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MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO TRANSFER FROM A COMMUNITY COLLEGE
TO A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY:
PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON PERSISTENCE

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

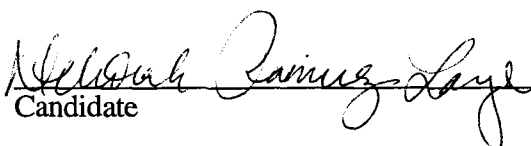
by

Deborah Ramirez Lango

San Francisco, California

November 1998

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.


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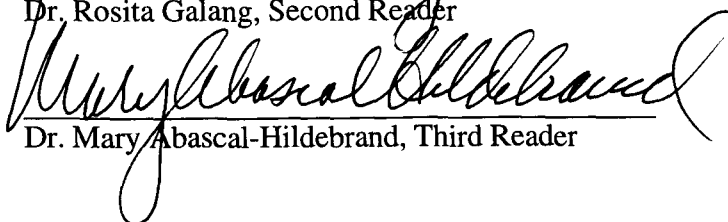
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DEDICATION

In honor of all the Mexican women who labored in the fields and faced constant hardships so their children could have a better life. Your efforts are not in vain and your valor lives on in the lives of your children.

APPRECIATION

I wish to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude for my beautiful unconditionally loving husband, PETER MICHAEL LANGO. His constant friendship, support, and encouragement has empowered me. Our friendship has given me the ability to fulfill lifelong dreams I believed were not within my reach. I have learned so much about myself through you, Peter, and this has given me the confidence I needed to go forward. I could not have been more fortunate to have such a wonderful man love me and ask nothing in return but my happiness. I treasure the day I met you and I look forward to spending my life with the man who is everything to me.

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I would like to acknowledge, thank and send love my to co-researchers. Thank you for your voice! I know we have developed a relationship that will endure the test of distance and time. I hope you learned as much from me as I did from you. I am confident you will be more than you thought you would be.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Mexican American Women Who Transfer from a
Community College to a Four-Year University:
Participatory Research on Persistence

Dissertation Abstract

Mexican Americans, especially women, are grossly underrepresented in higher education. Those who enroll in community colleges rarely successfully transfer to universities. This study examined how Mexican American women's perception of themselves affect their persistence to transfer from two-year to four-year colleges.


A great deal can be learned from those who have met the requirements to transfer from a community college to a four-year college/university. The knowledge obtained from studying this population could facilitate greater socioeconomic mobility for a population with high rates of poor children, significantly lower median incomes than the general population, high dropout rates, and low rates of college persistence. A failure to understand this population's perception of their persistence presents long-term cost. The future impact of the Mexican American population on society makes the focus of their educational persistence of paramount importance.

Using participatory research, this study analyzed Mexican American women preparing to transfer from a community college to a four-year college/university. The core of this research examined the impact participation

in dialogue has on their perception of their persistence and a critical reflection of their empowerment with regard to completing a baccalaureate degree. Through a dialogic process discussed by Freire and Kieffer and developed by Ada, the participants and researcher engaged in a four phase creative reflective dialogue. The dialogues focused on the participants' concepts of, thoughts on, experiences with, and ideas of persistence and higher education.

The review of literature focused on the theory of student involvement developed by Astin and aspects of Hispanics in higher education. The data was collected through a two-phase series of dialogues with five Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four-year university. The data was collected over a two-month period.

Findings reveal that Mexican American women who transfer from a community college to a four-year university are culturally influenced and psychologically involved. Most importantly, the love of their mothers and their love of their own children empower them to persist.


Deborah Ramirez Lango,
Author

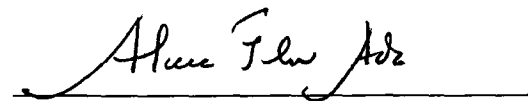

Dr. Alma Flor Ada,
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CHAPTER I

The Research Problem

Statement of the Problem

For most individuals a college education substantially increases the ability to become a more productive and participatory member of society. In fact, a college education, especially for underrepresented populations, brings positive rewards and is a means to socioeconomic mobility. As Proctor (1970) put it, "Education is the corridor through which America's minorities move from rejection, deprivation, and isolation to acceptance, economic efficiency and inclusion" (p. 43). Unfortunately, the number of minorities who obtain advanced degrees has remained consistently and relatively low in comparison to the number of recipients among America's dominant population (Lango, 1995).

One problem is that minorities, especially Mexican Americans, have only had minimal success transferring from community colleges to four-year universities (Rendón & Nora, 1989). As Aguirre & Martinez (1993) state,

Transfer from a community college to a four-year university is crucial to increasing educational achievement among Chicanos, because two year institutions are the educational contexts in which Chicanos and other Hispanic undergraduates are concentrated. Community colleges are the pipelines carrying students to higher levels of the educational system. (p. 39)

Mexican Americans are grossly underrepresented in higher education, and the degree of underrepresentation increases at each successive level (Carter & Wilson, 1991). Not only is the representation of Mexican Americans in higher education poor, but Mexican American women specifically have a lower participation rate in the labor force and a higher unemployment rate than the general population (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Schaefer, 1998).

Little is known about Mexican American women who transfer from a community college to a four-year university. Although some research exists on minorities in higher education, most studies do not analyze Mexican Americans exclusively. Even fewer narrow the focus to Mexican American women. Of the research studies that do examine Mexican Americans in higher education, the majority focus primarily on high dropout rates, low performance levels, and low educational attainment. There is little that addresses commitment in the family in the background of student's persistence. Some who have researched Mexican Americans have concluded that traditional Mexican American culture negatively affects the educational attainment of its women. Others claim racism, sexism, segregation, and lack of opportunity also account for the lack of educational achievement among Mexican American women (Gandara, 1982). However, no attempts have been made to capture, in dialogue, Mexican American women's perception of

their persistence in transferring from a community college to a four-year university.

As a woman of Mexican descent who has been educated in the public school systems of California, I know firsthand the educational obstacles placed before this community. The primary obstacle is a general rejection of the Mexican culture and an emphasis on assimilation. Additionally, if it were not for the persistence of many Mexican women before me, specifically my mother, grandmothers, and aunts, I would not have the privilege to aspire to a life less oppressed and more humane through the opportunity of obtaining degrees in higher education. It is because of this awareness and recognition that the focus of this research is on persistence, the ability to achieve the ultimate goal in higher education--a degree.

Background and Need for the Study

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1996), more than one out of ten people in the United States are Hispanic. Nationally, Hispanics are the fastest growing population in the United States. The Census Bureau estimates that by the year 2020 Hispanics will outnumber African Americans and by the year 2050 Hispanics will represent approximately twenty-five percent of the total U.S. population (Reza, 1995; Schaefer, 1998). Of those described by the U.S. government as Hispanic, Mexican Americans represent the largest group. In 1996, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that over sixty-five percent of

Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican descent. The increase in the Mexican American population is felt most in the Southwest area of the United States, in particular Texas and California where they currently comprise over twenty-five percent of the population (Schaefer, 1998).

Along with their increase in number, Mexican Americans have a high rate of unemployment, a larger than average percentage of female family-headed households, and significantly lower incomes. Only a small percentage hold managerial/professional positions, and the entire population suffers from low levels of higher educational attainment.

In 1996, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 9.7 percent of Mexican Americans were unemployed. This is twice that of the total white population, who had an average unemployment rate of 4.9 percent. Almost 30 percent of Mexican American families were headed by a single female compared to 18 percent of whites. The percentage of Mexican Americans living below the poverty level is almost triple that of whites. For year-round workers, the U.S. Census Bureau (1996) reported Mexican American's median income as \$23,609. This median income is \$17,275 less than that for year-round white workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996). Not surprisingly, nearly five times as many whites as Hispanics have university degrees.

When compared to other ethnic groups, only Native Americans rank lower than Mexican Americans in educational attainment (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). In 1990, a little over five percent of the Mexican American

population age 25 years and older had completed four years or more of college. This is deplorably low when compared with the fact that Mexican Americans 25 years and older made-up more than twice this percentage (13.3%) of U.S. population in 1990 and when additionally compared with their white counterparts. In 1990, the educational attainment of whites age 25 years and older was a little over 22 percent (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). This is four times the percentage of Mexican Americans.

Hispanics, more specifically Mexican Americans, not only have differential rates of degree attainment but their experience and participation in institutions of higher education are significantly different from those of whites. For the most part, Hispanics are concentrated in public two-year colleges rather than four-year colleges and universities. In June 1995, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that almost ten percent of the students enrolled at two-year colleges were Hispanic compared to less than five percent of the students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities. Hispanics also have a higher rate of part-time enrollment than their white counterparts, seven percentage points higher than whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997a). Hispanics are more likely to be continuously enrolled or to have re-enrolled than their white counterparts, with seventy-two percent of Hispanics having been continuously enrolled or having re-enrolled in 1992 compared to fifty-three percent of their white counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics,

1995b). In other words, Hispanics have a lower rate of degree attainment in a four-year time period and/or interrupt their studies during this same time.

Hispanics are concentrated in two-year colleges, have high rates of part-time enrollment, and suffer from continuous enrollment and/or re-enrollment. These conditions have been recognized as conditions that make persistence toward degree attainment less likely (Astin, 1971; Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Many researchers agree that initial enrollment in four-year colleges and universities enhances persistence toward degree attainment while initial enrollment in a community college reduces the likelihood of earning a baccalaureate degree (Astin, 1971; 1973, 1983; 1984; Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Gandara, 1995; Nora, 1987; Nora & Rendón, 1984).

This population's low occupational and educational achievement are of great concern in a society becoming more non-white every year. According to Astin (1982), "Higher education serves as the principal gatekeeper for entry to the most prestigious and lucrative careers..." (p. 1). With low levels of baccalaureate degree attainment, the likelihood of occupational and social mobility is almost assuredly nonexistent. This is of significant concern to the economic well-being of a nation entering the twenty-first century increasingly dependent on its non-white members.

