoral student. Therefore, a qualitative approach employing a phenomenological lens was helpful to understand the lived experiences of participants and how they make meaning of their experiences.

The Interview Protocol (Appendix A) served as the guide to facilitate the interviews. As Smith and Osborn (2003) stated, the arranged questions in a semi-structured interview are guided by participant responses, thus allowing a dialogue that permits flexibility to explore deeper meaning and clarification as dictated by the responses. The questions are more flexibly worded, are generally not strictly predetermined, and allow for greater exploration during the interview. This semi-

structured format allowed both the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue where questions were tailored according to participant responses, prompting further exploration in certain warranted areas. Probing questions were used, when needed, to seek richer detail from each participant. These additional probing questions proved extremely useful in soliciting and discovering important information.

A total of seven interviews were conducted with participants via the Web-based chat software, Skype. Overall, the open-ended interview format allowed the participants to guide the dialogue in a comfortable manner. Participants seemed to be very calm and relaxed throughout the interviews. Although initially scheduled for 60-90 minutes, the average duration of each interview was approximately 90 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 1 hour; the longest interview lasted 2 hours 15 minutes. The research participants were enthusiastic and eager to talk about their experiences. Participants frequently commented how they enjoyed the questions and how their answers helped them to reflectively acknowledge their resiliency and persistence in life and as doctoral students.

It was a healing experience to hear the stories and personal aspects of their lives from each research participant. I was highly intrigued by the similarities and differences of challenges experienced between these women. At times, several of their comments resonated with my personal experiences, and I became consumed with pride as they went on to discuss how they overcame their struggles.

Participant Profiles

Overview of Participant Characteristics

As stated in the criteria for participation in this study, all participants met the criterion of having both parents be of Puerto Rican descent. However, the criteria did not specify whether participants had to be from the island itself or were allowed to be born in the U.S. mainland. This study allowed for participation in both cases due to the established limitations of this particular ethnic group.

Most of the participants were born and raised in the state of New York, with the exception of two participants born on the island of Puerto Rico. Of those born in New York, all but one identified as first-generation American—in other words, with one exception, the parents of each respondent were born on the island of Puerto Rico, while the respondents themselves were born in New York. One participant's parents had been born in New York, making her the only participant to identify as a second-generation U.S.-born Puerto Rican. In terms of birth rank, three of the participants were the youngest among their siblings, two were in the middle, and the remaining two were the oldest. The average age among all seven participants was 45 years of age. Consequently, the two participants born in Puerto Rico were also the oldest participants of the sample. A summary of demographics is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Birthplace	U.S.-Born Generation	Birth Rank
Marcela	55	Aguadilla, PR	N/A	Middle
Sage	47	Brooklyn, NY	1st generation	Oldest
Milagros	40	Brooklyn, NY	1st generation	Middle
Maria	38	New York City, NY	2nd generation	Youngest
Christina	45	The Bronx, NY	1st generation	Youngest
Fania	38	Brooklyn, NY	1st generation	Oldest
Gabriela	50	Arecibo, PR	N/A	Youngest

Earning a PhD in the field of education within the past decade served as Another criterion that the participants had to meet in order to participate in this study. Table 4 provides various professional demographics about participants, including the year they attained their PhDs, degree concentration, and current job position. As Table 4 indicates, all participants earned their degrees between 2006 and 2012. The four areas in which the degrees were attained included Curriculum and Instruction, Teaching and Learning, Urban Education and Adult Education. With the exception of two participants, all have pursued positions within academia.

Table 4. Participant Academic Information

Participant	PhD Earned	Concentration	Current Position
Marcela	2010	Curriculum & Instruction	Middle school teacher; University adjunct
Sage	2010	Adult Education	Law enforcement (lieutenant)
Milagros	2012	Teaching & Learning	Post-doctoral fellow
Maria	2007	Teaching & Learning	Assistant professor
Christina	2006	Curriculum & Instruction	Assistant professor
Fania	2011	Urban Education	Director, Center LCP
Gabriela	2012	Urban Education	Associate professor

In understanding the context of the experiences of these participants, it was important to gather information on the specificity of three essential components of any doctoral program: time, money, and the major professor. The majority of the participants matriculated in their programs on a full-time basis. The two participants that attended school part-time also worked a full-time job during the day. Although all of the participants received financial assistance for their doctoral studies, one mentioned the necessity to acquire loans to get through the program. Attention to the participants' experience with the major professor was given due to its potential importance in relating to critical race theory. Among the seven participants, only one had a Latina major professor. Over half of the participants had major professors of Caucasian descent; furthermore, over half of the participants had male major professors. Program-related information for each participant is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Participant Program Information

Participant	Status	Funding	Major Professor
Marcela	Part-time	Fellowship	Puerto Rican female
Sage	Part-time	State-funded	White male
Milagros	Full-time	Fellowships, grants	West Indian male
Maria	Full-time	Assistantship	West Indian male
Christina	Full-time	Fellowship, loans	White female
Fania	Full-time	Fellowship, stipend	White female
Gabriela	Full-time	Fellowships	White male

Marcela

...yo volé y dije espérate, mujer Latina haciendo un doctorado y que está buscando gente para entrevistar...a esa nena hay que ayudarla, hay que correr para allá y hay que ayudarla rapidito.

...I flew and said ‘Wait, Latina woman getting her doctorate and is looking for people to interview...that girl has to be helped, [I] have to run there and [I] have help her quickly.

Marcela is a 55-year-old inner-city middle school teacher and adjunct professor in the Northeast. She was born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and is one of twelve siblings, only some of which graduated high school. Her mother has a second-grade education and her father has a fourth-grade education. Marcela accredited her father with instilling in her a love for learning and for motivating her to do well in school:

Yo me crie viendo a mi padre leyendo, viendo a mi padre escribiendo...entonces yo desarrolle ese gusto por la lectura, ese gusto por las historias, los cuentos...y mi padre siempre toda la vida, nos decía una y otra vez, ustedes tienen que estudiar, ustedes tienen que estudiar.

I grew up watching my father read, watching my father write...so I developed a liking for literature, a liking for history, stories...and my father always, all of his life, he’d say to us, time and time again, you have to study, you have to study.

For that same reason she feels as if she was PhD bound from the very beginning. She stated that ever since she was a young girl, she always knew that she would continue to study until she reached the highest point, which she ultimately did.

Marcela was a single mother of two who had recently arrived from Puerto Rico after having completed nine credits hours in educational leadership in a master’s program at the *Universidad de San German, Interamericana*. She previously received a bachelor’s

degree in the natural sciences with a concentration in biology at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras campus. Upon her arrival, Marcela learned about a fellowship opportunity through a conversation with a colleague whose wife had received the award. This colleague subsequently introduced her to the director of the fellowship opportunity; at that time she learned about a combined master's and doctoral program in curriculum and instruction that featured a concentration bilingual and bicultural education. Thus, having been accepted, she continued her graduate studies in the master's program studying bilingual education.

Marcela was the sole provider for her two children, so she worked full-time as a teacher during the day and tended to her graduate school duties in the evenings. After having earned her master's degree, Marcela decided to postpone attaining her PhD for a few years because she felt that she had already sacrificed too much time away from her children. When she felt enough time had passed, she reinstated herself in the program and continued on with her doctoral studies. She attributed her return, again, to her boys, because she wanted to be in a better position to support them in their endeavors.

Marcela had a unique experience in comparison to the rest of the participants in this study because all of her cohort members were Latinos. This occurrence was due to the specificity of the program. Marcela's cohort was a small group of six students, including two Puerto Rican females (including Marcela), two Puerto Rican males, one Ecuadorian male, and one Spanish male. They would sit together in all of the courses they shared as a means of support for one another. Of the six, Marcela was the only one

who went on to complete the doctoral program. The others dis-enrolled for various reasons.

Marcela's dissertation looked at the involvement of parents in their children's education. It was a qualitative study in which she interviewed nine Latino families: three Puerto Rican, three Dominican, and three Mexican. She admitted that the difficulty she encountered in obtaining access to these families for her study was one of the driving factors that led her to participate in the current study. Reflecting upon the writing of the dissertation, Marcela stated,

...escribir la disertación fue un proceso muy lindo...creo que fue la parte más linda del doctorado...escribir la disertación, especialmente cuando estás trabajando a nivel de etnografías y de estudios cualitativos que tú tienes la oportunidad de escuchar las voces de las personas...

...writing the dissertation was a beautiful process...I think it was the most beautiful part of the doctorate...writing the dissertation, especially when you're working with ethnographies and qualitative studies, and you have the opportunity to hear the voices of the people...

I certainly appreciated this particular statement, given the nature and purpose of the current study.

Marcela was the only one of the seven participants who chose to respond entirely in Spanish, even though the questions were posed in English. She would use English words or phrases sporadically, but it was quite evident that her thoughts and opinions were explained in a more sophisticated fashion in the Spanish language. Reading her transcript served as a refresher for me in academic Spanish. Although I am a fluent speaker and writer, I am fluent in conversational Spanish. It was fascinating to hear her

speak and learn how to say certain words in Spanish that I may not necessary use in everyday conversations. It was undoubtedly a fruitful learning experience for me.

Marcela responded to my call for participants a week after the description of this study was posted onto the websites of the two cooperating organizations. A colleague of hers e-mailed her to encourage her participation. She immediately reached out to me and expressed her enthusiasm in sharing her story. The interview had to be rescheduled once because her speakers did not appear to be functioning properly, but she insisted on purchasing earphones to be able to proceed. Marcela exclaimed, “¡*Pero, si tu eres una nena!* [But, you’re a young girl!],” when she saw me on the other end of her screen. She congratulated me several times during the course of the interview on having come so far in my education so early on in my life.

Although the interview took place late in the evening, Marcela was the most generous with her time among all of the participants. Her interview went on for two hours and fifteen minutes. I interceded twice to remind her of the time in an effort to be respectful of her time, but with a “*No te preocupes/Don’t worry about it,*” she continued on. She explained that she was more interested in making sure I had the information I needed than she was in going to bed.

At the end of that first interview, I felt excited about those that were to come. I hoped that the rest of the women would be as enlightening, friendly, and supportive as she had been. Being older, I looked at her in a motherly light. Looking back, I feel it was an amazing interview that gave me direction in terms of how to best listen for important points in future interviews. The completion of the first interview demystified the data

collection process for me. At that point in time, my research became tangible and finishing became more of a reality.

Two months after I completed that first interview, Marcela sent me a follow-up e-mail to see how my dissertation work was progressing, which I thought to be such a sweet gesture. What I remember most vividly about Marcela is her genuine interest in helping me succeed, as evidenced by her purchasing a microphone for her computer to be able to Skype with me and her extreme generosity with her own time to ensure that I had sufficient data. Her will to serve and give back to ensure Latina representation in the academy is admirable.

Sage

...why aren't there [Puerto Rican] people walking in the parade with their gown on to show that Puerto Ricans can be academically inclined and gifted and can achieve this?

Sage is a 47-year-old law enforcement lieutenant in the Southeast. She was born in Brooklyn, New York. Both of her parents were born in Puerto Rico and attended vocational schools. Her mother managed to graduate from a nursing high school, but her father did not complete his high school program. She has a younger sister who had struggled in academics and did not go on to achieve a graduate education after she earned her bachelor's degree. Sage was always academically gifted, always told by her mother that she was college-bound. She remarked that this expectation was noted very early in her life, so she did not recall ever questioning whether she would attend college.

Sage had originally planned on attending law school after the completion of her master's program, but ran into some difficulty while attempting the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). She attributed her difficulty to the unconventional format of the exam. As she stated, "I had problems with it, because the language on the LSAT is not what you speak in Brooklyn, New York...in my everyday life, I don't have anybody that I can talk to with LSAT language." She went on to explain how she felt that the LSAT and other standardized examinations are culturally biased and used as a means to deter minority students from their academic pursuits.

After having consulted with a trusted professor in her master's program, she decided to pursue an EdD program due to her fear of not being able to successfully complete the additional statistics courses that were required for a PhD in education. After having successfully completed two statistics courses, she built up the confidence to transition to the PhD program. Sage decided on adult education as her concentration because she felt it was broad enough to allow her to teach various subject areas throughout her career. She considered matriculating in a criminology PhD. program, but figured it was best to pursue an area unrelated to law enforcement.

Sage's doctoral program was state funded, as she worked full-time and tended to her graduate study on a part-time basis. She stated that there was no established cohort and no established study group when it was time to prepare for the comprehensive exams. With regard to those "comps," Sage admitted that preparation was challenging, yet she felt it to be manageable. She stated that she had spoken to her professors about the expectations and format of the exams; furthermore, preformatted questions were made

available to her. Although memorization still presented a struggle for her, the sample questions instilled reassurance and a base for success.

Sage's dissertation was a qualitative study, in which she also worked with a sample of Puerto Ricans. A Puerto Rican woman herself, she admitted to becoming immersed in her work because it was a topic that was very personal to her. Her strong interest in her topic, along with the importance she deemed it to hold, greatly facilitated her dissertation writing. Regarding the dissertation writing process, she shared, "I found it was an easy process, the most important work that I have ever done. I'm glad I had this experience, to say I did something I felt was important." Another reason she may have found the dissertation writing to lack certain difficulty is potentially due to the way she handled her committee's input. It was clear that she took the committee's feedback seriously and understood how much the committee impacts the dissertation writing process. In her words, "Whatever your professor is telling you to do in your committee, if they say jump, you say how high, just like that." This approach clearly allowed her to move very quickly through the various stages of the dissertation writing.

Sage's husband is also in law enforcement and she spoke highly of him during the course of the interview. She shared how supportive he was during her writing by not being dependent on her to maintain the household; for example, they survived on pizza and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Like four of the participants in this study, Sage had no children while matriculated in her doctoral program, so this unique dynamic did not play a role in her experience.

Two weeks after I had defended the proposal for this current study, I attended a summer research and writing institute provided by my fellowship program. One of the exercises required me to introduce myself to the person next to me and tell him or her about my dissertation topic. During that conversation my partner for the workshop activity gave me Sage's name as a potential participant for my study. That morning I was feeling very tired and was not particularly enthusiastic about discussing my dissertation. I did not realize at the time that the person sitting next to me would provide me with the name of my second potential participant for my study. I returned to my hotel room, conducted a search on Google, obtained her e-mail and office phone number, and forwarded her an e-mail requesting her participation. She responded three days later agreeing to participate; a week later, we set an interview time.

The day arrived and when Sage appeared on the screen, the first observation I made involved her t-shirt, which featured the name of the institution where she had received her PhD. The next observation I made was of the books that were in the background. She appeared to be in an office in her home. Whereas I had not experienced any technical difficulty with Marcela, I did experience brief technical interruptions during Sage's interview. These glitches were not too disruptive, but were certainly nerve-racking. I kept saying to myself, "come on, don't do this," because I was concerned she would get restless, affecting the outcome of the interview. Fortunately, the Internet connection regained stability and we were able to continue on with the interview relatively smoothly.

Sage was very energetic during the interview. I hardly had to ask any probing questions. While we discussed her dissertation topic and her experiences with the writing process, she just jumped up out of her chair and actually pulled her dissertation out from one of her bookshelves. As she spoke, she flipped through the pages and at one point said, “one day you’ll have one too.”

Although I agreed with many of Sage’s thoughts and opinions, I recognize that out of all seven participants, Sage was the one who differed the most across the board in terms of characteristics and experience. It seems as if she was the most Americanized participant, her line of work is in a totally different field (although she plans to pursue a career in academia in the long-term), and her reasoning for pursuing a PhD was derived as an alternative from her actual desire of becoming a lawyer. Also, during the interview, she mentioned her tendency to try new things and constantly challenge herself; pursuing a PhD was one of those new challenges. Sage has now taken up photography as her new challenge and is dedicated to a rigid workout routine.