Purpose of the Study

Mexican Americans, especially women, are grossly underrepresented in higher education. Those who enroll in community colleges rarely successfully transfer to universities (Astin, 1971; Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). The purpose of this study sought to explore, discuss, recognize, realize, and name persistence through Mexican American women voicing their knowing. The core of this research analyzed the influence participation in dialogue can have on this population's persistence toward degree attainment.

Research Questions

The research questions sought to explore, discuss, recognize, realize, and name persistence through the Mexican American women voicing their knowing. This will be accomplished through what Reza (1995) has called praxis-plus. Praxis is the term used by Freire to describe the process of reflection and action (Reza, 1995). Reza (1995) has labeled the praxis model, developed by Ada as "praxis-plus", a reflective process of critical dialogue that includes "a multicultural context, personal experiences, and emotional responses" (p. 15).

The research questions were divided into four major components:

a) naming or describing the issue, b) relating the issue to personal experience, c) critical reflection and d) awareness leading to action. More

specifically, the following questions facilitated dialogue in the four major components:

Descriptive (naming the issue)

1. What is persistence, in the context of Mexican American women obtaining a degree?

Personal Interpretive (experiences and feelings of participants and recognition of the validity of their own experience)

2. What is the relationship between self-perception and persistence?

Multicultural/Critical Reflective (issues of power, equality, and justice)

3. What personal and affective factors influence persistence?
 - 3A. What are the participants' personal factors that have contributed to their persistence in higher education?
 - 3B. What are the environmental factors that have contributed to the participants' persistence in higher education?
 - 3C. What are the institutional factors that have contributed to the participants' persistence in higher education?

Action (leading to social justice)

4. What recommendations can be gleaned from this research that will help Mexican Americans achieve a higher education degree?

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale of this study draws on Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Throughout the twenty years Astin (1984) conducted

research on student development, he found an increasing amount of inconsistency in the literature. From what Astin (1984) regards as a “muddle of findings” on the topic of student development, he created a theory of student involvement. According to Astin (1984), the theory of student involvement derived from a longitudinal study of college dropouts “that endeavored to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affect the student’s persistence in college” (p. 302).

To clearly understand Astin’s theory of student involvement, one must know how Astin defines involvement: “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 207). To Astin (1984), involvement clearly implies a behavioral component. He states, “It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves...” (p. 298). He argues that the more physically and psychologically involved students are in their academic life, the more apt they are to persist in their education.

Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement is based on a general population of undergraduates at a four-year university, not specifically Mexican American women enrolled in a community college. Consequently, one might assume the theory does not apply well to this specific population. However, involvement is a measurable behavioral component that transcends cultural and social constructs of gender and ethnicity. The principal advantage of Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement over

other theories of student persistence is that Astin was the first in this area to focus on the motivation and behavior of the student and not effective teaching techniques. Astin's theory of student involvement also serves as a theoretical framework in which to present the specific literature on Mexican Americans in higher education because the literature in this area is not similar.

Significance of the Study

A great deal can be learned from those who have met the requirements to transfer from a community college to a four-year college/university. The knowledge obtained from studying this population could facilitate greater socioeconomic mobility for a population with high rates of poor children, significantly lower median incomes than the general population, high dropout rates, and low rates of college persistence. A failure to understand this population's perception of its persistence presents long-term cost. In fact, Gandara asserts, "...their undereducation portends potentially grave consequences for the economy and social structure of the United States..." (p. 2). Perez & Martinez (1993) assert, "The number of female-headed Hispanic families is increasing at a faster rate than African American or white female-headed families" (p. 4). The future impact of the Mexican American population on society makes the focus of its educational persistence of paramount importance.

More specifically, this study should be significant to women of Mexican descent in the California community colleges because it could encourage Mexican American women to capture in dialogue their perceptions of persistence. If their perceptions of persistence are no longer silenced, they can engage in critical dialogue and reflection as individual students and as members of an oppressed group. This process is to likely facilitate empowerment. This empowerment could lead to a life less oppressive for women of Mexican descent and assist a fuller realization of their human potential.

Delimitation of the Study

The participants of this study were selected from Mexican American women preparing to transfer from a California community college to a four-year university. The participants were selected from one community college recognized by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities as a Hispanic serving institution. Five Mexican American women preparing to transfer from Bakersfield College to a four-year college or university participated in this study.

Limitation of the Study

Because reflection is an ongoing life-long process, time limited this study. This study only captured in dialogue one aspect of a student's progress

toward realizing her full human potential. Additional limitations that surfaced during the research process are stated in Chapter 4.

Definition of Terms

Chicano/a: Persons of Mexican or Mexican American ancestry or descent who self-describe themselves to be “Chicano.” The term began being used by many Mexican Americans in the 1960s seeking an identity that would embrace their ethnic and cultural background. It continues to be used today by many educated and politically involved Mexican Americans.

Ethnicity: A person’s biogenetic inheritance, which may or may not include the individual’s culture (DeFrantz, 1996).

Hispanic: Persons of Cuban, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish ancestry or descent.

Mexican American: Persons of Mexican ancestry or descent.

Persistence: In this study, completing the requirements to transfer from a community college to a four-year university and acceptance for admission into a four-year university.

Student Involvement: The amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to academic experience (Astin, 1984).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature must be prefaced by addressing a disheartening fact. After an extensive search, I was unable to locate literature that specifically addresses the subject of this dissertation. Additionally, the review of the literature demonstrated that much of the research provides only a general, broad-based understanding of Mexican American women who transfer from a community college to a four-year university. Much which is known about this population's participation and persistence in higher education can only be gleaned from extracting aspects of larger inquiries.

The following literature reflects studies that include Mexican American women students as an aspect of a larger inquiry. The conclusions reached don't necessarily apply to the specific population under study but do constitute a broad context. The literature is divided into three categories: a) a theoretical foundation underlying persistence, b) examination of Hispanic women in higher education, c) Hispanic students in community colleges.

Theory of Student Involvement

As a result of researching student development for 20 years, Alexander W. Astin found many inconsistencies in the literature. From what Astin

(1984) regards as a “muddle of findings” on this topic, he developed a theory of student involvement (p. 297), derived from a longitudinal study of college dropouts. Astin (1984) attempted to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affect a student’s persistence in college (p. 302). According to Astin (1984), student involvement refers to “the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to academic experience” (p. 297). Astin believes that the more physically and psychologically involved students are in their academic life, the more apt they are to persist in their education. The study, through which Astin (1984) developed his theory, measured undergraduates and did not stratify the sample by gender and/or race. In other words, the sample included a general population of undergraduates.

Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement serves as a theoretical framework in which to present the specific literature on Hispanics in higher education because the literature in this area is not similar. In fact, little research has been done solely on Mexican American women in higher education. For the most part, research on Mexican Americans in higher education examines this population as a part of a larger Hispanic group, includes both women and men, and/or uses a Caucasian control.

Within Astin’s theory of student involvement, he states his conclusions in terms of conditions and factors that contribute to students’ involvement or lack of involvement in school-related activities (Astin, 1984,

p. 302). According to Astin (1984), the most significant environmental factor is place of residence. Positively related to retention was living on campus, found among all types of students in all types of institutions. Participation in fraternities, sororities, or extracurricular activities of any type is also positively related to retention. In addition, Astin (1984) points to student participation in sports, particularly intercollegiate sports, as having a positive effect on persistence. Enrollment in honors programs, involvement in ROTC, and participation in professors' research projects also positively enhance retention (p. 302).

In addition, Astin (1984) found that holding a part-time job on campus contributes to retention. However, if students work full-time and off-campus, they are more likely to drop out. Astin (1984) sees these two environmental factors--living and working on campus--as contributing to retention because the student's life is primarily centered around academic pursuits (p. 302).

Furthermore, Astin states that the findings concerning the different types of colleges attended are also relevant to his theory of student involvement. He found that students are more likely to drop out if they attend a two-year college and less likely to drop out if they are enrolled in a four-year college or university. Another interesting finding in Astin's (1984) longitudinal study was that students are more likely to persist at a religious college if their religion is similar to that of the college; likewise, blacks persist

more often at a black institution than they do at a predominantly white college. And students from small towns are less likely to persist at large colleges (Astin, 1984, p. 303).

In summary, according to Astin (1984), a student who persists in an undergraduate program is generally one who lives on campus, holds a part-time job on campus, is involved in a social club or extracurricular activity (ROTC, sports, honors programs, etc.), and is enrolled at a four-year college or university.

Hispanic Women in Higher Education

Literature on Hispanic women often portrays their cultural role as in conflict with educational and occupational goals promoted by the dominant culture (Mirande & Enriquez, 1979). In fact, Nieves-Squires (1991) asserts that a major assumption about Hispanic women is that they focus only on the family and home rather than on educational and occupational aspirations. Another assumption is that Hispanic women are content with being portrayed as “sex objects” and are additionally comfortable with having low aspirations (Nieves-Squires, 1991). In her examination of Mexican American women in higher education, Vasquez (1982) asserts that many studies have “utilized a pathological model of cultural deficit to account for low educational achievement” (p. 148).

Much of the research that does exist on Hispanic women in higher education tends to focus on drop outs and underachievers. Segura (1993), in an examination of the barriers and difficulties encountered by Mexican American women while enrolled in high school, found lack of support and recognition while in school contributed significantly to high dropout rates. The women Segura (1993) studied reported no encouragement from their teachers and counselors to continue their education (Segura, 1993). Additionally Segura (1993) reported that once Mexican American women dropped out of school and later returned, school counselors did not suggest college preparatory classes. Gandara and Osugi (1994) found that even post-graduate Mexican American women recalled being placed on a noncollege preparatory track.

Though a dominant cultural perception posits that Hispanic parents do not encourage their children to aspire to a higher education degree, some researchers have reached contrary conclusions. In fact, some researchers found that Hispanic women do receive encouragement from their parents for attending college; however, men receive more encouragement from their parents than do women (Cardoza, 1991; Nieves-Squires, 1991). Nieves-Squires (1991) further explains that of the women who had received encouragement to attend college, unlike men, these women were not encouraged to move away from home. Consequently, women experienced

greater family and domestic responsibilities while in college (Nieves-Squires, 1991).