Milagros

I represent a Puerto Rican woman from specifically Newark.

Milagros is a 40-year-old postdoctoral fellow at a university in the Northeast. She was born in Brooklyn, New York. Her experiences as an inner-city high school teacher in the Northeast led her to decide on pursuing a concentration in teaching and learning. Admirably, Milagros continues to live in the inner-city post-dissertation completion as a means to maintain her humility and stay grounded.

Milagros found out about college through the federal TRIO program Upward Bound in which she participated during the summer of her sophomore year in high school. Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. It also provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. This program serves high school students from low-income families, as well as those families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants not only complete secondary education but also enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. Reflecting upon her participation in the program, Milagros remembers the constant existence of an understanding and expectation that all of the participating students were college-bound; likewise, she remembers the impact that those expectations had on her outlook on education.

The Upward Bound program set Milagros on the right path. She attended college immediately after high school graduation and was then awarded a fellowship to attend a master's program in public policy. Through the course of her master's program, Milagros overheard some of her peers discussing their plans to pursue a doctorate. At the time she had not been exposed to this concept of a doctoral degree. She entertained the thought of the PhD, but decided to take a brief intermission to teach due to the intensity of her master's program in the Midwest.

It was during her time teaching high school in an inner city when she realized that she needed to pursue a PhD in order to make the difference she hoped to make. She pondered about the best way to systematically influence education and community

development on a larger scale. On her quest for more information on the PhD venture, she attended an information session at one of the top Ivy-League institutions in the nation; at this information session, she encountered her future doctoral advisor. This professor is a renowned scholar in issues that surround communities of color and marginalized students.

Milagros was assisted well, financially. For the first three years of her program, she received full funding for tuition and fees, as well as an assistantship stipend. For her first two and a half years in the program she worked at a research center; for the remaining semester, she was hired as a research assistant by a professor who had received a grant from the National Science Foundation. Milagros also received the Minority Dissertation Fellowship in Education Research through the American Education Research Association in addition to a Women's Studies Fellowship awarded to her by the university. These awards allowed her to matriculate through her program on a full-time basis.

Milagros's dissertation involved a secondary analysis of a longitudinal study on Black and Latino boys in single-sex schools. She used survey and interview data from two schools in New York City to explain the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender in Black and Latino boys' meanings of their masculine and academic identities. Before she reached the dissertation stage, she had to prepare what her program referred to as a "qualifying paper," which was essentially a pilot study of the dissertation project. This qualifying paper took the place of the traditional comprehensive or qualifying exams administered in most doctoral programs.

It is also important to note that like Sage, Milagros was not part of a structured cohort. The navigation of the various components of the doctoral program, particularly the dissertation writing process, was a solitary experience for her. She had this to say about the writing process:

It is a really draining process...there is no one around that really understands, because your family doesn't understand unless they have PhDs. Your friends don't understand, unless [they] are in the process or have gone through the process. They don't understand. It can be very isolating.

She went on to explain that during several points of her writing, she questioned herself due to lack of support. In a slow, pensive voice she expressed, "It's such a unique process...it's hard for me to actually verbalize it, because there are so many lows." With a glazed look in her eyes, there was a short pause after that statement. It was truly a moment of reflection for her.

Since the completion of the interview, Milagros has remained in constant contact, forwarding me information about postdoctoral positions. Milagros was the only participant with whom I experienced major technical difficulties. After we completed the interview, I proceeded to transfer the audio file to my laptop. Although the recorder appeared to be working properly, it had actually malfunctioned, essentially losing the entire second half of the interview. She was gracious enough to agree to a second interview to recover what had been lost, but this new interview took approximately a month and a half to reschedule.

I e-mailed her immediately after I realized I had lost half of the interview because I knew she had plans to travel to Puerto Rico the following week. She agreed to be re-

interviewed upon returning from her trip, but that was the same week Hurricane Sandy made its way to the Northeast. She lost power for days in her area and had been staying with a friend. I felt embarrassed e-mailing her every week to follow up on another interview time because I know how limited faculty schedules can become, but given my knowledge of the importance of persistence in qualitative work, I kept insisting. That experience led me to utilize a backup recorder for the remaining interviews.

I see a lot of myself in Milagros in her desire to remain humble and connected to her community. Having relocated myself from New York to Florida, I increasingly feel as if I am losing a part of my identity. I can also see myself moving right back into my neighborhood in Brooklyn and living my life as I did before—going to the bodega to get *un peso de queso pa' mami* (a dollar of cheese for mommy),” going to the *cochifrito* spot to get an *alcapurria* and a *jugo de parcha*, looking out the window to listen to the *viejas* (old ladies) downstairs talking their *bochinche* (gossip). I can see myself hanging out on the block, sitting on a milk crate, as the people I grew up with pass by and say, “¡Que pasa, doctora!” Most importantly, I can see myself going into my old elementary school across the street, P.S. 59, and being a guest speaker at an assembly where I tell the children “I’m Dr. Morales; I went to school here and grew up in this neighborhood, just like you.” Like Milagros stated, “...it’s not about me, it’s not about this PhD, it’s about communities...people in this town are struggling.”

Maria

I feel like in a lot of ways she was my honorary chair.

Maria is a 38-year-old assistant professor at a university in the Northeast. She is second-generation New York City-born, as her parents were also born in Spanish Harlem, also known as *El Barrio*. Maria is the youngest of three daughters; like the previous three participants, she remembers always feeling as if it were expected of her to go to college. She also had some exposure to the thought of college through her second sister, who had applied to and attended college. Like Milagros, Maria had participated in a college prep program for students of color while enrolled in high school, which granted her the opportunity to attend college trips and fairs.

At the start of her doctoral program, Maria had not had children. It wasn't until the end of her second year that she gave birth to her first daughter. Maria is now married and a mother of three. Her husband is a teacher and aspires to earn a PhD also. The interview took place via Skype in her home during the evening hours. At one point in the interview, her three-year-old daughter cried for her; she had to briefly step away from the interview saying, "go to bed, mama." Because *Mama* is one of those Puerto Rican words that we use to show affection, it reinforced the familiarity between us.

What is interesting and different about Maria in comparison to the other participants is that she was very much focused on building her family while making her way through her program. Marcela, Christina, and Gabriela had already had their children when they decided to pursue their PhDs. Sage, Milagros, and Fania decided to hold off on having children until they completed their programs; none of them had any children at the

time of their interviews. Maria was the only one who held both priorities on an equal plane. Although this approach was challenging, she was able to finish.

It was through the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program that Maria was presented with the idea of pursuing a PhD. This struck a chord with me, because it was through that very program that I had become aware of the possibility of attaining a PhD. At the start of the program she had an interest in pursuing women's studies, but was advised by a professor to reconsider due to the small number of positions available in that particular field. It was then that she decided to apply to the program, ultimately receiving a teaching fellowship. The program helped her realize her passion for teaching, but she quickly became disillusioned and frustrated, eventually moving on to work in the education non-profit sector. Having become intrigued by the concept of school reforms in New York City and small school reforms, Maria decided to pursue her PhD in education, specifically in the area of teaching and learning.

Maria was awarded a graduate assistantship for a two-year period. The assistantship provided her with tuition remission and a living stipend, which she earned by way of a 20-hour workweek. In her case, the graduate assistants were not expected to work in the summer, which would have caused a financial burden had the faculty in her program not been willing to substitute courses with independent studies during the fall and spring semesters. Maria was also granted credit for a few professional development courses she had taken while she was teaching. The flexibility of the faculty allowed her to move through the program relatively smoothly with a full-time load.

Maria was the only Latina in her cohort, which otherwise featured two White females and two White males. Not only were they of the dominant culture, but they were also of a different socioeconomic status. She referred to them as “solid middle class to upper middle class,” which did not reflect her own experiences.

I am from a lower middle class home. My mother was a homemaker and my father had been a police officer, but when I was probably a year old, he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis so he was on disability and social security for all of my life until he passed away. We were living on a very fixed income. We were kind of very modest lifestyle.

With regard to the diversity of the faculty, she noted it to be almost entirely White and very much male dominated.

Like Milagros, Maria did not experience the typical format of comprehensive and qualifying exams, which did not make her happy:

We didn't have the comps, [and] I felt that there was a whole process that I had missed in terms of really getting and undergirding of the foundational knowledge that was applicable. I don't really even understand the whole comps process, but I know friends of mine who did it. I feel like it really has helped them. It might be nerve-wracking and horribly intense, but it really does prepare you, so you have that foundational knowledge, and you don't have feel like you have to constantly look over your shoulder for somebody to uncover you as a fraud.

In place of these exams, she had to present and defend a portfolio to her committee that was reflective of her scholarly voice. Successful defense of the portfolio allowed her admittance to candidacy status, during which she could continue by writing her proposal. Writing the proposal was a challenge for Maria because by then she had recently given birth to her first daughter and her major professor was neither attentive nor supportive.

His name opens doors, and that was useful for sure. But in terms of getting that done, and getting some real guidance, I didn't have that. So I kind of rode in circles for a year before I finished the proposal and defended the proposal and then began to work on the data collection.

Maria accredits a weeklong intensive dissertation writing institute and her second pregnancy for having gotten her through her writing. The institute gave her the structure she needed and the pregnancy gave her the motivation to get through the process.

Maria's dissertation examined the evolution of a small Bronx school. She wanted to know what made that particular school function and what held it to its vision. What I found fascinating about Maria was that she had worked very closely with Michelle Fine, the author of *Framing Dropouts*, a book I had read in my Retention Strategies in College and Universities course during my own doctoral studies.

What I remember the most about Maria's story was the struggle she experienced with the chair of her committee. She recounted the several times she would take an hour-long train ride in the wintertime, six months pregnant, only for her chair to give her all of 15 minutes of time and provide her with very little feedback. She felt there was a gender division, as well as a power trip, because her chair was a renowned scholar. Luckily, she had an African-American outside professor who offered to serve as an outside reader in order to support Maria at her defense. In Maria's words, "she was there for the specific purpose of running interference and supporting me when I was defending with my own chair." Had it not been for this "honorary chair," Maria probably would not have made it.

I thought about how painful it is when "one of your own" turns his or her back on you. Generally speaking, people of color expect to be supported by other people of color,

and when that does not happen, it is a huge insult for many of us. I am familiar with that feeling, having undergone it myself. I also thought about how fortunate I am to have my chair. She is tough but certainly invested in my success; for that I am grateful.

Christina

I felt empowered, because I was able to show them a lot about my culture and teach them that we are really smart people. We are okay, just like they are. Except, you know, we have this beautiful bronze color.

Christina is a 45-year-old assistant professor at a university in the Southeast. She is a first-generation U.S.-born Puerto Rican from the Bronx, New York. She received her bachelor's degree in language and literature as well as a master's degree in secondary education with a specialization in curriculum instruction. She earned her PhD in curriculum instruction with concentrations in both language and literacy as well as language culture in society.

Like the previous participants in this study, Christina felt that attending college was always expected of her. She made the following statement regarding parental expectations:

I strongly believe that what drove me to my PhD was the fact that my parents, specifically my mother, never questioned I couldn't obtain the highest degree. She would always instill a very common Puerto Rican saying, which was, whatever it is you want to be just be the best in it, and reach the highest that you can. I only saw it as attainable. Even though, I didn't see many people like me, but I did know it was something I could achieve.

Her mother was only able to complete the 11th grade and her father earned an associate's degree. She is the youngest of five children.

Her cohort was a small group of five, of which she was the only Puerto Rican. In search of a support network she joined the Holmes Scholars program, which is designed to enrich the scholarly experiences and professional connections of talented men and women from underrepresented groups in universities and colleges. In addition to the Holmes Scholars program, she also sought out support from the Black Caucus African-American group.

With regard to financial assistance, Christina was awarded an assistantship, but as a non-traditional student with two children, she found herself still having to take out additional loans to make ends meet. During the first year and a half of her doctoral studies, she worked as a lab assistant. From her second semester forward, she taught language and literacy. She also worked as an instructor with Summer College Opportunity in Preparation for Education (SCOPE), a program for underrepresented minorities, during the summer to support herself with additional income.

The opportunity to work with the SCOPE program was particularly important for Christina, as it allowed her to help others whose qualities mirrored her own. This was of immense importance to her, because she knew the impact that the words “yes, you can” can have on a student. In her words, the SCOPE program

...helped me economically, but it also helped me in many ways, because I was working with people just like me. And because it [was] through the multicultural office, we had Puerto Ricans and African Americans and [other] minority groups that really needed the attention and someone to believe in them and say yes you can. The fact that I was, to some, extent their role model...

It is clear that the SCOPE program and the Holmes Scholars program were intricate and essential pieces of the puzzle for Christina on her four-year journey to the PhD.

Reflecting on her experiences with comprehensive exams, Christina stated, “...my comps was a wonderful experience, even though it was painful.” This feeling corroborated what Maria mentioned about missing out on that experience. When the time came for Christina to prepare for her three comprehensive exams, she scheduled meetings periodically with her advisor to ask detailed questions about the content on the exams. During this process, she created a timeline for herself to help her manage the material. Her comprehensive exams consisted of both a written and an oral portion. Regarding the oral defense of her exam questions she remarked, “at some point you have to continuously tell yourself they are not attacking me, they just want to do this in lieu of helping me.”

One experience that was unique to Christina and not experienced by the other participants involved dismissing a committee member. She sternly stated, “I thought this person had a problem with how I am... my upbringing [was] constantly surfacing when I [was] establishing an argument or making a claim.” Fortunately, she felt that the rest of the committee members genuinely wanted to bring diversity to the institution and wanted her to succeed.

Christina’s dissertation work was a qualitative phenomenological piece composed of stories noting how secondary teachers learn how to teach writing. When asked about the writing process, Christina stated, “the process of writing the dissertation, of gathering data, of finding a dissertation, is heart-throbbing, gut-wrenching, but it is a process of

growth.” She went on to explain that she found asking for help to be a challenge because the dissertation process is very personalized:

I think that a lot of people forget that at one point you have this very profound experience with your dissertation and it is a revelation. At first you start thinking, ‘What in heaven or hell am I doing?’ then you gather data, and you’re thinking, ‘this is too much, I think I am necking into this and I don’t know how to come out.

Christina concluded that eventually, through organization and acquired knowledge, she started to see that finishing this project was indeed possible. Christina also offered words of encouragement and expressed great pride in my dissertation work.

Christina and I rescheduled the interview on two occasions; the first time was due to my action, while the second time was due to hers. When the interview did occur, we were both in our respective offices. I noticed this immediately when I caught a glimpse of her books in the background. In this instance, we had to complete Part 1 of the interview on one day and complete Part 2 a week later. Christina had intended to complete the entire interview within an hour, but we quickly ran out of time and she had another engagement to address.

We then set up another meeting time to complete the remainder of the interview, but ten minutes before I was supposed to begin, the coordinator in my office came to me and asked, “I have a student in my office and he speaks very little English. Can you help me?” My heart sank. I am the only Latina in my office, so I am the automatic go-to person for such matters. I was in doctoral student mode; I had quickly learned to say no to things that would interfere with my dissertation. I did tell her no, explaining to her that I had a very important meeting on Skype that was in my best interest not to reschedule.

Five minutes later, as I waited for Christina to sign onto Skype, I found myself staring at my door. I felt incredibly guilty, as if I had let down my people. I could not accept what I had done. I e-mailed Christina stating an issue came up at work preventing me from meeting with her at our designated time. I ran into my coordinator's office and said "fill me in." When she responded by asking "what about your meeting?" I said "I'll reschedule, fill me in." To my surprise, Christina had also been running late and we were able to catch each other shortly thereafter and complete the remainder of the interview.