Bova and Phillips (1989) found that as Hispanic women pursue an education, conflict between education and family obligations tends to arise. Thus, the difference in parental support between Hispanic women and men may lie in the roles women are expected to fulfill. However, in her study of eight professional Mexican American women, Simonello (1981) found high parental expectations for education that were consistently reinforced with an emphasis placed on the importance of education. Cardoza (1991) also reported little difference between Hispanic families' and non-Hispanic families' aspirations for their children's educational achievement. Additionally, Young (1992) found that of the Mexican American women in her study, two-thirds reported significant family emphasis placed on education. Researchers have concluded that parental support, especially by the mother, is a predictor of academic success for Mexican American women (Cardoza, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango, 1995; Vasquez, 1982; Von Destinon, 1989). Finally, Cardoza (1991) reported that a mother's support and encouragement was not only a predictor of a daughter's higher education success, but mothers also served as role models for their daughters. Interestingly, in reflecting on the voices of the participants in this study an area of thought resonated that had not previously been considered. In relation to the research revealing a mother's support as a predictor of

academic success, this research reinforced the writings and thoughts of both Plato and Paulo Freire.

Plato discusses this notion of parental love in his *Symposium*. He points out that “[by nature] we want our children to be better than we are.” Plato believes that “all mortal creatures love their young” and that human parents will sacrifice self for the greater good of their young (Brumbaugh & Lawrence, 1963, p. 29). He states,

[Parents] will dare greater dangers, even, than for their children; they are ready to spend their money like water and to wear their fingers to the bone, and, if it comes to that, to die (Hamilton & Cairns, 1989, p. 560).

Plato believed this sense of self- sacrifice is due to an innate desire for immortality (Brumbaugh & Lawrence, 1963, p. 29). According to Plato, “Love is longing for immortality” (Hamilton & Cairns, 1989, p. 559). In other words, through the sacrifice for the greater good of a child one will achieve immortality, the parent lives on in their children. Plato believed love, “longs for the good” and to love a child is to “bring forth upon the beautiful, both in body and in soul” (Hamilton & Cairns, 1989, p. 558).

Freire (1994) believes, “the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love” (p. 70). Mothers seek to liberate their children through authentic acts of love and in doing so liberate themselves. Freire (1994) writes, “Love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others” (p. 70). He goes on to state, “Love cannot be sentimental.... It must generate other acts of freedom;

otherwise it is not love" (p. 71). Love is commitment to others, it is revolutionary. Freire (1994) states, "Liberation is... a childbirth" (p. 31).

No matter the level of support given to Hispanic women who aspire to a higher education degree, Vasquez (1982) concluded that they struggle with the conflicting obligations of family and school. In his study of peer group influence on Mexican American values, Farias (1971) found that Mexican American students were often forced to make a choice between home and school values. Hispanic women feel guilty because of their inability to contribute to the family's income and other culturally dictated obligations (Nieves-Squires, 1991; Vasquez, 1982; Von Destinon, 1989; Young, 1992). Hispanic women face a crisis in trying to find a balance between competing family and school values and obligations.

In her examination of some contributing factors to the persistence and attendance of Hispanic women in college, Cardoza (1991) states:

It has been suggested that Hispanic culture also has other deleterious effects on academic achievement, primarily through Spanish language use and retention. (p. 135)

In other words, because of their use of Spanish, Hispanic women's attendance and persistence in college suffers (Cardoza, 1991; Chacon, et al., 1982).

However, Cardoza (1991) found little or no relationship between language and persistence of Hispanic women in higher education. Vasquez (1978) additionally found that bilingual Mexican American women experienced more success than monolingual Mexican American women in higher

education. Persistence in higher education among Hispanic women is also greater for those who delay marriage and childbearing (Cardoza, 1991).

Persistence is also affected by the self-confidence of Hispanic women (Nieves-Squires, 1991; Young, 1992).

Primary barriers to persistence among Hispanic women in higher education are structural external variables (Cardoza, 1991; Vigil, 1988). It has been reported that socioeconomic status, number of hours performing domestic duties, and number of hours working an outside job negatively affect academic progress (Astin, 1984; Cardoza, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango 1995; Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989). More specifically, Hispanic women who have many responsibilities at home experience a negative impact on academic performance and program progress (Lango, 1995).

In "Integration, Involvement, and Persistence of Chicano Students," Von Destinon (1989) sought to learn how persistent Chicano students surmounted obstacles that are known to contribute to attrition. Von Destinon (1989) presented a profile of the "archetypal" successful Mexican American student (both male and female). The successful Mexican American student in higher education, according to Von Destinon (1989), has a strong sense of self and specific expectations for achievement. She or he has a sense of responsibility for successes and failures and is humble yet proud. The successful Mexican American student has a network of friends on campus with similar backgrounds and interests. However, above all else, Von

Destinon (1989) concludes the successful Mexican American student is strongly committed to getting an education even in the face of any barriers.

Hispanic Students in Community Colleges

Researchers examining Hispanic students in community colleges have made similar findings. Researchers in this area have found that the majority of their sample not only reported transfer to a four-year college or university to be important, but many also had plans to transfer (Nora and Rendón ,1988; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988). In fact, Nora and Rendón (1988) in their study of Hispanic students enrolled at six community colleges in Arizona, California, and Texas found that almost three-quarters of those sampled believed transferring to a four-year university to be very important while slightly over fifty percent of Hispanic students had indicated plans to transfer.

While a majority of Hispanic students enrolled in a community college had either planned to transfer or believed transfer to be very important, the majority of these students did not participate in activities that have been found to facilitate transfer (Nora & Rendón, 1988; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988). Behaviors reported by researchers that facilitate transfer include contact with faculty, participation in academic and career counseling, and academic and nonacademic programs (Astin, 1971, 1973, 1982, 1984 ; Hernandez, 1980; Hurtado, 1985; Nora and Rendón, 1988; Rendón, Justiz & Resta, 1988).

Nora and Rendón (1988) found a high level of commitment to attending college and attaining a degree affected Hispanic community college students' transfer to a four-year college or university. They also reported that students with high levels of academic achievement and social integration into the college had high rates of behavior related to transfer (Nora and Rendón, 1988). Nora (1990) also reports the reason Hispanic college students have not been retained is largely caused by a lack of money for college.

Hispanic community college students report a lack of encouragement to transfers by faculty, counselors, and other community college personnel. Rendón, Justiz, and Resta (1988) found in their examination of barriers that impede transfer among Hispanic community college students that just over thirty percent of Hispanic community college students report being encouraged to transfer by faculty, counselors, and other community college personnel. Interestingly, these researchers also found that faculty, counselors, and administrators reported student-centered traits as impediments to their transfer from a community college to a four-year college or university (Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988). They report that almost half of those included in their sample had never or rarely made appointments with faculty and over sixty percent never or rarely asked for assistance or advice from faculty members (Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988). Additionally, a majority of those included in their sample had not participated in academic or career

counseling or sought the assistance of college recruiters (Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988).

In an application of a model of college withdrawal, Fox (1985) found persistence to be affected by high levels of academic integration. However, other researchers have found social integration to be more of an influential variable on persistence than any other variable (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella, 1980). In campus-based aid programs as determinants of retention among Hispanic community college students, Nora (1990) found persistence to be directly affected by both campus-based and noncampus resources. Nora (1990) defined financial assistance programs such as College Work Study, National Direct Student Loan, and Educational Opportunity Grants as campus-based resources and high-school grades and student financial need as noncampus-based resources.

Some researchers found other support services related to a Chicano student's academic success. In his comparative study of Chicano and Anglo community college students, Hurtado (1985) suggests that Chicano students need peer groups, drop-in centers, and exposure to a variety of careers and professionals. Other support services also influence academic success. His research supports the creation of centers where Chicano students can build a peer support group and develop a sense of belonging. While those support services are important to college persistence and academic achievement,

Hernandez (1980) also found child care, health services and job placement to be imperative for Chicanas.

McCool (1984) found the ability of Hispanic community college students to complete their educational objectives directly affected by their positive perceptions of their educational experiences. In other words, persistence among Hispanic community college students is, according to McCool (1984), affected by their own perceptions of their educational experience. Hernandez (1980) also concluded that what ultimately leads to a student's decision to persist in college is his or her own perception of student personnel and academic support services.

Summary

Although the literature previously discussed does not specifically address the subject of this dissertation, the sources provide a broad general understanding of persistence in higher education. From this general understanding, I was able to extract aspects of the larger inquiry to the specific population under study--Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four-year university.

Astin (1984) believed that the more a student is involved in her academic life the more likely she is to persist. An additional variable Astin (1984) found in his theory of student involvement concerned type of college. He found that persistence is less likely among students attending a two-year

college and more likely for students attending a college that reflects their ascribed social status.

Literature concerning Hispanic women in higher education outlined some of the assumptions and dispelled the dominant cultural perception that this population does not emphasize education. In fact, a mother's support is a predictor of academic success, and little or no relationship exists between language and persistence (Cardoza, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango, 1995; Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989; Young 1992).

Other literature concerning Hispanic women in higher education specifically outlined those variables related to persistence. Among those variables are delay in marriage and childbearing, self-confidence, academic/campus involvement, peer group on campus, socioeconomic status, and external obligations (Astin, 1984, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango, 1995; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989; Young, 1992).

In examining Hispanic students in community colleges, researchers have made similar conclusions. Commitment and high levels of academic achievement and social integration positively affect transfer among this population. However, many researchers also found that while a majority of Hispanic students enrolled in a community college believe transfer to a four-year university important, many do not demonstrate behavior found to facilitate transfer (Nora & Rendón, 1988; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988).

Other researchers examining Hispanic students in community colleges have examined the effect of campus-based aid programs vs. noncampus-based support services' relationship to retention and persistence. Some researchers have concluded the services themselves are not related to persistence but rather the student's perception of educational assistance and experiences that plays a larger role (Hernandez, 1980; McCool, 1984).

This literature is insightful and provides a foundation upon which to build an analysis of Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four- year university. It provides an opportunity to find similar results that will validate their findings and conclusions and move beyond what is commonly known.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Using participatory research methodology, this study analyzed the reflections of Mexican American women preparing to transfer from a community college to a four-year college/university. The intent was to critically analyze the participants' reflection on their process of persistence.

Participatory research is a qualitative methodology that is unlike traditional forms of inquiry. Participatory research "go[es] after knowledge that is not traditionally part of the already established and published store of knowledge" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 12). Ada and Beutel (1993) state that traditional research methods are, not designed for the "subjects" to be able to learn from the experience. Further, while the researcher may learn *about* the "subjects," she does not learn *with* them (p. 26).

Additionally, Kuh and Andreas (1991) assert that traditional research has produced little beyond the simple purposes of their study (p. 406). When contrasted with quantitative methodologies, participatory research does not merely "describe or uncover interpretations of social dynamics; [it does] something about social contradictions and inequities" (Maguire, 1987, p. 16).

Participatory research is based on the principles of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy's core agenda seeks the empowerment of people through

the transformation of reality and self (Ada & Beutel, 1993; Freire, 1974; Freire, 1994). The purpose of critical pedagogy is the creation of an environment and structure through which one can find and follow his or her own inner process and move from oppression to transformation and freedom (Reza, 1995, p. 79).

All too often, patterns of oppression are so ingrained that people believe oppression is an integral part of their cultural heritage. Accordingly, the process of transformation, painful as it is, "requires the colonized to question the existing paradigm [that] creates a dissonance through which they can regain their emancipatory voice" (Reza, 1995, p. 78). It is through the daily rituals of power that the colonized become participants in reinforcing and maintaining dominated positions (hooks, 1990, p. 155). To move toward a transformative emancipatory voice, courage and strength are necessary in knowing and honoring one's own truth and in overcoming the "truths" of the oppressor (Reza, 1995, p. 78).

Critical pedagogy strives to honor and validate through critical reflection, allowing one to develop new knowledge. Participatory research involves the creation of new knowledge by and for the participants and the researcher (Park, 1993, p. 17). As Maguire (1987) states, participatory research aims "to develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental social structures and relationships" (p. 3).

Participatory research is a collaborative process from beginning to end. It is not a methodology focused on the transmission of information from participants to researcher. Instead, it “creates a living document and historical text of their work together” (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 9). Participatory research does not generalize the human experience; rather it is a reflection of human experiences and both the “researcher” and the participant learn from one another and at the same time.

Manning (1992) encourages scholars to utilize methodologies that ensure both the researcher and participants “are ardently engaged in teaching and learning from one another” (p. 198). As such, participatory research employs dialogue as an essential component of the participatory research process. According to Park (1989), the dialogue plays a vital role in participatory research:

To dialogue means to talk as equal partners in an exchange of not only information but also of sentiment and values. Dialogue is a means of discovering the sharedness of a problem, the connectedness of the lives, and the common ground for action. (p. 12)

In dialogue, the honesty and openness are found in the interaction and communication between people. Dialogue engages deep thoughts and emotions and allows for “naming one’s world” (Freire, 1970, p. 69). In dialogue, each person reveals part of herself and enter[s] the dialogue with the

hope and trust that people are capable not only of knowing but of knowing more profoundly (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 88).

The participatory researcher must “listen loudly to what [the] participant has to say...” (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 88). As the stories unfold, researchers must record, clarify, and listen carefully to the wisdom of the Self in each person (Ioga, 1988). But participatory researchers must also listen carefully to themselves. In dialogue you reflect--reflection brings realization that there are many “truths,” many ways of “knowing”. Reflection, according to Maturana and Varela (1987),

is the process of knowing how we know. It is an act of turning back upon ourselves. It is the only chance we have to discover our blindness and to recognize that the certainties and knowledge of others are, respectively, as overwhelming and tenuous as our own. (p. 24)

Reflection gives people the insight to understand the origins and validity of their own particular truths. Through reflection one gains confidence and becomes capable of placing one’s personal truths in the context of other truths. When we can identify our own individual truths and compare them to others’ truths, we are empowered to defend our truths without rejecting the validity of other truths.

In this way, dialogue can provide a vehicle for social justice, empowering each individual involved in the dialogue. Dialogues are

particularly focused on empowering the research participants to reflect upon and address issues of concern to them.

In her definition of four dimensions of power, Delgado-Gaitan (1991) states,

Empowerment is an ongoing intentional process centered in the local community involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. (p. 23)

She further states that through empowerment,

People become aware of their social conditions and their strengths; they determine their choices and goals. Action is taken to unveil one's potential as a step to act on one's own behalf. (p. 23)

Participatory research, Park (1987) asserts, is ultimately concerned with "empowering people so that they can take effective action towards betterment of their life conditions" (p. 1). According to Kieffer (1981), the empowerment of research participants is focused on the following dimensions:

1. development of a more positive sense of self,
2. construction of a more critical comprehension of the web of social and political relations which comprise one's experienced environment, and
3. cultivation of resources and strategies, or functional competence, for efficacious attainment of personal and collective socio-political goals (p. 7).

In short, empowerment can be defined as the ability of a person to shape her reality--one does not directly empower someone else; one creates conditions for empowerment (McLaurin, 1991, p. 70). In this study,

conditions were created for Mexican American women, whose voices have been colonized, to develop a greater sense of self, a critical understanding of their colonization and oppression, and ability to reclaim their life as related to their persistence in higher education.

Research Setting

Established in 1913, Bakersfield College is a publicly funded, two-year community college. The college is one of the oldest two-year community colleges in the nation and is one of three colleges in the Kern Community College District. Bakersfield College is an open-door institution located on 153 acres in the northeast area of Bakersfield. Bakersfield College primarily draws students from the Kern High School District and seeks to provide students with “a learning environment that fosters respect for individuals and ideas...” The college focuses on student success by providing quality instruction and services and an environment which values and supports learning, teaching, and scholarship (Bakersfield College, p. 6).

Currently Bakersfield College is recognized as an institute which serves Hispanic people by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. Institutions recognized with this distinction must have an enrollment of twenty-five percent or more Hispanic students.

Selection of the Participants

Participants were self-selected from a list of Mexican American women transferring from Bakersfield College after the spring semester of 1998 to a four-year college/university within the following academic year. The list of Mexican American women transferring after the completion of the spring semester was obtained from the registrar's office with the permission of Bakersfield College administration. Bakersfield College approved and facilitated this research.

After the list was generated, a written invitation to participate was sent to each prospective participant. Included in the invitation was my profile and the purpose of the research. After one week, I phoned each participant to set-up a time to meet. No criteria other than that already stated was used to select participants for this study. The participants agreed to allow their real name or a portion of their real name to be used.

Entry into the Community

At the core of this phase, the researcher must develop an intimate connection with the needs, concerns, and experiences of the community with whom she will be working (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 63). It is essential, according to Maguire (1987), for the researcher to obtain "deeper and more critical understanding of reality as perceived and experienced by both participants and the researcher" (Maguire, 1987, p. 41).

My entry into this community was not a challenging endeavor. I am a Mexican American woman who faces the hardships and obstacles associated with this ascribed status. I am also a community college transfer. I understand fully this community and my entry was the result of birth. Additionally, I was raised from birth through my early adult years in Bakersfield, California, know the elementary and secondary public schools systems well, and attended Bakersfield College. I am and will always be a member of this community. It is for this reason that I am motivated to empower *mis hermanas*.

Profile of the Research Participants

Marissa Rojas

Marissa was born and raised in Bakersfield, California and is second generation American born. She is among the first generation of her family who did not experience the grueling physical labor associated with farm labor. Marissa is also among the first generation to attend college. Marissa writes, "It is through my education that I will break through the traditional work patterns in my family."

Marissa lives in an area of Bakersfield commonly known as "la Loma." She lives with both parents and remains close to an older sister who also resides in la Loma. Her family follows a "traditional" Mexican American

domestic lifestyle where her father is the sole provider of the family's income and her mother remains home.

Although her parents practice a traditional Mexican American lifestyle, Marissa was raised differently. She states,

Early on they instilled in me the importance of an education and want me to obtain a professional job. They want me to obtain a career which I will be happy with and that will provide for me.

Growing up Marissa did not have any neighbors who shared her same interest in school. "Many times while I was going to school, my friends stayed home and while I was studying, they were going out." The lifestyle many of her neighbors practice does not appeal to her, especially because she often hears of neighbors her same age "getting in trouble with the law." "That lifestyle never appealed to me; what matters to me most is obtaining a college education."

Marissa has always attended public school and early on realized her potential and desire to succeed. She was placed in the gifted and talented education program in elementary school and took advanced placement courses in high school. In 1996, she graduated from high school and was honored by the California Scholarship Federation for placing in the top five percent of her senior class.

Marissa states that she did not receive academic help from home and did not have the tools necessary for the advanced courses she was taking. She

believed that the lack of these resources forced her to struggle more than other classmates. Nevertheless, Marissa strived to do her best and writes, "I faced the challenges and overcame the obstacles."

After graduating from high school, Marissa enrolled in Bakersfield College and became a member of Phi Theta Kappa. Two years after enrolling in Bakersfield College she graduated with a 4.0 grade point average and will transfer to California State University, Bakersfield as a math major. Marissa is scheduled to begin classes at CSU Bakersfield in the fall semester of 1998.

While attending Bakersfield College, Marissa worked on a part-time basis at the Bakersfield College Learning Center where she tutored students in chemistry and calculus. She spends her weekends working as a receptionist for a real estate company in Bakersfield. Marissa's career goal is to become a community college professor.

Marissa states that her priority is and will remain education. She believes that her dedication, diligence, and perseverance helped her to succeed in school and allowed her to become the person she is today.

Barbara Castillo

Barbara was born and raised in Bakersfield, California where she is from a family of five. She resides with both her parents and has two older sisters. Barbara believes that her "youngest child" position allowed her to receive

more than just “hand-me-downs.” She states, “I had the opportunity to learn and observe each of my family members in different ways.”

Barbara’s family values were such that children are obligated to attend school. She writes, “[i]f you were a child, you belonged in school.” However, this obligation did not extend beyond high school and attending college was different. According to Barbara, childhood obligates you to attend school but adulthood does not.