A week later Christina asked to interview me for a project on which she was working. I was glad that I was able to return the favor to her so soon. The particular quality I want to highlight about Christina is her passion and pride about the role of her identity in the academy. I could hear the passion in her voice with every breath. I remember thinking to myself "wow, now that's what I call a strong Puerto Rican woman."

Fania

...my father would make me coffee every morning...and my mother would be in charge of my lunch break.

Fania is a 38-year-old assistant professor for a small Catholic women's college in the Northeast. She is also the director of the Center for Latino Community Practices at her college. Fania is a first-generation Puerto Rican born in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents migrated from Puerto Rico in their 20s; her mother attained an eighth-grade education and her father attained a fourth-grade education. This fact really captured my attention, as the levels of education that Fania's parents reached were similar to those

reached by my own parents—my mother attended school through the fourth grade, while my father attended through the seventh grade.

Like the other participants, she exhibited strong academic skills from the very beginning, which facilitated admission into a specialized high school. The nature of a specialized high school generates an environment where students are prepped for college entrance. The expectation of the school was that its graduates would go to college; they ensured that outcome by taking the students on college visitation trips.

Fania's husband, also Puerto Rican, earned a PhD as well. He completed his doctoral program a few months before Fania started her own program. Fania's husband and Michelle Fine both played major roles in Fania's decision to first pursue a PhD and subsequently complete the doctoral program. Interactions with her partner and various other scholars opened her awareness to how research supports community work, so she applied and was admitted to a PhD program in urban education with a concentration in urban educational policy. She considered applying to doctoral programs in social work and in social welfare, but she felt they did not speak to her true interests in education and community organization.

The faculty members in Fania's program were very homogenous in background. However, Fania spoke very highly of her major professor, who went out of her way to make Fania feel welcomed and accepted although she was of the dominant culture. She gave the following statement about her relationship with her major professor

I actually reached out to her before I applied to the program, and not only did she respond to my email, she took me out to coffee and really took me under her wing. In many ways, she became and still is kind of like a *madrina*

to me. And even though she was White, she had the right politics. She was really interested in research around issues of race and class and discrimination, and really spoke out about those issues.

Madrina translates to godmother in the Spanish language; these individuals usually possess a very special role in the lives of Puerto Ricans. Therefore, her use of this term provides evidence that Fania felt a strong sense of closeness with, trust for, and respect of her major professor. She further stated that her committee consisted entirely of women, all of whom possessed strong social justice lenses.

Her cohort also consisted mostly of women. She recalled a few individuals of color in her cohort, but most of these peers struggled due to tending to familial duties and working full-time. She followed up on this recollection by comparing herself to some of her other cohort members:

There were some White women who had babies throughout their programs because they had partners or parents who were able to help with child care or somebody was making enough money to allow them to focus on school, and that is all they would do.

Fania worked part-time as a consultant during her program. She did not have a family to tend to while progressing through her program because of the lack of affordable child care arrangements.

Fania organized a support group for the course readings. In this five-student support group, each member was responsible for understanding one reading with exceptional depth and summarizing it to the rest of the group. Fania stated that the group would be difficult to keep on task, as people would sometimes use the group to vent about personal troubles, causing it to be more of a support group than an academic

exercise. Regarding comprehensive exams, Fania had two exams. The “first exam” consisted of five essay questions based on the five core courses everyone in the program completed, while the “second exam,” featured questions developed by the students themselves based on a certain area reflective of their potential dissertation topics.

Fania’s dissertation examined the ways in which various families navigated the high school admissions process in New York City according to race and class. The dissertation was an ethnographic study on two middle schools, one in Spanish Harlem (*El Barrio*) and the other in the Upper East Side. She met frequently with her chair to discuss her work and they developed a very friendly relationship, but Fania did mention that “...there was a time when I was really mad at her,” referring to the fact that other classmates had completed dissertations that were of a much smaller scale and finished.

Fania was awarded several awards of financial assistance. She was awarded a fellowship for the first two years of her program. During her third year she received a fellowship designated for minority graduate students. She also participated in the Writing Fellows Program, which involved her working fifteen to eighteen hours a week supporting a professor’s students with undergraduate writing.

Of the seven participants, Fania is the participant whose experiences most closely mirrored my own. Although I generated great rapport with all seven participants, I felt the closest to Fania. This feeling was perhaps due to her story about how her parents would make her *café* and *sancocho* during her writing process. I remember getting very emotional when Fania was discussing her parents’ role in her dissertation writing. It reminded me of how much miss my parents. One possible source of this reaction is the

way she interjected those Puerto Rican words I often heard while growing up, like *malcría*, *madrina*, and *fulana*. Fania felt comfortable enough to use foul language at times. Perhaps this combination of qualities made me feel so connected.

Maria referred Fania to me as a potential participant for this study. I was unaware at the time that I had already met her husband at a Puerto Rican Studies Association conference in Puerto Rico in 2008. Not only had I already met him but I remember thinking to myself, “he’s very cool.” When I found out I would be interviewing his wife, I was exceptionally intrigued. Fania was the only participant who had the privilege of having a spouse who understood and had undergone the doctoral student process. Sage and Maria had supportive husbands, but neither of these spouses had experienced a doctoral program.

Fania mentioned two Puerto Rican female doctoral students during the course of the interview. The first Puerto Rican woman she remembers meeting was at the open house of her then-prospective doctoral-granting institution. The second student was a current doctoral candidate at the time of my interview.

There was one Puerto Rican student that I met during one of the open houses there, and it was nice to see her, but I think she was so overwhelmed with her own stuff that she didn’t offer herself as a resource.

There is this wonderful Puerto Rican woman...I know she is stuck, and I know she doesn’t know what the hell to do, or how to get unstuck, and she has an advisor who is not available...I try to support her...

In both accounts, these women illustrate hardship and struggle. I wonder about the stories of those two women. I wonder if they have finished. These accounts remind me of why I am going through this process.

Gabriela

*Even to this day I am constantly trying to prove that I am good enough.
I'm actually considering doing a second PhD.*

Gabriela is a 50-year-old associate professor in the Northeast about to seek tenure in the coming months. She was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico and was raised in the Bedford-Stuyvesant/Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, New York—the neighborhood in which I was born and raised. She was raised on public assistance with an abusive father who had a third-grade education; she referred to him as *campesino*, which translates to a rural area. Her mother had an eighth-grade education. Gabriela is the youngest of her siblings.

Like Sage, Gabriela was in the intellectually gifted program, and like all the women in this study, she was always a good student. “Academics have always been easy for me,” she stated. Her achievements speak to this statement, as she was an excellent student who was skipped a grade, graduated high school at the age of sixteen, and was offered a full scholarship to well-respected private university in the Northeast. Unfortunately, her mother did not support her decision to move so far away, so Gabriela had to stay at a local college. She completed one semester and left, as she felt overwhelmed and isolated.

Shortly thereafter, she got married at 18 years old and gave birth to her first daughter at. At the age of twenty, she was divorced and decided to return to a community college to ensure a better life for her child. Toward the end of her second year at the community college, a professor from a very prestigious university in New York City approached her and inquired, “Why are you here? You should be at a university.” This professor then asked Gabriela to visit her at the university where she worked, subsequently introducing Gabriela to people in the university’s education department. Through those various interactions, Gabriela was encouraged to apply and was accepted on a full scholarship.

Although a strong student, Gabriela had personal troubles that deterred her continuously from her academics. She reflected on how those personal issues affected her academic performance:

It’s not just hard in terms of logistics, but psychologically when you are the first one to graduate in your family when you are the first one to even go that way, there is something going on in your head. I had to go to therapy the last year I was there, in order to get myself to graduate.

Once she received her bachelor’s degree, she began to teach. She understood, however, that the Department of Education only allowed her five years to obtain a master’s degree. Therefore, she made sure to continue earning credits along the way until she earned her master’s degree.

After having earned her master’s degree and working at alternative high schools for ten years, Gabriela finally decided to pursue a PhD. Her decision came about while being overwhelmed with the nature of her work. She worked with at-risk students who

had extremely troubled lives, which eventually took a toll on her own mental and emotional health. At the time, she was also working as an adjunct at two colleges in New York City and felt it was best to apply for a full-time position. She was turned down because she did not have a PhD, so as Gabriela stated, "...it was time to get my PhD."

Gabriela graduated in four years with her PhD in education with a concentration in urban education. She does not remember any Latino/a faculty members within her program, although she does recall one African-American female professor. She attended full-time and was awarded a teaching fellowship, writing fellowship, and minority scholarship.

When reflecting upon her experience with her comprehensive exams, she admitted, "I actually enjoyed that." Her exam was a sit-down, two-question exam. The graduate students were provided with a general idea of the topics that could potentially be covered, but were not provided with actual questions on the exam. She was permitted to come to the exam with a prepared bibliography, which allowed her to fully exhibit her strength as a writer.

Gabriela was very content with her committee, stating that "they knew what was best for me, they were very supportive." Her major professor, a White male, was also the chair of the newly-established department, while her other two committee members were Latinas. The characteristics and dynamics of her committee members certainly facilitated the process. Her satisfaction with her committee reminded me of how pleased I am with my own committee.

When asked about her support network, Gabriela disclosed that her support group included an African-American female and an Indian female. They met on a weekly basis while they underwent the dissertation process. She indicated how this group formed an intricate piece of her writing process when she stated, “I wouldn’t have graduated if I didn’t have the support of that study group.” Every week, two of the support group members would review the work of the other support group member, with each member taking turns each week to have her work reviewed. The accountability of belonging to that group minimized procrastination for Gabriela immensely.

Gabriela’s dissertation examined the experiences of Latinas in single-sexed schools as related to constructing a transnational feminist identity. Her study was based on three single-sexed schools: one Catholic, one public, and one vocational. Gabriela was interested in the success of Latinas in this particular type of institution and the development of their individual selves.

Gabriela is now a professor in her sixth year in academia and attempting to attain tenure, a process about which she surprisingly did not seem too enthusiastic. She stated, “I’m really unhappy where I am right now, and then I’m at the department where it’s a very traditional type of department.” She expressed her desire to implement innovative ways to change the educational system as well as her disappointment in her department frowning upon anything that she does outside of the department. She concluded, “They just want me to stay in my department. They don’t want me to work with the other departments...so yeah, I’m not happy. I actually want to get out.” This experience indicates that more struggles can certainly lay ahead post-PhD.

Two qualities stood out to me regarding Gabriela. The first quality involved her upbringing in Williamsburg, which is walking distance from where I grew up. A huge smile filled my face when she stated so; I was hooked from that point forward. This sense of comfort and familiarity came over me in knowing I had walked down the very block in which she grew up.

The second quality that stood out to me was her thought of attaining a second PhD because of her self-doubt and her disillusionment with education. This came as quite a surprise. I asked myself, “Who would want to go through that again?” I could relate to this feeling of uncertainty, as I continue to have my moments where I doubt my accomplishments are sufficient. I even began to consider enrolling in law school upon completion of my doctoral program. It may just very well be that I fear breaking away from my academic safety net.

Summary

This chapter presented the demographics of the research participants as well as some introductory information as to the significant elements of their lives related to their persistence in their doctoral programs. The chapter offered the individual participant descriptions and narratives of their lived experiences. Their stories were presented through brief narratives using the very words of each participant, as well as reflections of the researcher. Chapter 5 will present descriptions of the themes which emerged during participant interviews.

CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter contains a discussion of the thematic findings as they relate to the conceptual framework, the literature reviewed for the study, and each of the research questions. Four research questions were designed to provide a framework through which the lived experiences of Puerto Rican women and their persistence in their doctoral programs could be explored. The four research questions were designed according to Solorzano's five tenets of critical race theory.

The data collected from the seven participants were gathered through semi-structured interviews, deep researcher reflection, member checking, and field notes. The process produced opulent descriptions from the participants about their experiences. The questions were also instrumental in enabling a descriptive composite picture of their lived experiences in earning their doctoral degrees. The emergent themes provided a distinctive perspective of Puerto Rican women as they battled adversity in the pursuit of attaining a doctoral degree.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to elaborately describe the experiences of Puerto Rican women and the PhD. Once all the data was analyzed, several themes emerged. These themes will be discussed in this chapter in significant detail in relation to the accompanying connected narratives of the participants. The emergent themes identified were as follows:

1. Personal attributes
2. Family as inspiration
3. Advocating for my community
4. Socioeconomic status and capital
5. Racial discrimination and sexism
6. Latino/Minority faculty and peers

Thematic Generation

After all participant interviews were completed, I analyzed, reflected upon, and triangulated the collected data. As was explained in Chapter 3, I utilized Corbin and Strauss's (2008) referred method of open and axial coding to generate the relevant themes. I also developed a thematic content matrix (Table 6) to help with the data examination process. This tool allowed me to begin identifying preliminary categories and issues that originated from the multiple data sources (Smith & Osborne, 2003). On numerous occasions, I revisited the original interview transcripts, audio recordings, member check statements, and observational notes to thoroughly explore participant words in depth and to capture the true essence and meaning of their stories.

Table 6. Thematic Content Matrix

Theme	Marcela	Sage	Milagros	Maria	Christina	Fania	Gabriela
Innate academic ability	X	X					X
Self-efficacy		X	X	X	X	X	X
Paternal support	X			X	X	X	
Maternal support	X	X			X	X	X
Parental support	X				X	X	
Spousal support		X		X		X	
For my children	X				X		X
Disproving statistics	X	X			X		X
Giving back	X		X		X	X	
Humble beginnings	X		X	X			X
Hidden curriculum	X				X		
Meritocracy						X	X
Access	X		X		X		
Racial discrimination	X				X	X	X
Language	X	X			X		
Assimilation							X
Gender superiority				X			
Minority peers	X	X		X	X	X	X
Minority faculty	X			X			

Discussion of Thematic Findings

Table 7 summarizes the relationships between the emergent themes and the research questions of this study. Research Question 1 was answered via the themes of *racial discrimination* and *socioeconomic status and capital*. Research Question 2 was addressed by the themes of *socioeconomic status and capital* and *sexism*. Research Question 3 was answered with emergent themes addressing *personal attributes*, *family as inspiration*, and *advocating for my community*. Research Question 4 was addressed with the themes of *racial discrimination*, *advocating for my community*, and *Latino/minority faculty/peers*. The themes of *racial discrimination*, *socioeconomic status and capital*, and *advocating for my community* overlap across all four research questions.

Table 7. Relationship of Research Questions to Thematic Findings

Research Questions	Thematic Findings
1. Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies?	Racial discrimination, socioeconomic status and capital
2. What life experiences are narrated within issues of class and gender by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?	Socioeconomic status and capital, sexism
3. How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience?	Personal attributes, family as inspiration, advocating for my community
4. Are issues of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Ricans in doctoral programs?	Racial discrimination, advocating for my community, Latino/minority faculty and peers

Theme 1: *Yo soy así* – Personal Attributes

How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience? Research Question 3 was designed to explore and uncover themes that might emerge from the perspective of Puerto Rican women about the role their individual characteristics played while enrolled in their doctoral programs. Three themes emerged which collectively provided a rich response to this question: (a) personal attributes, (b) family as inspiration, and (c) advocating for my community. Family support is of central importance, particularly in the form of emotional support from the students' immediate family (Gandara, 1982; Gonzalez, 2002), partners (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995), and strong mothers who guide and serve as role models of success (Gandara, 1982).

I conducted the first interview for this study with Marcela. During the first interview, the concept of "I've always been a student" emerged. Ever since Marcela could recall, she always enjoyed learning and performed well in her classes. She stated, "*Siempre me ha encantado estudiar. Siempre desde pequeña fui una buena estudiante. Siempre fui excelente en todos los grados*; I've always enjoyed learning. Since I was little, I was excellent in every grade."