Barbara is not among the first in her family to attend college; her father attended college in Guatemala prior to moving to the United States. Her father was a man of different trades: he worked the rail roads, owned his own business and was a teacher. Barbara’s mother did not experience college but worked in schools as a bilingual assistant and sold Tupperware® part-time. Barbara states that her parents, “never set on a specific career” but it was important that they always had a job to provide for their family.

Barbara related to me that however great her family obligation to attend school, she looked forward to going to school everyday. School is exciting to Barbara and she enjoys the challenges of learning.

In 1996, after graduating from high school Barbara was uncertain about her life plans. She knew she did not have to attend school; her family obligation had been met. Barbara faced a dilemma because she knew she did not owe attending college to her family yet looked forward to going everyday. She was uncertain and undecided about her life’s direction and decided that she would

do what she liked to do, go to school. She enrolled in Bakersfield College the fall semester of 1996 and will transfer to California State University, Bakersfield as a Liberal Studies/Education major fall semester of 1998.

Barbara states that she can now live her life without an obligation to attend school but she "would be passing up a great opportunity." College is her choice and she has a desire to learn more.

Juana Rangel

Juana is among the first generation in her family to be born in the United States. Her parents were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States in the mid-nineteen seventies. She states that her parents were "in search of a better life." What her parents found was a country unaccepting of non-English speaking people.

Juana reflects on the hardships her parents endured and is thankful they were able to tolerate the injustices and suffering. She believes her parents' suffering gave her an opportunity to live in a country where her "desires are at reach."

After struggling for two-and-one-half years, Juana completed an Associate of Arts degree in Human Services. She states that this was "no easy accomplishment." Juana characterizes herself as having "no sense of direction" after graduating from high school in 1994. Also, according to Juana, she had no goals. For her, college was a subject that was not discussed

at home. No one in her family had ever attended college; her family worked. Because of this, Juana believed her only option was work.

After graduating from high school and at the age of nineteen she entered the workforce but soon experienced unemployment after the company shut down. After the shut down she realized that she was unskilled and uneducated and would continue the same pattern of employment lay-offs if she did not become educated. During this same period of time, Juana also had to deal with the realities of pregnancy and hardships of becoming a single mother. She knew her lifestyle had to change because she didn't want to experience the suffering of her parents and did not want her son to go through life as she had. "I decided I wouldn't put my son through that; if anything I want to model how people can overcome unpleasant situations."

Juana states that she knows that she has made mistakes but is confident she can overcome those mistakes. Although she is a single mother, Juana does not characterize her son as a mistake. Her son Caesar is her driving force to a better life for herself and him. "If I didn't have him, I wouldn't be here [college]." Juana has made education a priority and seeks to help others like herself.

Maria Elena Chavez

Maria Elena was one of four children born to Dolores Huerta and Richard Chavez. She has been highly influenced by two parents who have dedicated

their life to seeing justice served. Her parents are both very active in union activity. Maria Elena's mother is co-founder of the United Farm Workers and her father was an active board member for many years. As a result of her parents' commitment to farm workers, Maria Elena grew up influenced by union activity. She states,

As a child, through the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO, I learned the importance of standing up for what I believe is right. I have seen first hand the many sacrifices that society's most oppressed peoples must endure to make their voices heard.

Maria Elena also comments that from a very early age, her parents stressed the importance of an education. However, she stated, "Their reverence for education emphasized more a quest for knowledge than a formal education." Maria Elena and her siblings are equally divided by those who chose to pursue a formal education and those who did not. She states that her parents were equally supportive of any educational decision she or her siblings made. She admires her parents for allowing her to find her "calling in life" unlike many other parents who "insist that's what is best." Maria Elena also attributes the open-mindedness of her parents in allowing her to become "the artist [she] is today."

Maria Elena is very clear about her educational goals and the reasons why she pursues a formal education. Her most immediate educational goal is to complete a bachelor's degree at the University of Southern California. Her interest in attending USC is to complete a bachelor's of fine art degree in the

School of Cinema-Television within two years. From there she “intends to collaborate with other like-minded artists and write and direct my own pieces for film and television.” Maria Elena believes that her pursuits of her degree are two-fold. She realizes that in order to reach her career goal she must develop technical skills that will enable her to develop her craft. She also feels a sense of responsibility to “make it easier for the next generation” to receive a formal education.

Maria Elena is also community oriented. She is a member of Movimiento Estudiante Chicano de Atzlán (MeCha) at the various schools she has attended and volunteers her time to youth programs that seek to inspire disadvantaged youth to pursue higher education.

Maria Elena has also maintained placement on the Dean’s Honor List at Bakersfield College the past three years and was recently nominated to the National Dean’s Honor List. She believes she has been “successful at maintaining a balance between my community involvement and dedication to my studies.” She stated that she plans to continue this pattern throughout her life.

Maria Elena has a balanced vision that is insightful. She realizes what lies ahead of her as a “Latina entering a career dominated by white males” and knows “it will be a challenge every step of the way.” She also believes that her own doubts about her ability to reach her educational and career goals can be subsided by recalling the “many victories won by farm workers who

have risen up against powerful agribusiness giants with nothing but faith and sincere longing for justice." She truly believes that by calling upon the knowledge gained through her life experiences that she will be able to "make the best of my educational experience in an institution of higher learning."

Angela Acuña

Angela was born and has lived her whole life in Kern County. She is the oldest of three children that were briefly raised by a Caucasian mom and a Mexican father. Her father comes from a family of fifteen children and her mother is one of five children. Both parents were abusive to themselves and to their spouse. They were alcoholics, drug abusers, committed adultery and were domestically violent. Angela stated that after eleven years of abusing themselves and each other, her parents divorced.

Angela attended public schools in Arvin, California. Arvin is a small farming town where most residents work as farm laborers. Her parents and grandparents have worked their whole lives in the fields and packing sheds. As a child, the emphasis in her household was not education but mere survival. She states, "education was spoken of but never really instilled into us or seen as a great asset."

While Angela was familiar with those who lived in Arvin she was not comfortable in school. She states, "[while in school], I realized I was quite

different.” Angela felt marginal. She was neither fully Caucasian nor fully Mexican. Those who were Caucasian viewed her as lower class and an outcast being Mexican “is something to be ashamed of.” Those who were Mexican did not accept her because she they believed she believed herself to be better than they. She states, “there were children at school who were not allowed to play with me because I am biracial.” Angela then revealed that during this time she consciously decided to deny her Mexican culture and assimilate into becoming fully Caucasian. She states that at this time she “felt lost.” However, she stated that her Nina would not allow her to fully deny her Mexican roots and kept in frequent touch. Because of the persistence of her Nina and Angela’s own personal growth, she now identifies herself as Hispanic. She states, “I am older and have come to value my culture, I am no longer ashamed of being biracial or Hispanic, I am proud.”

After dealing with the divorce of her parents, and feeling marginal and inadequate, Angela married. She states that she married a man much like her father, an alcoholic and abuser. Angela believes that she walked right into the same situation as her mother because she did not know any other type of life. As much as her husband abused drugs and alcohol, she to participated in much the same behavior. Angela is currently divorce and has a daughter from this relationship. Angela does not maintain

communication with her daughter's father as he did not express interest in sharing responsibility and custody of their daughter.

As reflects upon this period in her life she believes she was both self-destructive and codependent. She accredits her ability to get out of an abusive lifestyle to the love of her grandmother. About her grandmother Angela states, "without the love of my grandmother, I definitely would not be the person I am today." States that her grandmother never gave up on her and encouraged her to seek and strive for a better life. As a result of her grandmother and nina's constant influence, Angela entered college and will begin attending California State University, Bakersfield in January of 1999. Angela is among the first in her family to have attended and graduate from a college. She is excited about her educational pursuits but because there are not other family members before her that have attended college she is also somewhat fearful of the unknown. Angela believes that while she was encouraged by her grandmother and nina to pursue education, her true desire comes from creating a better life for her daughter through earning a higher education degree. Angela states, "I am looking forward to a new life, I believe a higher education degree will open doors I never knew existed." She believes, "the rewards along the way will last a life time."

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to encourage participants to reflect upon and articulate their perspectives on persistence in higher education. The research and interview questions were based on a four-phase methodology that engages the participants and the researcher in the art of *praxis*. Praxis essentially suggests the integration of action and philosophical reflection.

This study applied this four-phase methodology developed by Ada (1991) as Creative Pedagogy by having participants address questions associated with a major research question in each of the four phases: descriptive, personal interpretive, multicultural/critical (power), and creative/transformational/action.

The research questions and questions to guide the dialogues below were developed by the researcher prior to initiating contact with the participants and were modified as needed in the process.

Descriptive (naming the issue)

1. What is persistence?

Personal Interpretive (experiences and feelings of participants and recognition of the validity of their own experience)

2. How do the participants perceive themselves with regard to persistence in higher education?

Multicultural/Critical Reflective (issues of power, equality, and justice)

3. What are the factors that have contributed to the participants' persistence in higher education?
- 3A. What are the participants' personal factors that have contribute to their persistence in higher education?
- 3B. What are the environmental factors that have contributed to the participants' persistence in higher education?
- 3C. What are the institutional factors that have contributed to the participants' persistence in higher education?

Action (leading to social justice)

4. What recommendations can be gleaned from this research that will help Mexican Americans achieve a higher education degree?

Questions to Guide the First Dialogue

Phase One: Descriptive (naming the issue)

What is persistence?

Phase Two: Personal Interpretive (experiences and feelings of participants and recognition of the validity of their own experiences)

What motivated you to enter college?

What has been your experience in education (elementary, secondary, and postsecondary)?

Are you the first in your family to attend college?

What is your family's feelings toward you attending a college?

Who has been your strongest supporter in continuing your education?

What has affected you the most in your pursuit of a higher education degree?

What is your perception of yourself in higher education?

Who or what has influenced you the most in pursuing a higher education degree?

Phase Three: Multicultural/Critical (issues of power, equity, and justice)

What does it mean to be a woman of Mexican descent?

What are our strengths as Mexican American women?

What are our weaknesses?

When you think of a person in higher education, what do you envision?

How do you believe you came to this vision of a person in higher education?

What can we learn from the information regained in in phase one and phase two?