Marcela attributed her desire to learn partly to her personal attributes. She noted that some of the various components that make up her personality and her character were what allowed her to persist through her doctoral study. In her words,

En mi caso yo creo que fue parte de mi personalidad y de mi carácter que siempre he sido una mujer luchadora; Los rasgos de personalidad, esos rasgos de ser persistente, de

ser determinada, de no rendirte, de ser organizada. Siempre fui luchadora, determinada...

In my case, I think that it was part of my personality and my character, that I've always been a fighting woman; those characteristics of personality, of not giving up, of being organized. I was always a fighter, determined...

Marcela considered these characteristics to have encouraged her desire to pursue a PhD. She perceived the task as a personal challenge and she embraced the challenge:

Fue un reto personal de yo saber que había cumplido algo. No me gusta dejar cosas incompletas. No me gusta empezar algo y no terminarlo...me encantan los retos, no que me encantan las dificultades, pero que las dificultades para mi retan oportunidades de mostrar que yo puedo.

It was the personal challenge of knowing that I had completed something. I don't like starting something and not finishing it...I enjoy challenges...I don't enjoy the difficulties, but the difficulties, for me, challenge opportunities of demonstrating that I can do it.

Sage echoed Marcela's thoughts, stating "I was always academically gifted," further explaining that ever since she could remember, she was enrolled in a gifted program. Sage reiterated much of what Marcela had noted in terms of intrinsic characteristics:

I think I am a goal-driven person, accomplishment-driven person; something probably in the personality of that. What I will do is, I actually lay off a little bit and then I find another goal. I finish this, I find another goal...when I start a goal, especially a big goal, then I am going to finish it.

Gabriela also contributed to this theme of personal attributes, stating that she "enjoyed being in that intellectual environment." As mentioned in Chapter 4, Gabriela skipped a grade during her K-12 education and graduated high school at the age of

sixteen. Like Sage, she was also in the intellectually gifted program. After having returned to college after a brief break, she continued to be a straight-‘A’ student. Gabriela summarized her intellectual ability by stating,

Academics have always been easy for me. Academics for me, was the one place I think where I felt safe. I was always the smartest in my class. Often times, I was the smartest in my school...I had a college level in the fourth grade.

Although an assumption can be made that the other participants had always been good students as well, they maintained different foci. Five participants indicated that self-doubt was a substantial obstacle while completing their doctoral program. This doubt experienced by several participants is reflective of Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy. Milagros stated, “I think we are so hard on ourselves and we have to be like, you have to do this; it’s part of this culture of I’m not good enough.” Christina added, “...culturally speaking, I have always been my worst critic.” Fania said, “...that inner critique came up a lot in terms of, ‘oh shit, am I a fraud? Am I supposed to be in this program?’” These questions Fania asked herself are best illustrated through a conversation she had with her mother:

My mother had interesting observations for me. She said, “I’m not a scholar, but I know whatever you do, you get complicated, you do too much, and you never believe in yourself, so maybe if you address those things the other stuff will come.”

Maria took action in questioning her accomplishments outwardly with one of her peers. She recounted that conversation:

I was the only [Latina] and I felt very self-conscious, to the point where I asked a student in the previous cohort, who

was part of admissions, was I admitted because I was Latina...that self-doubt, nagging kind of voice behind me that is telling me you are the token.

Gabriela, although a star student, also referred to that voice inside that perpetuated a sense of inferiority:

It becomes like something, like a voice inside your head that in spite of what you are doing, there is something always inside your head telling you that you are not good enough...even to this day, it is there.

Gabriela admitted, “Even to this day, I am constantly trying to prove that I am good enough. I’m actually considering doing a second PhD.” The PhD is the highest academic degree possible in the U.S. Therefore, the extent to which a person considers completing another one of these degrees is very telling of the internalization Puerto Rican women continue to experience in facing societal messages of being substandard.

Nonetheless, Gabriela gave herself credit for having persevered through trying times. She noted that the strength and self-confidence that comes with overcoming trials and tribulations is incredibly valuable:

The more challenges and obstacles that you have to overcome, the more your brain is constantly adapting and constantly growing...In a sense, I could attribute my success in part to those obstacles.

As related to persistence, Gabriela concluded, “I think as long as you are confident in who you are and the expertise that you have to contribute, you will persist.”

Theme 2: *Pa' eso estamos* – Family as Inspiration

Undoubtedly, this conversation about Puerto Rican persistence cannot exist without discussing the role and the impact of family. The family has been, and continues to be, a prominent influence in the Latina literature; this study has further underscored this phenomenon. Every single participant in this study significantly referenced the role their families played in their roads to attaining their PhD degrees. The most notable family members mentioned were parents, spouses, and children.

Marcela spoke extensively about the impact her father had on her in terms of her intellectual development.

Yo me crie viendo a mi padre leyendo, viendo a mi padre escribiendo...entonces yo desarrolle ese gusto por la lectura, ese gusto por las historias, los cuentos...y mi padre siempre toda la vida, nos decía una y otra vez, ustedes tienen que estudiar, ustedes tienen que estudiar.

I grew up watching my father read, watching my father write...so I developed a liking for literature, a liking for history, stories...and my father always, all of his life, he'd say to us, time and time again, you have to study, you have to study.

She felt that her mother was supportive as well, but deemed her father as mostly responsible for her esteemed outlook on education. Marcela was one of two participants to highlight her father as the primary motivator of the two parents.

Maria was the other participant who highlighted her father regarding her persistence in her doctoral program. She explained how he constantly expressed his pride in her accomplishments. He also provided support through that process, especially with regard to emotional support, allowing her to complain to him on various occasions. She

did not specifically mention her mother, aside from where she was born and the fact that she was a homemaker.

Most participants mainly focused on their mothers as prominent figures. In Sage's case, the fact that her mother instilled the seed very early on prompted her to college and be successful. She highlighted, "My mom always told me, 'Sage is college-bound.'" Milagros highlighted her mother's support and pride, regardless of her lack of understanding of the doctoral process:

My mom is like well this is good, you are in school, she doesn't really understand it really, but you know they are proud of you. "Oh yea, she is going to be a professor," that is what she knows.

Christina and Gabriela went into greater detail regarding the role of their mothers in their doctoral process. When asked what made her consider obtaining the PhD, Christina stated,

I strongly believe that what drove me to my PhD was the fact that my parents, specifically my mother, never questioned I couldn't obtain the highest degree. She would always instill a very common Puerto Rican saying, which is whatever it is you want to be, just be the best in it, and reach the highest that you can.

When asked what caused her to persist to completion, she instantaneously referred to family, mainly her parents:

I did it for all my family members, specifically my mom and dad, which I think would have been amazing scholars and didn't have the opportunity, because life did not provide mechanism for access.

Christina further stated that for every day, every year of her doctoral program, she would call her mother at 4:00 AM before she started on her writing.

On the other hand, Gabriela had moved back in with her mother, who provided child care for Gabriela while she pursued her various degrees full-time:

My mom was always there to support me...It's funny 'cause when you think of support, she never helped me with my homework. Very early on, I was beyond her, and she couldn't support me in that sense, but the love was always there, and when I started having my kids, she was always there to help me with the kids.

Growing up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn was tough. It was not safe to be in the streets, so Gabriela grew up reading books. She stated, "My life was reading, reading, reading all the time. My mom really pushed the academics. She was really proud of me." Gabriela concluded that her mother gave her self-confidence and instilled the notion that succeeding is not possible if one does not believe in himself or herself.

Fania discussed at great lengths the significance of her parents' involvement with her persistence through her doctoral program. Fania was the only participant to provide a case of both parents engaging equally in a tag-team effort to help her to achieve the PhD. Fania and her parents worked out an agreement where she knew she could dedicate three full days a week to writing her dissertation—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. She asked her parents if they would turn her old bedroom into an office where she could come to write on those days. She would spend the night at their home on her writing days, as her parents were determined to contribute to her progress in whatever way they could. Fania explained,

My parents said, well, how can we help you with your writing...so my father would make me coffee every morning. I would wake up every morning at 6 AM to do a walk and every morning his contribution was that he would make me my coffee and my mother would be in charge of

my lunch break....so she bought this bell...in the shape of a long pencil...she would ring it to represent [a] writing break. We would eat for an hour and talk and that was my social break...and I did that for like a year and a half.

Fania stated, “My parents felt really good about contributing that way, ‘cause they knew that was something they could do.” They would often express words of encouragement when she felt defeated. She recalled, “I remember my parents telling me, ‘We don’t know what you’re doing, but we know you can do it, and we know you can finish, ‘cause you finish everything.’” Her mother also contributed by checking translations of some transcriptions Fania had completed in Spanish. Clearly, she attributes much of her success to her parents, stating, “I really thought I wasn’t going to continue at [one] point, but my parents helped me persist.” In the end, Fania’s parents threw her a graduation party and to this day remind her that she has surpassed their expectations.

In addition to parental support, the desire to provide for and set an example for their children was another element in the persistence of these Puerto Rican women in their doctoral programs. Marcela and Christina, each the mother of two sons, exclusively referred to wanting to set an example for their sons. Marcela explained, “[*Quise*] *darle un ejemplo para mis hijos...de que ellos vieran que hay que tener determinación en la vida*; I wanted to set an example for my sons...so they could see that you have to be determined in life.” Christina echoed Marcela in her desire, “My motivation were my boys. I needed to show them that life is what you do. You can always stand up, get the dirt off your knees and keep going.”

Gabriela has four daughters and no sons, but she also shares the same wish for her children:

I have four girls, so I'm thinking, the further along I get, the more likely it is that they will get, match me, and surpass; and for generations after...you move your whole family forward.

One of Gabriela's daughters was present at her defense. Gabriela wanted her daughter to see the process, hoping that she will also earn a PhD in the future.

Sage, Maria, and Fania attested to the importance of having a supportive spouse while completing a doctoral program, especially during the dissertation writing process. Sage stated, "I had a great relationship with my husband." She further elaborated that her husband was very independent and did not rely on her to help as much around the house while she was writing. She recounted that the dinner menu had become pizza and peanut butter and jelly, but that he was okay with this change.

Maria had to consult with her husband about finances. She had become aware of a dissertation writing institute that was rather expensive, so she sought his opinion on participating:

My husband is very supportive, has always been very supportive. I had to pay fifteen, sixteen hundred dollars to go for seven days...and when it feels like an investment, he is like, 'if it saves you time, if it gives you peace of mind, if it allows you to feel supported, then go for it.'

Fania was living with her partner at the time. Although they shared the expenses equally, work became a burden when the time came to write the dissertation. Her partner decided to step in:

I needed to crunch down on the writing, he was like, look, let's not have you work. Let's have you do this writing fellowship and you contribute in whatever way you can but I will take on most of the bills to see us through, because we need you to finish.

The facts that her partner had already earned his PhD and had made such deliberate sacrifices for her to finish were key reasons why Fania was able to persist in her program.

Marcela and Milagros summed up the notion of 'doing it for the family' and 'serving as a role model for the family,' which is a substantial component of all of the participants' reasons for persistence. In Marcela's words:

Yo creo el servir también de modelo en la familia pues yo creo que también es algo lindo que te llevas. A también ser pobre como ellos. Y de que mira a como he llegado y mira lo que he logrado.

I think that to serve as a role model for the family, well, I think, that is also something beautiful that you take with you. To also be poor like them and that look where I got and look what I have achieved.

Milagros admitted to her persistence being brought on by a perceived duty. When asked what kept her going, she explained, "I think part of it has been family and friends, and this sense of obligation to them. I would hear my nephew, 'Oh *titi*, I heard mom say you are going to be a doctor.'" Milagros concluded, "You get the degree, but it's not just you who you are doing this for."

The successes of these women stand for much more than personal gratification. Their successes are monumental and have the capacity to break barriers and impact future generations. Consequently, those who inspire and motivate us are those for whom

we fight. The participants in this study were clearly cognizant of the large-scale impact of their successes; their enthusiasm to participate in this study suggests this awareness.

Theme 3: *A la orden* – Advocating for My Community

Are issues of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs? Research Question 4 was intended to address the beliefs held and actions taken by these participants as related to their contributions to their various communities of origin. Three thematic findings were deemed relevant to the concepts of justice and advocacy: (a) racial discrimination, (b) advocating for my community, and (c) Latino/minority faculty and peers.

On a more personal scale, the participants in this study persisted for the sake of their families. On a larger scale, they also persisted for their communities—the greater Puerto Rican/Latina community and their respective geographic communities. Two notions frame the advocacy practiced by the participants of this study: (a) representing their communities and (b) giving back to their communities.

Referencing representation of the Puerto Rican/Latina community, Marcela stated: “Yo no quería ser una estadística más...hace falta que haya más representación de mujeres Latinas en diferentes campos; I didn’t want to be another statistic...we need more representation of Latina women in different fields.” Sage concurred with Marcela:

We need to have Latina representation...more of us [have] to have PhDs to kind of [show] the younger generations that it can be done and there is nothing wrong with Latino people that are underrepresented when it comes to doctoral programs.

Milagros also spoke about representing Puerto Rican women in a positive light, but she included additional components related to geography and sexuality:

I represent a Puerto Rican woman from specifically Newark...those two are intertwined... [and] are very significant part of my identity and that is really important for me...we all know stereotypes of what it means to be Puerto Rican, what it means to be female Puerto Rican...you are supposed to drop out and kind of have ten kids or whatever...

Gabriela also aligned herself with the notion of disproving statistics and stereotypical assumptions, stating:

That is what pushes me...first of all, I want to prove people wrong. I grew up hearing a lot of negative experiences about Latinas...the images of Latinos is that we are really hot...Latinas are hot, they are sexy, they are oversexed...I didn't want to fall into that.

The pressure that comes along with wanting to represent a community can, and has been, a deterrent to many Puerto Rican women who have attempted to pursue a PhD. In the case of the participants in this study, the pressure fueled their collective desire to persist. Sage stated, "You do it, not just for yourself, but so that other people can see that this is achievable if they wish to accomplish this very same thing." Christina, the only Puerto Rican in her cohort, stated, "I persisted for all the people that should be there that are not; for all the people that walked in, but weren't able to express how they felt and walked out." Christina further stated that she felt a burden on her shoulders to do well so others like her can gain access and opportunities. Gabriela also experienced a similar feeling, stating she felt the responsibility to move forward for everybody else:

I guess it was up to me in a sense. Nobody else in my family had graduated with a bachelor's degree. I was the

only one. I put a lot of pressure on myself, but I felt like I was carrying the torch. I was the one that was going to make it for everybody else.

Sage suggested an idea she had about Puerto Ricans walking in the Puerto Rican Day parade wearing their full academic regalia to show that Puerto Ricans can be academically inclined, gifted achievers. Visibility definitely must be achieved so that those who come after are assured of the possibility of such an achievement. However, the participants in this study did not believe that visibility alone would rectify the disparity of the educational attainment of Puerto Rican women. They felt that more needs to be done; those who have achieved the highest academic degree possible must coach those who follow and give back to the communities that are most in need of assistance. These communities are often the ones from which they originate.

Milagros first became interested in pursuing a PhD while teaching at an inner-city high school in the Northeast. She continuously wondered how she could have a larger systematic impact on education and community development. She passionately explained:

...there are people in my community that are really struggling, who are really working to survive...there are people that are out there doing some real work. It's just kind of like, thinking about the community and thinking about other people in my life that I have to do this for...Trying to remember that this is not about me, this is the work that needs to be done.

Milagros regarded this as the high point during her process that kept her going while she endured low moments. She said proudly, "I'm doing this because of those

boys,” referencing the boys in her study. “I’m doing this because I lost my brother to the streets.”

Milagros actually grew up in an inner-city environment and lived in the suburbs for five years while she was teaching. She moved back to the inner city as a doctoral student because she felt that she needed to stay grounded about the realities of such communities—poor, working-class, Black and Latino communities. She reiterated, “It’s not about me, it’s not about this PhD, it’s about [these] communities and people who are out there struggling.”

Christina worked with Summer College Opportunity in Preparation for Education (SCOPE), a program for underrepresented minorities. Working there helped her economically, but she claimed it has also helped her in other ways.

I was working with people just like me...and because it is through the multicultural office, we had Puerto Ricans and African Americans and minority groups that really needed the attention and someone to believe in them and say yes you can.

Marcela was a committee member who organized an annual fair for Latino parents and families. She organized the program, served as its moderator, and gave presentations on her research when asked to do so. In Marcela’s words, “*uno va aprendiendo de como entrar al sistema, y después utilizar esa experiencia para ayudar a otros que están en la misma posición que uno estuvo*; you begin to learn how to enter the system, and later you use that experience to help someone else who is in the same position you were in.” Although there is a sense of responsibility among the participants

to assist those from similar origins or in similar positions, the participants seem passionate about doing so, as it provides them a sense of fulfillment.

Theme 4: *En la lucha siempre* –Socioeconomic Status and Capital

What life experiences are narrated within issues of class, gender, and sexuality by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs? Research Question 2 was designed to reveal and describe the meaning of ascribed characteristics as these Puerto Rican women understood them. The two thematic findings of (a) socioeconomic status and capital and (b) sexism answer this research question, after having been generated from the invariant constituents. Class refers to the enduring and systematic differences in access to and control over resources for provisioning and survival (Acker, 2006; Nelson, 1993). Bettie (2003) argued that issues of social and cultural capital arise when working-class parents lack the social networks, skills, and knowledge to enable their child.

The ability to persist in a doctoral program requires the consideration of several factors. One of the most significant influences is that of socioeconomic status and the social and cultural capital that it grants. The participants in this study are all first-generation college students: none of their parents achieved a bachelor's degree and most have origins in low-income, working-class families. How does one with such a background not only gain acceptance into a doctoral program but persist to complete the program in its entirety? The participants in this study were adamant about discussing the struggles that were bound to occur.

Marcela was the first participant to engage in a discussion about socioeconomic status and its effect on the information to which people have access:

Era difícil por las limitaciones económicas que yo tenía viniendo de una familia pobre. Y no solamente pobre en el sentido financiero y económico, si no también pobre en el sentido de la orientación que me podían dar. En el sentido de la información que ellos mismos no tenían. No conocían. Pues eso me limito un poco.

It was difficult because of economical limitations that I had coming from a poor family. And not only poor in a financial sense and economic, but also in an orientation sense, that they could give me. In the sense of the information they themselves did not have, didn't know. Well, that limited me a little bit.

Maria was from a lower-middle-class home. Her mother was a homemaker and her father had been a police officer. However, he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when Maria was an infant, so he received disability assistance and social security payments for all of her life until he passed away. They lived a very modest lifestyle on a very fixed income. It is not unreasonable to assume that Maria's parents were unable to put Maria in a private school, nor pay for extracurricular activities that would have enhanced her educational experience at an early age.

Gabriela was raised in one of the most disadvantaged inner-city neighborhoods in the Northeast. Her ascribed status could have easily set her up for failure. She elaborated on the conditions in which she grew up:

My mom went through some hard times. She hooked up with my dad at sixteen. She was a very young mother, didn't speak any English. She was in New York, in Bed-Stuy, by herself...a lot of the time, she was on public assistance, but even though she was on public assistance, it wasn't enough, so she worked in factories and warehouses.

We lived in horrible neighborhoods...we had to fight, like every day...we grew up very tough.

The critical points of these stories relates to how these backgrounds translate into successful graduate experiences. This study views the stories of these Puerto Rican women under several lenses. Two of those lenses are that of the hidden curriculum and meritocracy, as discussed in Chapter 2. When asked about these two concepts and how they relate to their persistence in their doctoral programs, Milagros stated:

I think that is something most students of color or students of color from first-generation college backgrounds are still struggling with...figuring out this hidden curriculum. We don't have that social capital. We don't have that language. When we get into doctoral programs, we are trying to figure everything out, 'cause who do we know that had a PhD?

Christina stated, "I equate [the] hidden curriculum to access, and I think there are a lot of venues that culturally diverse people don't have access to or are not told to access."

With regard to the highly-favored American ideology of meritocracy and its role in obtaining a PhD, three participants had very strong opinions. Both Milagros and Fania regarded it as a myth. Milagros commented:

...you can work hard, but if you don't have the access or the social capital, you are not going to navigate the stakes. This is the whole American ideology, American dream and everything...you have to work hard to a certain point, [but] access and [the] privilege that comes with having access needs to be there in order for you to move on.

Fania echoed Milagros's opinion, stating, "I think it's important to acknowledge that [meritocracy] is a myth and that some people have advantages, and acknowledge that," but she cautioned against becoming consumed by that notion. She suggested that focus be

placed upon how to create other sources of support and capital and obtain that information. Gabriela very firmly stated,

Meritocracy just doesn't work...Not when you are dealing with people that are starting on completely different playing fields. Things are not equal. I don't think we could ever be as successful.

Meritocracy forms part of the second tenet of the theoretical framework used for this study.

Regarding the doctoral student experience, Milagros stated, "We are supposed to play this game differently, but nobody gave us the rules. Nobody told us that we were playing the game first of all." Fania admitted that world of the academy was very new to her; furthermore, she felt that an acknowledgement must be made that not everybody has a clear understanding of the fact that not everyone starts with the same set of tools.

Theme 5: *Así son las cosas* – Racial Discrimination and Sexism

Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies? Research Question 1 was posed to better understand how and to what extent racial discrimination impacted the persistence of Puerto Rican women completing a doctoral program. The two thematic findings of (a) racial discrimination and (b) socioeconomic status and capital answer this research question. Macionis (2011) defined intersection theory as the analysis of the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

Although varying in intensity, all of the participants in the current study clearly elaborated on their experiences with racial discrimination while completing their doctoral

programs. Each participant shared how she transformed her frustrations with racial discrimination into doctoral program persistence.

One of the evident critical factors that emerged from within the narratives of the Puerto Rican women in discussing their lived experiences in a doctoral program was the influence of racial discrimination and sexism. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and gender is often cited in the literature as a reason why Latinas discontinue their doctoral programs. However, the participants in this study chose to utilize those frustrating scenarios as sources of motivation to persist. The discrimination faced by the participants in this study often encompassed stereotypical assumptions held by their peers of the dominant culture; in one case, these assumptions originated from another faculty member of color who was of the dominant sex.

Marcela attributed some of the discrimination she encountered to her accent, stating: *“Cuando llamaba la escuela graduada para aclarar algún asunto o someter algo. Y ellos notaban mi acento inmediatamente que tengo un acento fuerte, pues...También era un trato bastante descortés;* When I arrived at the graduate school to clarify something or submit something, and immediately they noticed my accent, well I have a strong accent, it was also very rude.” Christina experienced a similar situation, not because of her accent, but because of her verbiage and point of view on issues. She recalled having difficulties with a certain professor who she later had to dismiss from her committee:

At some point I felt my demeanor and how I gesticulate or how I express myself was questioned. I thought this same person had a problem with how I am and my upbringing

[was] constantly surfacing when I [was] establishing an argument or making a claim.

Language is a prominent element that arises in discussions of racial and ethnic discrimination. The other element involves preconceived notions that are associated with various cultures. Of all the participants, Christina and Fania seemed to endure the most overt type of discrimination. Christina recounted three distinct instances during which she felt she was belittled due to being Puerto Rican. The most trying of those situations was at a doctoral student get-together:

There was this Irish professor who invited the doctoral candidates to visit his home; And one of the comments after two, or three, or four glasses of wine or beer [was], “You know what? I get confused with you, because I know that Puerto Ricans are slow and you are not slow.” That was a piercing pain in my heart. I eventually figured out why he said it; before me, there were two or three that had dropped the program.

Christina also mentioned two other professors who stereotyped Puerto Ricans, prompting her to have to speak up about it; one of these professors was Chicano. Ultimately, Christina admitted that the stereotype implying that many Puerto Rican women engage in sexual activity at a very early age helped serve as the driving force for her to complete her doctoral program because she refused to become another statistic of a Puerto Rican woman who did not finish.

Fania had also experienced racial discrimination on various occasions while completing her doctoral program; she chose to elaborate on the time she confronted this discrimination for the first time and “reclaimed her power” in a space where people did not necessarily assume that she had the expertise, knowledge, and skillset that she

possesses. She was at a monthly group dynamics workshop with some of her doctoral peers at a nearby hotel:

One day it was my turn to get rid of the pizza boxes, and I had a *pañuelo* on my head, 'cause I didn't do my hair and I had a t-shirt. And this other *blanco* guy who was staying in the same hotel who wasn't with our group said to me, "Oh, I see that we have a new maid in the hotel don't we?"

She responded to that with "I don't know, do we?" Although that happened five years ago, Fania continues to experience the stereotypical doubt and belittling that she experienced that day. She stated, "At the university, I don't have a *pañuelo* on my head, I'm often wearing a suit, and students will still say, 'Do you know when Professor Fania is coming back?'"

Gabriela discussed the impact that the concept of assimilation has on the level of discrimination experienced by people. She mentioned the systematic effects of assimilating to the dominant culture and its significance to the Latino culture. Such a discussion is indeed imperative when examining the persistence of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs because it highlights the difficulties that may arise when trying to adapt to not only the dominant culture, but a graduate school culture as well. It is not unreasonable to assume that those who are more open to assimilating into the graduate school culture are more likely to persist in their programs. In her words,

Latinos have always been partly about assimilation...the wiping out of our culture, which is our strength, in order to replace it with some stuff that we are not good at. They take away our strengths, then we are always going to be second best...and this is true from early on all the way to the top, so they take away your individual culture, all the things that make you, you...and you're never going to be able to measure up to them, because they are the masters.

It's a cultural deficit thing, erasure of culture, and in that way they maintain the power. They are the ones that are at the top and we are always the ones that are going to be second at the bottom.

Risman (2004) described gender structure as containing three dimensions: (a) individual, (b) interactional, and (c) institutional. Schroeder and Mynatt (1993) stated that female graduate students often feel ignored, invisible, and dismissed by their male faculty advisors. Maria felt that a gender dynamic existed between her chair and herself. Although her chair was a male of color, she perceived him to hold an apparent sense of superiority over her; she did not perceive this same disparity to exist between one of her male peers and her chair. She seriously stated,

I was six months pregnant. It was in the winter. I take an hour long train ride to meet with him, so I can get some guidance on how to structure my intro to the defense. He meets with me for like fifteen minutes, gives me no feedback as far as what I am supposed to do; And then when the defense came, I get started and he cut me off and told me essentially to cut to the chase.

For Maria, the gender aspect was a large part of the difficulty she experienced. She explained that she had known of other relationships held by her chair that were much different. Maria described her chair as a brilliant public speaker who did not come across as such an advocate for underrepresented populations in his individual interactions. Furthermore, she noted that he did not attend her graduation. Maria summarized her graduate program by stating, "They don't take a strong enough stand for issues of equity and justice."

Theme 6: *Ando con los míos* – Latino/Minority Faculty and Peers

In various ways, all of the participants in this study mentioned the action of seeking support from other underrepresented minorities as a means to persist in their doctoral programs. These support systems included (a) special programs designed to provide outreach and additional services to assist underrepresented students, (b) ethnic minority peers, or (c) ethnic minority professors. Regardless of the sources these participants utilized, they clearly partook in meaningful interactions with others of similar backgrounds. Marcela described the composition of her cohort:

Éramos seis estudiantes- dos mujeres incluyéndome a mi y las dos Puertorriqueñas, y cuatro varones, y de los cuatro varones. Habían dos puertorriqueños, uno era de Ecuador, y uno era de España. Pues prácticamente también como éramos los únicos, tratábamos de sentarnos juntos, y darnos apoyo uno al otro.

It was six students—two women including me and both Puerto Ricans, and four males, and of the four males, there were two Puerto Ricans, one was from Ecuador, and the other from Spain. Well, practically, also, since we were the only ones, we tried to sit together to support one another.

Marcela further stated that she relied on this group for support, especially in the statistics courses where they were usually the only Latinos. She admitted that had it not been for this group of individuals, she may not have been successful in her program. In her words,

Pues yo pienso que se me hubiese hecho bien difícil si yo no hubiese contado con estas personas Latinas, con estas compañeras Latinas que me apoyaron, me motivaron, en los momentos que yo a veces sentía rendida porque la carga era muy grande.

Well I think that it would have been really difficult if I would not have counted on those Latino people, with these Latino colleagues who supported me, motivated me, in the

moments I sometimes felt defeated because the load was too big.

Marcela also had a Puerto Rican woman for a major professor, a rare sight given the number of Puerto Rican women who graduate with a PhD (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Marcela very fondly elaborated on her relationship with her major professor:

Esta mujer pues es una mujer muy sabia, ella conoce muy bien, no solamente la parte lingüística del programa y de la educación bilingüe, sino también la parte política, el contexto político, y el contexto histórico de lo que representa ser bilingüe y ser bicultural aquí. Entonces, ella también conoce muy bien las instituciones, como se mueven las estructuras sociales en este país, los juegos que hay que saber para tu entrar.

This woman, well she is a wise woman, she knows very well not only the linguistics part of the program and of bilingual education, but also the political part, the political context, and the historical context of what represents to be bilingual and bicultural here. Therefore, she knows the institutions really well, how the social structures move in this country,

Her major professor assisted Marcela in more than just the logistics of the program and the dissertation writing. She lent Marcela assistance in every way possible. Marcela added, *“Siempre yo tenia que acudir a mi mayor advisor...ella siempre fue intermediaria ahí en todo eso; I always had to turn to my major professor. She was always the median there in everything.”* Time and time again, Marcela’s major professor provided words of encouragement to keep her motivation up: *“Tienes que terminar, tienes que hacerlo, tu puedes, estas casi al final, te queda poco; You have to finish, you have to do it, you can do it, you’re almost at the end, you have a little left.”*

Like Marcela, Sage also had Latino peers who supported her throughout her program. Sage spoke of the psychological effects of surrounding oneself with those who share a similar background.

To be honest with you, I was gravitating towards the minorities. There were not too many Spanish, but I had my friends Carmela and Gordon...it was mostly those two that I was following throughout...psychologically, I felt more comfortable like that.

Maria sought the assistance of a Black female professor who was known for her guidance of several other female doctoral students of color. “She gave her emotional support and was supportive in every way.” When Maria vented to this outside professor about the difficulties she had been experiencing with her major professor, she immediately stepped in and said, “I am going to be a reader so I can come to the defense and support you.” Gratefully, Maria confessed that this professor had served as her safety net, saying, “She was there for the specific purpose of running interference and supporting me when I was defending with my own chair.” That professor played a key role in helping Maria, and in fact was the professor who proceeded to hood her at graduation. Maria concluded, “I feel like in a lot of ways, she was my honorary chair.”

Christina belonged to the Holmes Scholars program and was also a member of the Black Caucus African American group. Through the Holmes Scholars program, which serves racial and ethnic minority doctoral students, Christina facilitated diversity workshops for various educational communities on power and privilege. This cohesive group organized various activities, including potlucks and dances. The program also organized writing groups that were particularly helpful to Christina as she progressed

through her dissertation. In her words, “We made sure that we took care, as you say, of your own.”