Phase Four: Action (leading to social justice)

What are the primary needs of Mexican American women pursuing degrees of higher education?

What would you need to strengthen your pursuit of a bachelor's degree?

What would you tell another Mexican American woman interested in earning a bachelor's degree?

What would you say to other Mexican American women who are not interested in attending college and/or pursuing a bachelor's degree?

Procedures for Data Collection

In this stage of participatory research, the process involves a coming together in solidarity between the participants and the researcher. Therefore, the collection of data requires a process of constant interaction among the participants and the researcher (Ada & Beutel 1993; Park, 1993). Adapted from sequentially developed steps of data collection by Reza (1995), the following process was used to collect data for this study:

1. Frame research question(s).
2. Frame questions to guide the dialogues.
3. Enter the community and invite participation.
4. Engage in first dialogues with participants.
5. Transcribe first dialogues.
6. Researcher and participants separately read and reflect upon the content of first transcribed dialogues.
7. Engage in second dialogues where themes are generated from first dialogue.
8. Transcribe second dialogues.
9. Co-researchers (researcher and participants) separately read and reflect upon the content of second transcribed dialogues.
10. Reflect upon the research process, dialogues, and generated themes.
11. Develop critical consciousness.
12. Share results with co-researchers. (pp. 90-91)

Dialogues were conducted over a two-month period during the summer of 1998. First dialogues occurred in the offices of the Chicano Culture Center on the campus of Bakersfield College. Each dialogue was conducted individually. Second dialogues were conducted at various locations with the majority taking place in the offices of the Chicano Culture Center. The others were conducted at a local restaurant and in the home of the participant.

First Dialogue

The first dialogue was conducted on the campus of Bakersfield College in a location known to all the participants, the Chicano Culture Center. The participants dialogued individually, with each dialogue scheduled during a time convenient to the participant.

Prior to beginning the dialogue, participants were given a brief introduction to participatory research and the intent of this research endeavor. They were asked if they had any questions or concerns that needed to be addressed prior to beginning the dialogues. The participants had a few questions that were immediately addressed. Some participants did appear to be nervous and anxious. To lessen these feelings, we took time to discuss topical events on the Bakersfield College campus. Once it appeared the nervousness had subsided, dialogues began. Dialogues were scheduled

to take as long as two hours; however, each session lasted an average of one hour.

Transcription and Review of First Dialogue

First dialogues were transcribed and sent to each participant within a few weeks. Due to the time constraints of the participants and myself, the taped dialogues were transcribed by a third party. Once the tapes were transcribed, a hard copy was sent to each participant. I also listened to the tapes as I read the hard copy to ensure the accuracy of the third party's transcription. After relistening to the tapes, I read the transcribed dialogue looking for themes while recalling the words from the taped dialogues.

Second Dialogue

The purpose of the second dialogue was to ensure opportunity, the opportunity for the participants to read, assess, and reflect on the first dialogues and to comment, correct and/or elaborate on the previous dialogue. To ensure a deeper understanding of this research endeavor, I sent a copy of the proposal of this dissertation to the participants along with their transcribed dialogues. This was done to further the participants' specific knowledge of Mexican American women in higher education. This empowered/enabled the participants to deepen their thoughts as they reflected on themselves in higher education.

I called each participant to schedule a day, time, and place for the second dialogue. The majority of the dialogues were conducted in the same place as the first; however, two participants had conflicting commitments and were unable to meet in the Chicano Culture Center at Bakersfield College. Arrangements were then made to meet at a convenient location. One took place in a restaurant during lunch and another took place in the home of the participant.

Prior to the completion of the second dialogue the participants were repeatedly asked if there was anything else they would like to add. Some participants did briefly continue on with their reflections but the majority felt that, at that point, they had nothing more to add. The participants were then encouraged to reflect on the dialogues, and I endeavored to ensure a comprehensive reflection of their thoughts and feelings.

Transcription and Review of Second Dialogue

Once again, due to time constraints the second dialogues were transcribed by a third party. I sent a hard copy to the participants and asked them to check the transcription for accuracy and comprehension. I then called the participants for any further reflections that would be fruitful to this research.

To check the accuracy of the hard copy, I listened to the tape while reading the hard copy. After several listenings of the second dialogues, the hard copy was then analyzed for themes while reflecting on each dialogue session.

Data Analysis

After each dialogue session all transcripts were analyzed to identify sentences and passages that related them to the topic of this study, persistence of Mexican American women. The passages provided the participants the ability to name persistence and examine issues and problems faced by Mexican American women in higher education. Possible themes were discussed with each participant in subsequent dialogues to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on the themes that were generated from the dialogues. The transcripts of all the dialogues were continually checked to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of the data gathered and to reflect the same interpretation and knowledge gained by the participants.

The Data

Phase I: Naming

During this phase the participants were simply asked to name persistence. The following is the raw data from this phase of the dialogues.

- Desire
- Drive
- Consistency
- Success
- Intangible
- Focus
- Dedication
- Struggle
- Trying
- Will
- Overcoming

Phase II: Personal Interpretive

In phase two participants were asked to talk about their motivations, their experiences in all levels of education, and their perceptions about their participation in higher education. During this phase the participants were also asked to talk about the affect of their family's feelings and perceptions of their participation in higher education. The following is the raw data from this phase of the dialogues.

- Opportunity
- Need
- Choice
- Well-Being
- Child
- Exciting
- Realization
- Escape
- Proud
- Daughter
- Responsibility
- People's Criticism
- Lack of guidance
- Ethnocentric Teachers
- Acceptance
- Expanded
- Proud
- Family Obligations
- BC Counselors and Faculty
- Learn
- Family
- Alternative Life
- Belief
- Obligation
- Positive
- Difficult
- Supportive
- Mom
- Grandmother
- Society's Perception
- Lack of Tools
- Cultural Isolation
- Self-Esteem
- Obligations to Family
- Wiser
- Lucky
- Other's Lifestyle

Phase III: Multicultural/Critical Reflective

In this phase participants were asked to think of issues or thoughts that have emerged from phase one and two. They were asked about the meaning of their ethnicity and their gender and what are our strengths and weaknesses as a Mexican American women. The following is the raw data from this phase of the dialogues.

- Challenging
- Struggles
- Insightful
- Proudful
- Sense of community
- Ability to take charge
- Supportive family
- Accepting
- Silent
- Not driven
- Cultural socialization
- White person
- Looks well off
- A mirror
- Someone knowledgeable
- Media
- What I want.
- Definitive
- Responsible
- Opportunity
- Sense of family
- Closeness with family
- Organization skills
- Ability to function under any circumstance.
- Room for improvement
- Submissive
- Ascribed status
- Small
- Not belonging
- Diverse group
- Preppy white male
- Experiences
- All that was shown.

Phase IV: Action

During this phase the participants were asked to begin putting all the information gathered from the dialogues and reflect. They were asked what the needs of Mexican

American women in higher education and how would you take action to ensure you and other Mexican American women are strengthening their ability to thrive by pursuing and completing a bachelor's degree. The following is the raw data from this phase of the dialogues.

- Role models
- Social support
- Institutional support
- Encouragement
- Get focused
- Financial stability
- Can I help?
- It's scary.
- You are going!
- Just start.
- Encouragement
- It's wonderful
- It's wonderful.
- Mentoring
- Financial support
- Understanding
- Money
- Think positive
- Do you need help?
- Go to school!
- You can do it.
- With a gun.
- It's valuable.
- Under any circumstance, do it.
- Pace yourself.
- You will love the thrill of knowing.

Profile of the Researcher

Born a woman of Mexican descent, I am among the third generation in my family to be born a United States citizen. I was also among the first generation in my family who did not experience the direct hardships of migrant farm labor. However, the hardships of many generations of migrant farm workers was and continues to be present in the psychology of my family.

I was raised in a traditional Mexican American home where women are rewarded for their ability to cook well, keep house, and tend to children. However, having the privilege of attending a predominantly middle-class Caucasian public school, I was able to witness and eventually desire a life separate from that traditionally revered by my family and culture.

Although having the desire for a life different from the traditional life ascribed to me, I continued to experience a marginal existence where I was neither fully accepted by my culture, because my life goals were antithetical, or by the dominant culture, where I was seen as a member of a subordinate class. As a result, I was able to appear to be on the outside looking in on both cultures while interacting among members of both cultures. This gave me a vantage point that enabled me to gain knowledge of both cultures. However great I now believe my vantage point to be today, this belief only came as a result of a lifelong struggle with marginality.

Although having suffered from the effects of marginality, I was influenced by grandparents who instilled a great sense of pride in my heritage. It is through the teachings of my grandparents that I was able to overcome the effects of marginality and believe in my ability to be whomever I choose to be. For me, transformation has been a lifelong process that continues to be unfinished. Empowerment is a continual endeavor for those whose ancestors have been colonized and historically oppressed.

I attended public schools throughout my life. I was originally placed on a vocational track in high school that was changed after realizing my ability in the classroom differed from my performance on a standardized test. Because of my uncertainty about myself, I attempted to find my niche in life and struggled for several years as a part-time community college student. Even though I struggled throughout my community college years, I knew that I desired a degree of higher education. In 1987, I eventually completed enough courses to transfer to a four-year university where I eventually earned a Bachelor's degree in 1989. In 1992, after giving birth to my son, I earned a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. It was after these monumental events that I was empowered to understand my self-worth.

After earning a Master of Arts degree, I began teaching part-time at a community college. I eventually earned a position as a full-time, tenure-track sociology instructor at a community college located in northern California but resigned to take a position elsewhere. Currently, I am employed as a full-time lecturer in the School of Education at California State University, Bakersfield. As a result of my experience as a woman of Mexican descent, having lived a marginal life with tremendous self-doubt, I am committed to the empowerment of students seeking higher education, as I believe knowledge to be liberating.

CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the themes which were generated by the study and the information gathered from the dialogues with five Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four-year university. To facilitate discussion and reflection, the dialogues were conducted in a friendly and open manner. Each participant generously shared her ideas, feelings, and experiences.

The presentation of the findings is intended to portray the critical reflections of the participants as they emerged through dialogue. They represent the participants' reality.