Fania joined with two other doctoral students in her program to create their very own support group called Fabulous Female Educational Academics (FFEA). FFEA members met regularly to keep themselves on task with their research protocols, regardless of whether they were conducting interviews or completing observations in the field. Fania proudly stated, “We did a good job supporting each other through that.” The three FFEA members, which aside from Fania included another Puerto Rican woman and a White woman, went to each other’s graduations as part of the FFEA pact; whenever someone from FFEA defended, the other two FFEA members gave her a t-shirt that said “Fabulous Female Educational Academic.” Fania also attributed her persistence to other Puerto Rican ABD’s who had not finished, stating, “Hearing the regret in their voice made me kind of push through.”

Gabriela also had two peers who supported her through her dissertation writing—one was African-American and the other was Indian. They met on a weekly basis as they worked on their respective dissertations. Gabriela echoed Marcela’s same sentiment about her group: “I think I wouldn’t have graduated if I didn’t have the support of that study group.”

Listening to the Voices Through the Framework

In this research, Solórzano’s five tenets of critical race theory were used to view the phenomenon of Puerto Rican women and their journey toward the doctorate in an

innovative way. The original purpose of critical race theory was to examine the intersection of race, law, and power. Solórzano's approach consists of five tenets: (a) intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, (b) challenge to dominant ideology, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) an interdisciplinary perspective. For the purposes of this study, Solórzano's approach was utilized for use with Puerto Rican women and their sense making of attaining a PhD.

Table 8 summarizes the relationship between the emergent themes and Solórzano's five tenets of critical race theory. The first tenet, intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, as well as the second tenet, challenge to ideology, are both addressed by the themes of (a) racial discrimination and sexism and (b) socioeconomic status and capital. The third tenet, commitment to social justice is illustrated in the themes (a) racial discrimination and sexism, (b) advocating for my community, and (c) Latino/minority faculty and peers. The fourth tenet, centrality of experiential knowledge, is reflected throughout all of the themes of this study. The last tenet, interdisciplinary perspective, can be exemplified via the themes (a) personal attributes, (b) socioeconomic status and capital, and (c) Latino/minority faculty and peers. An elaborative explanation of the relationship between the thematic findings and the five tenets follows.

Table 8. Relationship of Critical Race Theory Tenets and Thematic Findings

Critical Race Theory Tenets	Thematic Findings
1. Intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination	Racial discrimination and sexism Socioeconomic status and capital
2. Challenge to dominant ideology	Racial discrimination and sexism Socioeconomic status and capital
3. Commitment to social justice	Racial discrimination and sexism Advocating for my community Latino/minority faculty and peers
4. Centrality of experiential knowledge	Personal attributes Family as inspiration Advocating for my community Socioeconomic status and capital Racial discrimination and sexism Latino/minority faculty and peers
5. Interdisciplinary perspective	Personal attributes Socioeconomic status and capital Latino/minority faculty and peers

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the first tenet asserts that race and racism are pervasive and permanent. It also integrates race and racism, while focusing on the intersections of racism with other forms of subordination such as classism or sexism. The relationship between this tenet and the theme of racial discrimination and sexism is evident.

Marcela recalled being treated rudely at the graduate office; she identified her accent as the reason for the impoliteness. Christina also feels she was belittled because of the way she expressed herself, which is a cultural manifestation. She also experienced more direct discrimination in having to confront two professors who stereotyped Puerto

Ricans. Fania discussed the way in which she has been mistaken for a maid and asked regularly by her students when the professor would be available. Gabriela mentioned the concept of assimilation and how it eliminates the strength of Latino students, while Maria recounted her struggles with her male major advisor, causing her to rely on another female professor to finish. The second tenet challenges the traditional claims of the educational system such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race theorists argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Calmore, 1992; Solórzano, 1997). Racial discrimination addresses the dominant ideology of colorblindness and race neutrality; socioeconomic status and capital address the dominant ideologies of meritocracy and equal opportunity.

The aforementioned scenarios discussed in Tenet 1 challenge the traditional claims of colorblindness and race neutrality. As related to socioeconomic status and capital, Marcela, Maria, and Gabriela discussed how their humble origins limited the access they had to resources that would have enhanced their academics. Those accounts challenge the ideology of equal opportunity because they clearly illustrate the immediate inequality that many experience due to their ascribed status. Milagros, Christina, Fania, and Gabriela discredited the idea that working hard will ensure success, highlighting the concepts of hidden curriculum, access, and capital as deterrents to the ideology of meritocracy.

The third tenet, commitment to social justice, challenges people to visualize social justice as the fight to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination while

empowering groups that have been subordinated (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The themes of (a) racial discrimination and sexism, (b) advocating for my community, and (c) Latino/minority faculty and peers address the participants' commitment to social justice. Marcela, Sage, Milagros, and Gabriela discussed their commitment to social justice in terms of representation by disproving statistics and stereotypical assumptions about Puerto Rican women. Additionally, Marcela and Christina demonstrated their commitment to social justice by being involved with organizations and programs that served underrepresented minorities.

Another way social justice was exercised was the way in which participants sought or assisted other Latino/minority faculty and peers. Marcela had a Puerto Rican major professor who was committed to seeing her succeed, as well as her Latino cohort of six to which she clung for support. Sage also had her two Latino friends on whom she relied for support. Maria sought the assistance of a Black female professor when her chair was uncooperative. Christina was a member of two student group that catered to ethnic minority students. Fania was supported by her support group of Latinas (and one honorary Latina), while the two peers who supported Gabriela through her dissertation writing were African-American and Indian. All of these relationships exemplify a commitment to overcome the experiences mentioned under the first tenet of racial discrimination and sexism and promote social justice for the underserved.

The fourth tenet, *centrality of experiential knowledge*, recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination in the field of

education. Critical race theory in education views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experiences of students of color by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, and narratives (Olivas, 1990). All of the themes derived from the voices and the narratives of the participants, as experienced by them, support this tenet. Their knowledge serves as a valid form of science.

Lastly, critical race theory draws from the strengths of multiple disciplines, epistemologies, and research designs (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Critical race theory in education challenges traditional, mainstream analyses by analyzing racism and other forms of subordination in education in historical and interdisciplinary terms (Olivas, 1990). For example, the theme of personal attributes can be explained from a psychological perspective, whereas socioeconomic status and capital can be explained from a sociological perspective. Latino/minority faculty and peers is highlighted in education literature. The current study, in essence, pulls from that particular trilogy of literature.

As explained in Chapter 2, the conceptual framework for this study is that of Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which is essentially a theoretical branch extending from critical race theory (CRT). LatCrit examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit can be used to reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging the Latina/o experience with issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. Thus,

LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the specific experiences of Latinas/os through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). All of the participants' experiences with immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture, as well as all of the generated themes in this study, can be viewed under the unique lens of Latina Critical Race Theory.

Results from Investigator Triangulation

In an effort to validate the emergent research themes, avoid subjective interpretation, and minimize any researcher bias in the interpretation of findings, three experienced reviewers were recruited to review and interpret one interview transcript. The three experienced reviewers were also Puerto Rican women, none of whom served as participants for this study. Reviewer #1 was a Puerto Rican woman in her 50s who holds a doctorate in education with a concentration in higher education. Reviewer #2 was a Puerto Rican woman in her 40s who also holds a doctorate in educational leadership with a concentration in higher education. Reviewer #3 was a Puerto Rican woman in her 50s who received her doctorate in mass communication/international communication.

Initially, the researchers were e-mailed a transcript for review along with a request for their overall interpretation of the transcript in relation to persistence and the four research questions of this study. I provided no further information to them in order to minimize any bias or influence. My intent was to ensure comprehensiveness and a more reflexive analysis of the data (Mays & Pope, 2000). The expert reviewers informed me of their interpretations and findings via e-mail before I revealed my own interpretations. I

met with Reviewers #1 and #3 face-to-face and revealed my interpretations via email to the Reviewer #2, as she is out-of-state.

As the dissertation chair of this study, the task undertaken by Reviewer #1 was to read the results and determine if the summarized interpretations were plausible. Having read all of the transcripts, her determination was that the interpretations presented in this work are in fact plausible. As the chair, Review #1 oversaw the management of the data in its entirety.

Reviewer #2, also a committee member, agreed to serve as a reviewer of themes. In her review she referenced the importance of community and group support of those of same race or ethnic background, as well as family support. She also acknowledges that stories of race and racism are present in the transcript and that the participants talk about coming from a poor family. Essentially, she referred to four of the six themes I identified. Her comments were extensive, thorough, and sent in a timely manner.

Reviewer #3 is not a member of the committee; she served as an external expert reviewer. I sought her assistance as a reviewer because I had known of her as another Puerto Rican woman on campus in a different department, but I had not yet had an opportunity to meet her. I e-mailed her three days before the university was set to close for the inter-semester break, asking for her assistance. I thought I would have to wait a few days due to the break, but to my surprise, she responded immediately with, "Thank you for the honor of reading your work," even though I also received an auto-response e-mail. She eagerly agreed to serve as a reviewer, e-mailing her comments to me in a

timely manner along with an invitation to meet up and discuss the overlap of our interpretations.

I met Reviewer #3 at her office on campus. As I walked in I automatically became consumed with joy. In her office was a red wall with two large, colorful paintings. The lights were dimmed and music was lightly playing in the background. As I made my way over to her, she got up and welcomed me with smile and a hug. We discussed my work for about twenty minutes; during this discussion she communicated her support of my themes. She highlighted socioeconomic status and family as the more notable themes, briefly mentioning reproduction as it relates to gender and sexuality. Reviewer #2 had also made this same mention.

We went to lunch; over the chicken sandwich special, we discussed our professional and personal lives. Towards the end of our lunch date she looked at me, smiled, and said, "I'm very proud of you." I thanked her with tears in my eyes, and she said "There aren't many of us, we've got to stick together."

This study also included member-checking. In addition to their interview transcripts, participants were all sent an e-mail that outlined the six themes highlighted in this study. They were instructed to review the themes that were generated as related to their stories of persistence and to the research questions of this study. They were also asked and to relate their approval or disapproval of the themes provided. Additionally, the participants were instructed to provide any extra feedback or commentary they felt necessary. Four of the participants were supportive of the themes generated by the researcher. The other three were nonresponsive.

Marcela concurred that the emerged themes seemed to be relevant in the context of the research questions of this study. What caught her attention was the theme of racial discrimination and sexism. She noted that of the six themes, this one sounded more like an obstacle that Puerto Rican women had to overcome to achieve a PhD. She did, however, admit that it could also serve as a motivational force to persist. Milagros and Maria sought additional clarification on the theme personal attributes, but eventually agreed that it was relevant to their story once it was explained that the theme highlighted individual personality and character influences.

Summary

This chapter contained a discussion of the thematic findings as they related to the conceptual framework, the literature reviewed for the study, and each of the research questions. Each of the emerged themes was explored from the participants' perspectives, reflections, and narratives. A content matrix was formulated to demonstrate how the findings were recognized. All themes were identified and discussed in detail; interpretations of findings were congruent with those of three experienced researchers. The identified themes were:

1. Personal attributes
2. Family as inspiration
3. Advocating for my community
4. Socioeconomic status and capital
5. Racial discrimination and sexism

6. Latino/minority faculty and peers

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This concluding chapter discusses the implications that promote success and its relevance for future doctoral students, faculty, and administration. The implications of this study are derived from the participants themselves with the intention of addressing the challenges of the retention and success of Puerto Rican and Latino doctoral students. Findings from this study cannot be generalized beyond the research participants involved. However, the findings should act as a guide for the higher educational professional to gain an understanding of the important issues Puerto Rican women face in pursuing a doctoral degree. Important recommendations for future research on the documentation and improvement of the success rate of Puerto Rican doctoral students, as well as the researcher's reflection, will also be provided.

Purpose of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that the limited literature available on Latinas in higher education has historically focused on those Latinas who are not successful, than those who are. The participants in this study were able to successfully complete their doctoral programs, despite the barriers often cited in the literature as deterrents for Latina academic success. Although they endured many of the same struggles as those who choose to discontinue their programs, certain aspects of their lives allowed them to persist to completion.

This study captured the lived experience of seven Puerto Rican women who completed a doctoral degree program. Participants, in their own words, spoke of their experiences regarding doctoral study, specifically focusing upon the persistence strategies they utilized during their degree programs. The study sought to capture (a) their thought processes and motivations to persist, (b) the frustrations they encountered within their graduate programs, (c) the life obstacles they faced in their pursuit of the doctorate, (d) their beliefs concerning the culture of the academy, and (e) the highs and lows they experienced in their doctoral program.

Six themes emerged from the research to provide insight into the meaning that the PhD holds for Puerto Rican women. The connected narratives provided an understanding of persistence through the voices and experiences of Puerto Rican women and set the stage for continued research. Those narratives and voices are woven into the conclusions and implications of this study.

Conclusions and Implications

Implications for Future/Current Doctoral Students

As related to future doctoral students, participants were asked to provide advice to prospective Latina graduate students. Responses covered a range of areas, most notably including (a) family commitment, (b) self-perception, and (c) program navigation. The advice offered by the expert participants will serve as the official student implications for this study.

Regarding family, Marcela advised, “*No sacrificques tu familia por el grado. Establece prioridades en tu vida*; Don’t sacrifice your family for the degree. Establish priorities in your life.” Milagros included family in her advice about having a support network: “I would say making sure they have a strong support network, and not just in the academy but overall, having friends and family.” Fania concurred with Marcela and Milagros, stating

...advice that I would give to prospective Latina graduate students is don’t do it in isolation. And also, don’t underestimate your family, and create ways for them to be involved...so do it in community. And let people know in advance to almost give you permission to phase out of the family for a little bit, and then honor your commitments to be back in it...

Those who have undergone the process have said in jest that students should designate time for their loved ones during their doctoral program if they plan on having anyone to join in on celebratory festivities at the completion of their program.

Several pieces of advice were also given related to self-perception and self-esteem. Milagros recommended being good to oneself and not being so critical of weaknesses. Gabriela’s advice was as follows:

...not to forget who you are, not to forget your culture...that is a strength and you should build on that. In terms of persistence, I think as long as you are confident in who you are and the expertise that you have to contribute, you will persist. Just don’t try to be somebody else.

Christina harmonized with Gabriela’s thoughts, stating, “If I were to give advice to my fellow Hispanic or Latino members, I would tell them...know that you deserve it. Let them [the academy] embrace who you are.”

Maria and Fania gave advice specifically relating to program navigation. Their advice to prospective Latina doctoral students included the financing of graduate study and the importance of guidance in the process. Fania advised doctoral students to be persistent about researching funding opportunities, while Maria elaborated on the importance of students selecting the right major advisor for their own selves:

I think that the choice of advisor is a really important one. There is being strategic in your choice and then in terms of that, being well known. But the other is the emotional support, finding either a chair or *madrina* sort of speak that will guide you through the process...

The message Marcela and Sage conveyed was to keep going no matter what, utilizing the lack of representation of Latinas with PhDs as encouragement. Marcela commented, “*Yo les digo que se tiren, que nosotras podemos, y no solamente pueden lograrlo sino que hace falta que haya más representación de mujeres latinas en diferentes campos*; I tell them to go for it, that we can do it, and not only can they do it, but there needs to be more representation of Latinas in different fields...” Sage added:

...To just, if you start this, not stop. We really need to have Latina representation...to have more of us to have a PhD [so] the younger generations can see that it's doable and that there is nothing wrong with Latino people...when it comes to doctoral programs...

The participants were then asked to not only share the specific strategies or plans they used to persist, but also the strategies that they felt may have increased their resilience. This question was asked with the intention to gain insight into the ways in which the likelihood can increase for future Latina doctoral students to successfully navigate a doctoral program. Again, the personal aspects of doctoral study received the

most emphasis. Marcela admitted, “*Mira una cosa que yo aprendí, fue que además de ser persistente, tenía que ser humilde....a veces la humilde te lleva lejos...fue una defensa que yo he utilizado*; Look, one thing that I learned, was that, besides being persistent, I had to be humble...sometimes humility takes you far...it was a defense I utilized.”

Christina’s response closely mirrored Marcela’s:

Strategies that were more resilient were, I told myself, ‘You don’t know it all, because if you did, you wouldn’t be here. Ask questions, and stop thinking and investing so much time into thinking what other people think and just think about yourself.

Christina shared an additional strategy she used to persist. This strategy was more proactive and visual:

I created this 11x17 bulletin board and I put the picture of all the people that came in here and didn’t have the chance, and I wanted them to live vicariously through me...and I looked at it every day and every day I said, ‘I’m doing this for all of you,’ and that is a strategy I used to persist.

Undoubtedly, the dissertation distinguishes the doctoral process from other varying levels of study in the expertise that is required. Therefore, employing proper writing strategies are essential to success. Fania recommended:

...so the strategy of having a specific writing time was really helpful and it gave me permission on the days that I wasn’t writing, to let it go and not think about...what worked for me was having accountability attached to that writing time.

In addition to having strong writing skills, other fundamental skills play key roles in surviving a doctoral program, such as time management, organization skills, and visibility. All of these skills were mentioned by the participants as strategies they

employed to persist. Sage suggested “...staying focused, in a routine—this is the time and dates that I am going to be studying...and always studying during those times.” She further stated, “You do everything planned, everything thought in advance to allow you for if something doesn’t go right.” Marcela mentioned the importance of multitasking, “*Desarrolle la capacidad para hacer varias cosas a la misma vez también*; I developed the ability to do various things at the same time.” She also mentioned the role that visibility plays while enrolled in a doctoral program, “*Hacerte visible. Es importante que desarrolles relaciones o conexiones con las personas*; Make yourself visible. It’s important to develop relationships or connections with people.”

The last crucial strategy mentioned involves the concepts of self-care and support and the impact they hold on the quality worked produced. Milagros mentioned the importance of stepping away from one’s work from time to time to rejuvenate:

...just taking a little bit of time to you know, see them [family], get a manicure...little things like that that are still important because we are so wrapped up in this life of a student.

Maria referenced her support group as the external accountability necessary to persist and find success.

To summarize the recommendations for future/current doctoral students:

- establish a strong support network;
- choose a major advisor wisely;
- remain confident, yet humble;
- research funding opportunities;
- prioritize and learn how to multitask;

- be visible;
- have a routine and plan;
- have accountability attached to a specific writing time;
- don't forget where you come from, embrace it; and
- don't underestimate your family in the process

Implications for Graduate Faculty

As heard from the voices of Puerto Rican doctoral students, faculty, especially those who serve as major advisors, can be the factor that determines whether or not Puerto Rican women can earn a doctoral degree. The research participants eloquently described the positive role that faculty interaction played in each of their academic pursuits. Therefore, it is recommended for faculty to recognize their potential influence and take the opportunity to identify and acknowledge the additional challenges of Puerto Rican women doctoral students, as well as other Latino and minority doctoral students. As suggested throughout the extensive literature review, faculty members have the most contact with doctoral students. All of the participants in this study described their relationships with their major advisors and other faculty members in great detail. This next section will provide implications for faculty based on the responses of the participants as well as the results of my data analysis.

Faculty interaction is invaluable to doctoral student retention; the more time faculty give to doctoral students, the greater the likelihood that doctoral students will persist. Faculty should recognize how they influence their doctoral students in the

classroom and through personal mentorship. The goal of all faculty members should be to master culturally empathetic pedagogy. It is necessary that the faculty as a whole acknowledge that while all doctoral students experience certain struggles regardless of race or ethnicity, cultural differences can add to the standards stresses of doctoral study.

Faculty should promote a sense of community amongst all of its doctoral students. They should be encouraged, and even occasionally required, to work together. This sense of community can be built in the social sense by holding brown-bag activities or assemblies in which all doctoral students come together to discuss a certain topic or issues. Community can also be built academically by having faculty members communicate their expectation that students form study groups and share resources.

To summarize these recommendations, faculty members should:

- recognize their classroom and mentorship influence and take an opportunity to identify and acknowledge the additional challenges of Puerto Rican and Latino doctoral students, and
- promote a sense of community (not competition) amongst all doctoral students by implementing brown-bag activities or assemblies.

Implications for Administrators

Given the dismal representation of Latino faculty in the academy as well as the challenges Latino doctoral students face in lacking Latino role model professors, the first recommendation to administrators arising from this work is to increase the serious and purposeful recruitment of additional Latino faculty and doctoral students. Evidence reflecting the rapid growth of the Latino population in the U.S. has abounded for several

decades; therefore, a stronger emphasis is needed to ensure Latino/a representation at all ranks in the academy.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Di Pierro (2007) found that very few doctoral programs train advisors on how to support doctoral students in their dissertation phase. A stronger emphasis should also be placed on culturally empathetic mentoring training. Therefore, the second recommendation made for administrators is to establish mandatory faculty training sessions for both dissertation advisement and culturally empathetic teaching and mentoring.

Money represents a recurring theme in the study of graduate schooling. All of the participants in this study mentioned financial opportunities that were afforded to them as well as the impacts that these opportunities had on persistence in their respective programs. Despite these opportunities for financial support, most of the participants had to work additional jobs to stay afloat. Child care was a divisive issue for participants; some struggled to maintain this extra expense, while other participants refrained from the issue completely by choosing not to reproduce while completing their doctoral studies. Therefore, the third recommendation is the allocation of additional fellowship monies for Latino doctoral students, as well as the establishment of a child care budget or facility.

The last recommendation of this research is a call for further research. The unit responsible for graduate studies at all universities should continuously facilitate focus groups and administer surveys among doctoral students to not only gauge the importance of student issues but also determine the resources that may be needed to solve the issues. Focus groups should include representation from all doctoral students, regardless of race

or ethnicity, but focus groups specifically for Latino students should exist as well. Focus groups for Latino students should be facilitated by a Latino/a administrator to establish a familiar and comfortable setting.

To summarize these recommendations, administrators should:

- Encourage more serious and purposeful recruitment of Latino faculty and students,
- mandate dissertation support and cultural sensitivity training for faculty,
- budget for additional funding or benefits for child care, and
- monitor continuous implementation of doctoral student focus groups or surveys to better serve doctoral students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, methodological procedures, implications, and the existing literature, several important recommendations are suggested for practical future research that would tremendously enhance the understanding of the experiences of Puerto Rican and Latina doctoral students. This study only examined the experiences of Puerto Rican women who attained a PhD in Education. A comparison of how the experiences of Puerto Rican women PhD differ according to discipline would provide additional value. Therefore, the first recommendation is that this study be replicated with Puerto Rican women who have graduated with a PhD in other fields of study.

A second recommendation would be to replicate the current study with Puerto Rican men who have achieved a PhD. The gender aspect is a notable difference; furthermore, due to the extremely low number of Puerto Rican men achieving PhDs, it is

necessary to explore the experiences of Puerto Rican men. An extensive review of the literature must be conducted in order to identify the struggles and challenges they face in persisting through a doctoral program. A comparative study may also be considered in which the male and female experiences are compared and contrasted.

The census data referenced in this study regarding the number of Puerto Rican women who graduate each year with a doctoral degree includes Puerto Rican women who pursue graduate work on the island. Given the differences between Puerto Ricans in the mainland and Puerto Ricans on the island, a third recommendation is that this study be replicated with Puerto Rican women who graduated with their PhDs in Puerto Rico.

A fourth recommendation is that a study of this nature be conducted with Puerto Rican women and other Latinas who graduated with a PhD from a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). HSIs are defined by the U.S. Department of Education as not-for-profit institutions of higher learning with a full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student enrollment that is at least 25 percent Hispanic. Given the demographic dynamic of HSIs, it would be of interest to determine how the experiences of those women are similar or different from those who acquired their PhD from a predominantly White institution (PWI).

As a last recommendation, I encourage that this study be replicated reflecting various Latino subgroups to ensure a more accurate illustration of the various cultures, histories, political stances, struggles, values, and belief systems. Similarities are bound to arise just as readily as differences; regardless, the scholarly approach should be one of specificity and authenticity. The intellectual world can no longer continue to generalize

knowing that such differences exist, so the voices of other cultures must also be heard and validated.

Researcher's Reflection

Writing the dissertation has been quite an experience. As I sit here to write this reflection, I am in awe. The idea for this dissertation topic first came to me while enrolled in my previous doctoral program in 2010. When I enrolled in my current program in Spring 2011, I had already completed an extensive literature review on the topic. However, it was in the Prospectus course that I began to refine my idea.

At first I wanted to look at Puerto Rican women who were currently “all but dissertation” (ABD) in their doctoral programs. I wanted to look at the experiences of Puerto Rican women doctoral students at HSIs and PWIs. I revised those ideas because I became concerned with the recruitment of potential participants and because I was questioned continuously by various faculty and peers on why I wanted to look at women who were ABD, instead of completely done. Through my classes, the endless reading, and the several papers I wrote, I was able to refine my idea to what it is today.

Preparing for my proposal defense was an incredibly stressful experience. When I thought I had done all that I could, my major professor would send me her extensive feedback and send me back to the beginning. I remember opening up the attachment and seeing nothing but the color red. I also remember racing against the clock, exhausted, in order to have the document finalized before it went to the committee. It was a close call, but I made it. As for the defense itself, I was nervous at first, but halfway through the

presentation I came to the realization that I really did know what I was talking about and the remainder of the presentation went smoothly.

Upon successfully defending my dissertation proposal, I was feeling happy, excited, and relieved. I dropped off my form with the four signatures and went home to submit my IRB application, which I had already filled out and had on standby. I received IRB approval about three weeks later, so I was ready to collect my data. At the time that I had received IRB approval, I had already reached out to the Puerto Rican Studies Association (PRSA) and *El Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños*, requesting their assistance in recruiting potential participants. Both organizations agreed to post a description of my study on their respective websites in June 2012. Centro posted the description in September and PRSA did so in October.

Luckily, I had also forwarded my recruitment e-mail to the Latino Knowledge Community of the National Association Student Personnel Administrators, which forwarded it immediately in August. I found Marcela through this circulation. A week prior to this outreach I attended a dissertation writing workshop in Tampa, where I was given the name of another potential participant (Sage). Having already obtained two participants for my study in two weeks, and only needing six to proceed with the study, I figured it would not take me long to find participants. However, I was wrong. After I conducted the first two interviews, there was a silent period of about three weeks before Milagros e-mailed me volunteering to be interviewed; she recommended I reach out to Maria, who recommended I reach out to Fania, who recommended Gabriela. During this

time my major professor emailed me that another committee member had located another potential participant (Christina) for my study and provided me with her information.

The data collection itself was a smooth process, but there were some stresses. The recorder malfunction that I experienced with Milagros's interview was indescribably stressful. I remember staring at the recorder in disbelief, questioning whether I should cry. I just could not believe it. I felt so embarrassed having to ask Milagros to share more of her time with me, especially when I knew her time was limited. Hurricane Sandy then came through the Northeast and delayed progress even more.

Gabriela was a challenge to schedule. She cancelled on me twice; the first time she said she was moving and the second time she said she was at a conference. What I did not understand was why she would set up interview times in the first place if those events were pending?

I finally finished all of the interviews and my new challenge was finding a bilingual transcriptionist. I was fortunate in that one of my committee members put me in touch with one. I have absolutely no complaints about my transcriptionist. All of my transcriptions were completed in two weeks and she was very affordable. It was the smoothest part of the dissertation process. I burned all of the interviews on to a CD and mailed it to her home. Every two or three days she would send me a transcript.

The hard part came after I had gathered all of my transcripts, a time during which I had made an appointment with my major professor. She had instructed me to notify her once all of my interviews were transcribed so we could meet regarding the development of the themes. At our meeting, I found myself in her home office with a stack of

transcripts for me and another stack for her. She sat down, looked at me, and said, “So what do you think?” I was perplexed. I was under the impression that we were going to use that meeting time to determine the themes of my study together. I quickly found out that this assumption was not her intention at all.

She instructed me to read the transcripts independently and identify the themes I felt were driving the study. She would then review the transcripts after I had completed this task. I left her office that evening very upset. I felt angry because I felt like I had lost a week. I felt angry because I felt like she had misled me to believe we were going to get something done that evening and we did not. Most notably, I felt angry because now I had to go home and do all the work myself. I remember crying as I drove home.

However, something happened when I got home. A sense of determination came over me and I said to myself, “I’ve got to get this done.” I pulled out two dissertations and started organizing the chapters according to these two dissertations. I first filled in the subtitles. Later, I started to create and plug tables into the document. Little by little, everything started falling into place, slowly but surely.

My strategy to move forward was to do complete tasks piecewise. First, I constructed the participant profiles (Chapter 4) over the course of a weekend. I was feeling motivated through this process and experienced the same feeling when developing the thematic findings for the study. Again, I accomplished this mission over the course of a weekend.

Chapter 6 came next and I suddenly found myself stuck. I originally intended for Chapter 6 to be another results chapter, but I just did not see how I was going to make

that happen. This roadblock happened in December when I was in New York celebrating the holidays with my family; in two weeks, I managed to type up seven pages. My high had come to an end. I knew I had to consult my major professor regarding my being stuck. I was afraid I would have to push back my defense for another month. I was afraid because I knew I had done everything I could, but I was simply out of gas.

At the end of our hour-long meeting my major professor asked me, “Well why seven chapters?” I explained to her that I was following the layout of a previous dissertation. It never dawned on me that I could say to her, “I’m only going to have six chapters.” Throughout the entire writing process I felt like I was on a rollercoaster. I have had moments where I felt extremely confident and I saw the light, but I have also had moments when I felt like I still had so much more to learn and I was still so far away from being in the same place where others appear to be by the time they defend their dissertations.

If writing was the only struggle I would not have been overly stressed, but in addition to the stresses of writing are the stresses of life. The past three months have been rather challenging for me. I had relationship troubles, my car broke down, and my fellowship was revoked upon taking a position as a full-time employee. My spirit was broken for quite some time. I remember saying to myself, “Wow, I can’t catch a break,” but having made my peace with those situations, I now consider them to be a blessing in disguise. As they say, the Lord works in mysterious ways.

Not having transportation in the state of Florida is a serious challenge. For weeks I carpooled with various colleagues and have resulted to taking the university shuttle—

talk about a humbling experience. My five minute car ride became a forty-five minute commute. I now wonder if that was God's way of ensuring I completed my writing in the timeframe I wanted. Sure enough, I did nothing but stay home and write.

I have to say that through all of the frustrations, I have grown and found joy. I now know eight new Puerto Rican women who acquired a PhD (including one of the reviewers); these women encouraged me to persist and are living proof that this process can be completed despite the odds. I could not have chosen a better dissertation topic for me. The most fascinating aspect of this research study was the distinctively captivating stories shared by each participant. The depth of participants' experiences provided an intense visit into their lives and worlds as doctoral student.

Summary

This final chapter provided implications for current and future Latino doctoral students, faculty, and administrations. Recommendations for future research were also provided, as well as a reflection of the researcher.