To ensure accuracy of generative themes, the transcripts were analyzed several times until a pattern of consistency and meaning emerged (Kieffer, 1981, pp. 38-39). The generative themes--intangible traits, family, love, identity, and money--that emerged in dialogue related to persistence in higher education and emerged after analyses of the dialogues and creation of each participant's profile.

Intangible Traits

The dialogues began by asking the participants to name persistence. They were not asked to name persistence in higher education but persistence in general. As the participants reflected on their perception of persistence, their descriptions included unmeasurable personality traits. These intangible traits are what many might consider inherently psychological, yet this definition ignores a sociocultural influence. In other words, "personality" traits are not necessarily inherent but are developed as a result of the values and mores of a given society. Traits emerge as society sanctions individuals for their efforts and behavior.

In this study, the participants stated they believe that in order to be persistent, one must possess drive, dedication, and desire. Marissa Rojas reflected, "Dedication and desire [are needed] to keep [you] going no matter what obstacles may face you." Barbara Castillo believes desire is what helps one persist. Additionally, the participants believe persistence requires the will to overcome. Angela Acuña revealed that persistence "is desire...., it's something you can't give somebody...., it's something you have within yourself." Juana Rangel reinforced this notion by stating, "[When] you want something, you go after it."

For the participants, persistence involves motivation of well-being. They believe they have persisted in higher education because they are motivated by opportunity and a better life. Juana stated, "I want to be able to choose where I

want to be, not have somebody else choose what I'm going to be doing." Unlike Juana, who is motivated to create opportunities as a result of her education, Barbara believes higher education is a "great opportunity" in and of itself because it facilitates greater capabilities within her. Marissa reflected upon the fact that higher education is the means to a better life for herself where opportunities abound. Ultimately, the participants collectively believe that their desire, dedication, and drive to persist to their point of achievement in higher education grew from the deepest of motivations, family.

Family

Through dialogue, family emerged as the overarching influence on the participants' persistence. Maria Elena stated that our ability to persist and strength as Mexican American women come from "our sense of caring about family." She believes that in the face of what many of us experience in higher education--cultural isolation--our ingrained sense of family provides a feeling of belonging. In light of our cultural isolation on university campuses, our sense of family helps us deal with the problem of isolation.

A family's support is the foundation of problem-solving for Mexican American women in higher education. Barbara stated, "[Because Mexican Americans] are family-oriented, it helps in a lot of things we deal with in our lives. We're able to depend on our family and know they'll fight for us." While all the participants believe their family's support facilitated their ability

to persist in higher education, family was much more than a supportive mechanism. The love of a mother and maternal responsibility were extremely important themes as well.

Love

Love emerged as the richest theme generated in dialogues with the participants. All either attribute their ability to move forward to their mother or said they are motivated as a mother to provide for a child. Juana attributed her persistence primarily to the motivation to build a better life for her son. She stated, "my biggest motivation is my son, Ceasar. Kids do good because you model what you are and if your mom is a college-educated woman, then that's going to drive you towards college." She believes her responsibility of motherhood has compelled her to seek higher education so that she can not only provide a better life for her son but also model a life to work for. Juana additionally reflected that her mom was an integral part of her ability to persist. About her mom she stated,

She's just a traditional Mexican mother. The only thing she had to look forward to was being married and supported by her husband. I don't think she wants that for me. She wants me to be my own person and be able to not depend on marriage--not look to marriage as my only future.

Marissa additionally revealed that her mom would like for her to be independent. "My mom wants me to be able to go out and make it on my

own without having to rely on somebody else. Even though she couldn't help [with studies], she was always there to listen." Marissa's persistence is guaranteed because of the love of her mother.

Angela revealed in dialogue that her life was once very chaotic and filled with substance abuse. But no matter how "strung out" and chaotic her life once was, she believes that if it were not for her daughter she would not be involved in something as positive and socially acceptable as education. "My daughter keeps me going and keeps my head above water.... I'm here [community college] because I want to make a better life for her."

Angela believed not only that her love for her daughter led her to seek a better life facilitated through higher education, but also the love of her grandmother allowed her to overcome the influences of substance abuse. As Angela dealt with situations that endangered her own well-being and her daughter's, she began to realize that their livelihoods were threatened by her lifestyle. She reflected that she had shattered many family relationships but stated that her grandmother "never gave up on me.... No matter how way out I really got, she was always there." Her grandmother loved her, and Angela credits her grandmother with renurturing a sense of desire to pursue her goal of a bachelor's degree. The love of a mother and one's sense of motherhood are enablers. Enabling through love allows for the focus that is necessary when pursuing a degree of higher education.

Focus

When Marissa “visions” herself in higher education, she sees herself as focused and striving to achieve. Marissa stated, “It’s so set in my [mind] that I am going to do it. I am going to succeed.” Barbara’s focus came through an adamant belief in her higher education pursuits. Barbara stated, “[College] was always something I knew I was going to do.” Maria Elena has the “attitude of a fighter.” She understands there will be barriers placed before her; however, she states, “I’m going to have to cross and go through barriers-- I’m going to try to accomplish, even in school.” She acknowledges that she knows she is a “voice” for Mexican American women.

When asked how she perceives herself in higher education, Juana stated that she sees herself as “small.” While Juana feels alone and small on a college campus, as it relates to her ability to achieve her higher education goals, she stated, “I know I can do it.” Juana fully understands that she will face challenges, she is confident that she will get through them and reach her goal because she reminds herself “I can do it” as she refocuses her efforts when necessary.

Angela’s focus is unrealized. Angela previously enrolled in Bakersfield College but believes she initially dropped out and failed because “it was hard for me to focus at that time.” Because of her age, she now feels a great sense of urgency and, as a result, is now focused on completing her educational goals. Through dialogue, the urgency was revealed while she expressed a

great sense of thrill in going to school. When asked what she would tell another woman like herself who is not interested in going to school, she stated that she would approach her with a gun and say, "You're going to school."

Identity

Interestingly, these women do not share a common sense of identity. Maria Elena was the only participant to self-identify herself as a Chicana. Maria Elena is further aware of the oppression Mexicans and Mexican Americans have historically experienced and additionally understands the implications of this oppression. She is proud of her culture and is looking forward to the opportunity to be a "voice" for Chicanos.

Barbara did not specifically identify herself as of Mexican descent but stated, "It defines a lot of who I am and where I come from." Barbara appreciates her cultural heritage and values the stories and traditions that have been handed down. About her cultural heritage, Barbara stated, "It does make up a lot of my character, who I am."

While Maria Elena had a firm belief in her ethnic identity and Barbara recognized the influence of her cultural heritage, Marissa and Juana did not share this sense of identity at all. Marissa and Juana stated they had never thought of themselves as different from other people. They do not separate themselves from others. In fact, they never considered their identity as a

Mexican American and/or woman had an effect on them. Marissa stated that she just sees herself as a student and doesn't see color. She said she had never even thought of what it means or how it feels to be a woman of Mexican descent. Marissa also does not believe that a lack of representation of Mexicans or Mexican American faculty and administrators has hampered her pursuit of a higher education degree.

Upon learning about the disproportionately low representation of Mexican American women in higher education, Juana stated, "I've never looked at it as an issue of I'm Mexican." She stated that she had never looked at her ethnicity as an issue; she is "mainly worried about [her]self." However, upon further reflection of the first dialogue session, Juana recognized that she knows that she is Mexican but has not thought about what her ethnicity means to her. And after further discussion of the meaning of our ethnicity and further reflection of the issue under study, Juana stated she now believes her ethnicity presents, "a lot of advantages because I have two cultures.... I have two languages." As someone who is bilingual and bicultural, Juana now knows she is advantaged by being a woman of Mexican descent.

Angela identifies herself as a Hispanic but says that to look at her you would not know that she has lived the life of a Hispanic. "I don't look a bit Mexican. I look white." Even though she has lived the life of a Hispanic, ethnically Angela is both Mexican and Caucasian. Regarding the deception of

her physical appearance and ethnicity she stated, "I'm more accepted in some arenas and sometimes I'm not."

While these women differed in their identity, they were all very certain about their needs as Mexican American women pursuing a higher education.

Money

Money is a generative theme that emerged directly from a question of need. When asked what the women would need to ensure completion of a bachelor's degree, they all adamantly responded "money." This is an interesting theme because none of the women believed a lack of money had affected them most in their pursuits. In fact, Angela stated that her low or lack of self-esteem had affected her most in pursuing a degree. However, she stated her pursuit would be strengthened by "money." While money would also ensure a bachelor's degree for Barbara, she is affected most by time, or as she described, "the pressure I feel in time."

In light of the fact that Marissa has been awarded, "quite a few scholarships," she believes her pursuit of a higher education degree would be strengthened by more financial assistance. Unlike the other women who have not been affected most by a shortage of money, Marissa has been affected most by an inability to purchase the tools (calculators, computers, computer programs, etc.) she needs.

Juana has mainly been affected positively by her son. Negatively she has been affected most by other people's criticism and skepticism about her ability to pursue a higher education degree. However, Juana stated that she would be certain of her ability to earn a degree if she were provided "enough money to support her kids."

Maria Elena did not specifically state what affected her most in pursuing a higher education degree but did state that she believes cultural isolation does affect persistence. She stated, "Racially, I think it's important to be able to have some support." Maria Elena also believes she needs more money to strengthen her pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

Summary of Findings

The outcome of the dialogues was the generation of new knowledge and identification of how persistence is perceived by Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four-year university. Mexican American women who persist in higher education are culturally influenced and psychologically involved. The ability of Mexican American women to transfer from a community college to a four-year university is facilitated through supportive families where the love of a mother or a sense of maternal responsibility abounds for focused individuals who either do not see themselves as separate from others or who have a very strong sense of their cultural heritage. Persistence doesn't appear to be directly affected by a

lack of money, but all of the women believed additional financial support will ensure completion of a bachelor's degree by Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four-year university.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A college education increases the probability of becoming a productive member of society and is a guarantee of greater participation in a credential-oriented society. This increased probability and guarantee of greater participation is especially true for those in society who have been historically oppressed and underrepresented in all segments, particularly higher education. Mexican American women are among those whose representation in higher education has been historically and consistently poor. Much of the previous research on Mexican Americans in higher education have focused on the negative, examining drop-out and low performance and often attributing lack of persistence to the culture of Mexican Americans. This research focused on the positive and captured in dialogue the journey of Mexican American women seeking a life less oppressed and more human through the goal of obtaining a baccalaureate degree.