APPENDIX A- INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part One – Demographics

1. Birthdate: _____
2. Place of Birth: _____
3. College(s) and graduate school(s) attended, years attended, locations, and degrees awarded.
4. How did you find out about college?
5. What generation U.S. born are you?
6. How often are you in contact/travel to Puerto Rico?
7. What was the highest grade level completed by your mother? Your father?
8. Where do you rank in the birth order of your siblings?
9. What is your marital status?
10. Do you have any children? If so, what are their ages?
11. What job title do you currently hold? Your spouse/partner?
12. Did your spouse/partner receive a Ph.D.?
13. When do you think you realized you were going to get a PhD? What was that process about?
14. In what area did you complete your doctorate in? Why did you select that discipline? How big was your program in terms of faculty and their gender and color?
15. Tell me about any financial support received, if any? If none, why?
16. Did you attend part-time or full time? If part-time, where you working? Describe job.
17. Did you seek out assistance for a disability of any sort while in graduate school (optional)? Did you seek counseling while in graduate school?
18. How would you describe your cohort in terms of gender, class, color etc.
19. How long did it take for you to complete your doctoral course work? Tell me about your Comps? Did you have a study group?
20. Tell me about your dissertation. What was your topic? How was the process; the dissertation about –did you meet with your chair frequently? How would you describe your relationship?

Part Two – Questions

1. Would you say that your doctoral program was welcoming of graduate students from diverse backgrounds? Could you speak to the diversity of your department?
2. What are your thoughts on the “hidden curriculum”?
3. Did you socialize with your cohort?
4. What would you say were your top three challenges while matriculated in your doctoral program? From an institutional perspective? From a personal perspective?
5. How do you think issues of meritocracy play out in your Department? Among your peers or cohort?
6. What kind of institutional support network did you have while matriculated in your doctoral program (i.e. Financial, emotional, social)?
7. What kind of support did you have from faculty in general? Your chair/major professor?
8. What kind of personal support network did you have outside the university while matriculated in your doctoral program (i.e. Financial, emotional, familial, social)?
9. Tell me about your relationship with your adviser.
 - a. Did you visit your major professor only during office hours?
 - b. Did you have his/her cell number?
 - c. How frequently did (s)he responded to your need for feedback, etc.?
 - d. Did you ever go to his/her home?
 - e. Was (s)he a person of color?
 - f. What do you think were his her understandings (politics) on issues of race, sexuality, class, gender, etc.?
 - g. Would you say (s)he was a mentor, colleague, teacher, faculty?
 - h. How did (s)he deal with issues of power?
10. What kept you motivated to complete your doctoral study?
 - a. Tell me of a circumstance where you thought about quitting? Why did you persist? What would have pushed you to failure or to not complete your doctorate?
11. What advice would you give prospective Latina graduate students?
12. Please share with me stories (with as much detail as you can) of circumstances that put your resilience to the test?
13. Now, tell me specific strategies or plans that you use to persist? What strategies increased your resilience?
14. Did you feel empowered in grad school? Now?
15. Do you have thoughts on meritocracy and equal opportunity?
16. Who or what do you attribute your success to?
17. Looking back what do you remember most vividly about graduate education and doctoral studies?

18. In relation to issues of persistence and resilience, was it all worth it? Is a Ph.D. worth obtaining?
19. Given my topic and our conversation today, is there anything else you wish to add? Can you think about anything else I should have asked you or other people in this study?
20. What kind of activities and/or organizations were you involved with while matriculated in your doctoral program?

APPENDIX B- PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER



Dear Faculty Member:

My name is Cyndia Morales and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational and Human Sciences at the University of Central Florida. I am conducting research on the experiences of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs. The purpose of this study is to identify the social and educational experiences that influence your educational biography as a Puerto Rican woman who attended graduate school and obtained a Ph.D. I would like to request your assistance with my dissertation study. I am particularly interested in Puerto Rican women who have received a Ph.D. within the past ten years in a social science area and identify as first-generation in college. Please also note that in order to participate in this study both parents must be of Puerto Rican descent.

Your participation will involve postal, email, or phone correspondence and the use of a computer with the software "Skype" for one interview. The postal, email, and phone correspondence will be used to discuss any questions you may have before agreeing to the interview, to make sure you have access to a computer with "Skype," to send you a Participant Confirmation Letter and an Informed Consent Letter that all participants must sign and to make arrangements for a time and date for our interview to take place. The actual interview will take place at a date and time of your choosing and will last for one hour. The interview will be conducted through semi-structured open-ended interview questions. You will be provided with the interview questions prior to the interview. A second interview may be necessary for clarification, and if so, it will be based on your most convenient schedule.

Should you be willing to participate, please email me your availability, along with your "Skype" username and a phone number where you may be reached, so that I may set up an interview time, at your earliest convenience.

In order to ensure confidentiality, your name will not be disclosed at any time. If you are willing to participate in this study or would like to ask questions please contact me at Cyndia.morales@ucf.edu or at (718) 744-8044. Your contribution will address the lack of literature on the experiences of Puerto Rican women in graduate education.

Thank you for your time and support with this study. Your contribution to my study and the Puerto Rican community are most appreciated.

Thank you very much,
Cyndia Morales
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education
University of Central Florida
Cyndia.morales@ucf.edu

APPENDIX C- PARTICIPANT CONFIRMATION LETTER



Dear Faculty Member:

Thank you so much for assisting me with my dissertation research by agreeing to participate in an interview. I am a Puerto Rican woman, and a current doctoral candidate at the University of Central Florida in the Department of Educational and Human Sciences. My research will explore the experiences and educational biographies of Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs. This study will provide further understanding of experiences on persistence and resilience among Latina/o students in graduate education.

If you have agreed to be interviewed you acknowledge that you are a Puerto Rican woman with dual Puerto Rican lineage, have received a Ph.D. within the past ten years in a social science area and identify as first-generation in college.

I have attained permission from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida to conduct this study. Completion of this study will be valuable because it will lead to further understanding of persistence aspects for Latina/o students in graduate education.

Enclosed, you will find information regarding the agreed upon date and time of your interview. If you have any questions regarding your participation in the interview or questions about the interview itself, please contact me at (718) 744-8044 or at cyndia.morales@ucf.edu.

Thank you for your time and support with this study. Your contribution to my study and the Puerto Rican community are most appreciated.

Thank you very much,

Cyndia Morales
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education
University of Central Florida
Cyndia.morales@ucf.edu

APPENDIX D- PARTICIPANT THANK-YOU LETTER



Dear Dr. _____:

Thank you very much for assisting me with my dissertation research by agreeing to participate in an interview on DAY, DATE, at TIME. Your contribution to this study will provide further understanding of the experiences of Latina students in graduate education as it relates to their resilience and persistence.

I want to reiterate that your name and any other information gathered in this study will remain confidential and will only be used for educational purposes. I will be sure to forward you a copy of the transcription of the interview.

If you have any further questions regarding your participation in the interview or questions about the interview itself, please contact me at (718) 744-8044 or at cyndia.morales@ucf.edu.

Thank you for your time and support with this study. Your contribution to my study and the Puerto Rican community are most appreciated. I am grateful for your thoughtful commitment to my request.

Thank you very much,

Cyndia Morales
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education
University of Central Florida
cyndia.morales@ucf.edu

APPENDIX E- IRB OUTCOME LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

**From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: Cyndia Morales

Date: July 30, 2012

Dear Researcher:

On 7/30/2012, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: Puerto Rican Women in Pursuit of the Ph.D.: A Qualitative
Analysis of Persistence
Investigator: Cyndia Morales
IRB Number: SBE-12-08597
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 07/30/2012 09:40:46 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX F- INTERVIEW SCRIPT



Beginning:

Good morning/afternoon/evening Dr. _____.

I would like to thank you again for agreeing to participate in an interview for my dissertation work. At this time I would like to bring your attention to the *Explanation of Research* document. Have you read and do you understand the purpose of this study? Do you consent to participate?

Please know that your name and everything you say will be remain in complete confidentiality. In order to ensure confidentiality, all participants will be assigned a pseudonym. You are welcomed at this time to select a pseudonym of your choice. Your pseudonym is _____. From this moment on, I will address you by your pseudonym.

Today's interview will be audio-recorded and the audio-file will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist will have no knowledge of your name, as throughout the interview, you will be addressed by your pseudonym. You will receive a copy of the transcribed interview for your records.

Please also note that for the purposes of this study, a bilingual transcriptionist will be used to allow you the freedom to transition from English to Spanish and from Spanish to English at your discretion.

The interview questions you received will serve as a guide for our conversation today. It is expected that through our conversation, you will touch upon most, if not all of the questions. Let me emphasize that these questions will only serve as a guide. You do not necessarily have to answer all of the questions in chronological order. You are also not limited to those questions. You are welcomed to discuss any other matter you feel relevant to this study that may not be reflected in the questions provided to you.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the freedom to bypass questions and/or terminate the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions at this time?

I will now turn on the recorder and we will commence the interview.

End:

The recorder is now off. This completes our interview. Thank you again, for your time and assistance today. Please also feel free to refer other potential participants to this study, and to share any materials/resources that may assist me with my research. You have my email address and direct telephone number should you need to contact me regarding this interview.

APPENDIX G- DISSERTATION SUPPORT AWARDS



Florida Education Fund, Inc.
201 East Kennedy Blvd, Suite #1525
Tampa, FL 33602
(813) 272-2772 x203 (Office)
(813) 272-2784 (Fax)
Email: fef.jackson@verizon.net
Website: www.fefonline.org

September 6, 2012

Cyndia,

Congratulations! You've been approved for \$100.00 in dissertation research support! Please send me receipts (originals - no copies) totaling \$100.00 along with your mailing address so we can forward the reimbursement check to you in that amount.

Again congratulations! If there is anything more we can do, please let me know!

Only the Best,
Charles E. Jackson, MPA, GCNM
MDF Program Manager



Florida Education Fund, Inc.
201 East Kennedy Blvd, Suite #1525
Tampa, FL 33602
(813) 272-2772 x203 (Office)
(813) 272-2784 (Fax)
Email: fef.jackson@verizon.net
Website: www.fefonline.org

March 1, 2013

Cyndia,

Congratulations! You've been approved for \$500.00 in dissertation research support! Please send me receipts (originals - no copies) totaling \$500.00 along with your mailing address so we can forward the reimbursement check to you in that amount.

Again congratulations! If there is anything more we can do, please let me know!

Only the Best,
Charles E. Jackson, MPA, GCNM
MDF Program Manager



P.O. Box 305
Nassau, DE 19969

800.528.4105
302.644.1124

lospadresfoundation.com

Querer es poder!

December 1, 2012

Cyndia Morales
2580 Greenhill Way #316
Oviedo, FL 32765

Dear Cyndia:

Los Padres Foundation is pleased to inform you that you are a recipient of our Gilbert Rios Memorial Award in the amount of \$830.00 for the 2012-2013 school year.

The scholarship is disbursed at the beginning of each school year. Each payment will be sent to you after Los Padres Foundation has received corresponding receipts. If the money is to be used for other educational expenses, not your tuition, please call or email Andrea Betancourt for details.

It is incumbent upon you to provide Los Padres Foundation proof of enrollment and grades each semester. If you have any questions or need further information, please call us at 800-528-4105 or e-mail Andrea at lpfadmin@lospadresfoundation.com.

Sincerely,

Lillian Rios
President



P.O. Box 305
Nassau, DE 19969

800.528.4105
302.644.1124

lospadresfoundation.com

Querer es poder!

March 1, 2013

Cyndia Morales
2580 Greenhill Way #316
Oviedo, FL 32765

Dear Cyndia:

Los Padres Foundation is pleased to inform you that you are a recipient of our Gilbert Rios Memorial Award in the amount of \$840.00 for the 2012-2013 school year.

The scholarship is disbursed at the beginning of each school year. Each payment will be sent to you after Los Padres Foundation has received corresponding receipts. If the money is to be used for other educational expenses, not your tuition, please call or email Andrea Betancourt for details.

It is incumbent upon you to provide Los Padres Foundation proof of enrollment and grades each semester. If you have any questions or need further information, please call us at 800-528-4105 or e-mail Andrea at lpfadmin@lospadresfoundation.com.

Sincerely,

Lillian Rios
President

APPENDIX H- COMPARISON OF DUPLICATE DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Comparison of Duplicate Dissertation Research Questions

A Narrative Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates	Puerto Rican Women in Pursuit of the PhD: A Qualitative Analysis of Persistence
<p>1. What are the components of their perspectives?</p> <p>2. What social-cultural variables influenced their perspectives?</p>	<p>1. Do stories of race and racism shape the stories of persistence in Puerto Rican women in doctoral studies?</p> <p>2. What life experiences are narrated within issues of class and gender by Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?</p> <p>3. How do Puerto Rican women make sense of persistence in doctoral study as a personal attribute or experience?</p> <p>4. Are issues of social justice and social advocacy part of the narrative on persistence among Puerto Rican women in doctoral programs?</p>

Comparison of Duplicate Dissertation Interview Protocols

A Narrative Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates	Puerto Rican Women in Pursuit of the Ph.D.: A Qualitative Analysis of Persistence
<p>1. What was your doctoral school experience like?</p> <p>2. Which program did you attend?</p> <p>3. What are your views on graduate study?</p> <p>4. What was a typical day like for you?</p> <p>5. What was your worst experience?</p> <p>6. What things did you find frustrating?</p> <p>7. What was your best experience?</p> <p>8. What things did you find helpful?</p> <p>9. What social influences affected your graduate school experience?</p>	<p>1. Would you say that your doctoral program was welcoming of graduate students from diverse backgrounds? Could you speak to the diversity of your department?</p> <p>2. What are your thoughts on the “hidden curriculum”?</p> <p>3. Did you socialize with your cohort?</p> <p>4. What would you say were your top three challenges while matriculated in your doctoral program? From an institutional perspective? From a personal perspective?</p> <p>5. How do you think issues of meritocracy play out in your Department? Among your peers or cohort?</p> <p>6. What kind of institutional support network did you have while matriculated in your doctoral program (i.e. Financial, emotional, social)?</p> <p>7. What kind of support did you have from faculty in general? Your chair/major professor?</p> <p>8. What kind of personal support network did you have outside the university while matriculated in your doctoral program (i.e. Financial, emotional, familial, social)?</p> <p>9. Tell me about your relationship with your adviser.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did you visit your major professor only during office hours? ○ Did you have his/her cell number? ○ How frequently did (s)he responded to your need for feedback, etc.? ○ Did you ever go to his/her home? ○ Was (s)he a person of color? ○ What do you think were his her understandings (politics) on issues of race, sexuality, class, gender, etc.? ○ Would you say (s)he was a mentor, colleague, teacher, faculty? ○ How did (s)he deal with issues of power?

<p align="center">A Narrative Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates</p>	<p align="center">Puerto Rican Women in Pursuit of the Ph.D.: A Qualitative Analysis of Persistence</p>
<p>10. What cultural influences affected your graduate school experience?</p> <p>11. What you might change about your experience?</p> <p>12. Is there anything that you would like to add, change, or delete from what you have just told me?</p>	<p>10. What kept you motivated to complete your doctoral study? Tell me of a circumstance where you thought about quitting? Why did you persist? What would have pushed you to failure or to not complete your doctorate?</p> <p>11. What advice would you give prospective Latina graduate students?</p> <p>12. Please share with me stories (with as much detail as you can) of circumstances that put your resilience to the test?</p> <p>13. Now, tell me specific strategies or plans that you use to persist? What strategies increased your resilience?</p> <p>14. Did you feel empowered in grad school? Now?</p> <p>15. Do you have thoughts on meritocracy and equal opportunity?</p> <p>16. Who or what do you attribute your success to?</p> <p>17. Looking back what do you remember most vividly about graduate education and doctoral studies?</p> <p>18. In relation to issues of persistence and resilience, was it all worth it? Is a PhD worth obtaining?</p> <p>19. Given my topic and our conversation today, is there anything else you wish to add? Can you think about anything else I should have asked you or other people in this study?</p> <p>20. What kind of activities and/or organizations were you involved with while matriculated in your doctoral program?</p>

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