The study analyzed five Mexican American women transferring from Bakersfield community college to a four-year university. These women voiced their knowing of their persistence in higher education through

dialogue. Transfer was the point of examination in this study because Mexican Americans are concentrated in two-year colleges, and transfer is often not likely for those who initially enroll in a community college (Astin, 1971, 1973, 1983, 1984; Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Gandara, 1995; Nora, 1987; Nora & Rendón, 1984).

Using participatory research as the methodological base, research questions explored, discussed, recognized, realized and named persistence. The Mexican American women in this study voiced their knowing through a praxis model developed by Ada labeled by Reza (1995) as "praxis-plus." The research questions were divided into four major components: a) descriptive, b) personal interpretive, c) multicultural/critical reflective, and d) action.

Astin (1984) provided the theoretical foundation by which this study was grounded. Astin (1984) developed a theory of student involvement based upon the idea that a student's persistence in higher education is influenced by the amount of physical and psychological involvement in academic life.

The review of the literature demonstrated that much of the research provides only a general, broad-based understanding of Mexican American women who transfer from a community college to a four-year university. Much which is known about this population's participation and persistence in higher education can only be gleaned from extracting aspects of larger inquiries.

More specifically, the research on Hispanic women in higher education concluded that previous research that blames the culture for drop-out and low performance is inaccurate. These researchers found that the Hispanic culture does not hinder these women but, in fact, positively influences this population's academic success (Cardoza, 1991; Gandara, 1982; Lango, 1995; Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989; Young, 1992). Researchers in this area also identified specific variables related to persistence that generally include academic commitment, social status, psychological well-being, and external obligations (Astin, 1984, 1991; Gandara, 1982, Lango, 1995; Nieves-Squires, 1991, Vasquez, 1978; Von Destinon, 1989; Young, 1992).

Researchers examining Hispanics in community colleges have concluded similarly. Their findings reveal that academic commitment and social integration facilitate transfer to a four-year university. These researchers have also found that while many Hispanic community college students believe transfer to be important, their behavior does not support their belief (Nora & Rendón, 1988; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988). Other researchers have concluded that a student's perception of educational assistance and experiences does relate to persistence (Hernandez, 1980; McCool, 1984).

On analysis the findings revealed six major themes: (a) intangible traits, (b) family, (c) love, (d) focus, (e) identity, and (f) money. The findings revealed that women who persist in higher education possess intangible traits that are culturally influenced. Support of family and specifically the

love of a mother or a mother's love of child facilitate these women's transfer from a community college to a four-year university. The findings revealed a great sense of focus related to persistence for individuals who do not consider themselves as separate citizens or who have a very strong sense of their cultural heritage. The findings also demonstrated how monetary resources could facilitate a greater sense of ability to complete a degree program.

Conclusions

The findings of the study reveal facts about Mexican American women pursuing a degree of higher education that have not been found in previous research. This study allowed this population to speak for themselves which generated a wealth of knowledge regarding their persistence and participation in higher education. This study supported Astin's theory of student involvement and findings of other researchers conducting related studies.

As stated previously, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement includes both a behavior and attitude component. However, upon further analysis of Astin's (1984) theory, it is evident that the attitude component of involvement went unmeasured and is unfounded in his research. Specifically defined student involvement is, according to Astin (1984), "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to academic experience" (p. 297). It appears that Astin (1984) is equating behavior with attitude. Many sociologists and psychologists have had a long-

standing belief that behavior and attitude are neither the same nor equal. This research supports the notion that behavior and attitude are separate.

However, in the case of Astin's (1984) specific definition of student involvement, this study confirms the psychological or attitude aspect of his theory. Mexican American women have historically suffered from a fate where their physical involvement on college and university campuses is minimal. Because of many commitments to family and other domestic responsibilities, Mexican American women do not have the luxury of attending college full-time and devoting full-time energies to their higher education pursuits. However, this research has found that while these women have not had the opportunity to be full-time students with no other obligations or responsibilities outside of school, *they* are involved. These women are mentally involved in their higher education pursuits. Even though time does not permit them to be physically involved, they are focused on their goal of a degree of higher education. It does appear that one does not have to be as physically involved as previous research has concluded but mentally focused on pursuits of reaching a goal.

The findings of this study suggest that despite the inability to pursue studies full-time and be fully immersed in campus-life, Mexican American women who are focused and mentally involved in their goal of a degree are persistent. As for the women involved in this study, I predict confirmation of baccalaureate degrees.

This research demonstrated how family is a positive influence in one's persistence towards a degree. Family is not a hindrance, it is an assistive device that catapults a person when necessary and comforts during times of distress. In the pursuit of a degree, this is necessary as there are many experiences of "highs and lows" when the comfort and uplift is necessary to get you through the rigors of academia. However great, the love of a mother or the love of a child is directly related to persistence. This finding validates previous research of Mexican American women in higher education, which shows the "support" of a mother for Mexican American women is related to persistence in higher education. This research revealed that the operative word is not "support" but love. This is interesting as it reveals the true nature of what is needed to develop one's ability to persist, love.

As stated previously, Plato discusses this notion of parental love in his *Symposium*. He believes that "all mortal creatures love their young" and that human parents will sacrifice self for the greater good of their young (Brumbaugh & Lawrence, 1963, p. 29).

I believe Plato's theory of love accounts for the persistence of Mexican American women in higher education. It is evident that the women in this study who are mothers love their children, and their persistence is due to a longing for the greater good of their child. In the profiles of the women participating in this study, it is also evident that the mothers of these women have experienced hardships and seen many obstacles. Life for the mothers of

these women has not been fully human. The findings reveal that the mothers of these women long for the good to be theirs forever through the sacrifice of self for that of the greater good for their daughter.

Paulo Freire (1994) would call these mothers revolutionaries. Freire (1994) believes, "the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love" (p. 70). The women in this study are strongly loved by their mothers. And for those women in this study who are mothers, they have as deep and strong a love for their own children as their mothers have for them. Mothers seek to liberate their children through authentic acts of love and in doing so liberate themselves. Freire (1994) writes, "Love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others" (p. 70). He goes on to state, "Love cannot be sentimental.... It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise it is not love" (p. 71). Love is commitment to others, it is revolutionary. Nothing is more fully human than giving birth to a child and loving her. Freire (1994) writes, "Liberation is... a childbirth" (p. 31). This is Freire's (1994) metaphorical representation of how people emerge out of manifestations of dehumanization.

This research demonstrates that while financial resources and assistance would greatly help, it cannot be concluded that without it Mexican American women would not persist. Financial assistance does provide a greater ability to pursue studies with less financial worries and stress, but these women are fighters. They will fight and will "go without" for as long as necessary

because they believe the pay-off of a degree is better than satisfying immediate material desires

In sum, persistence is related to the amount of psychological involvement and the ability to focus on the tasks associated with obtaining a higher education degree. The love of a mother or the love of one's child increases persistence because it is the act of becoming more fully human while achieving immortality. Persistence is not directly related to financial resources but could be greatly influenced by the availability of funds.

Recommendations

The findings of this study are demonstrative and suggestive. They demonstrate truly human traits and expressions and suggest considerations. Thus, to recommend the type of character one should possess and how one should feel would only invalidate and dehumanize others who are not similar. This was not the intent of this research. It is also difficult to specifically recommend that Mexican American women not pursuing a degree become more focused, their families be supportive, and their mothers love them. It would be rather presumptuous of me to say that those who are not pursuing a higher education degree are not focused, not supported by their family, and not loved by their mothers. I do believe what separates women who persist in higher education and those who do not is the *object* of their focus. In the United States we are constantly deluged with the benefits

of individual consumption. Often our focus is more on immediate gratification than the result of long-term efforts. The United States is also a country where people have been historically oppressed and long-term efforts are focused only on survival.

Future Research

While increasing the numbers of Mexican American women in higher education would be in the best interest of society, we must also not lose sight of the structural constraints placed on this population by a society that does not value them. There are much wider concerns for this population, but education in any form will greatly serve to lessen the oppression and assist in leading to a life more fully human. Thus, the findings suggest that future research should consider the success of those who persist, in any arena. Persistence is a journey, not a destination. While the participants in this study made a valuable contribution toward understanding the persistence of Mexican American women transferring from a community college to a four-year university, they also generated useful knowledge that can be generally applied to all persistence. The findings suggest that research on persistence move away from quantitative forms of inquiry toward ethnographic forms. This, I believe, would ensure the true nature of persistence is realized by the researcher. Participatory research is certainly a form of inquiry that ensured the depths of my research were realized. Future research on persistence

should use participatory research so the depths of the endeavor is realized and transformation occurs for all involved.

As it relates to this particular subject under study, it would be a fruitful endeavor to examine the mother's feelings of her daughter's persistence. It would be interesting and enriching to determine whether the mother would describe her daughter's persistence similarly and what themes would generate from the mother. Researchers should include a component where the mother is a participant. Some questions that arise that future research should consider are 1) Why has the mother emerged and not the father? 2) What is it about the mother/child relationship that is facilitory? and 3) In the absence of a mother or mother figure, what emerges?

Ultimately, more research on Mexican American women in higher education is needed because there is a lack of understanding of this population. A greater awareness and understanding of Mexican American women could enhance the likelihood of more Mexican American women in higher education. Increasing the number of Mexican American women in higher education would only serve this society.

For Action

In order for change towards social justice to occur, it is necessary to recognize that there are both internal and external issues of oppression needing to be addressed by a larger society. However, in terms of this research

endeavor, we must focus on a smaller scale--the college and the community. It is terribly apparent that a large segment of Mexican American women are not first enrolling in college nor meeting the requirements for transfer to a four-year university. Educational institutions from elementary school through high school and beyond to colleges and universities should address the needs of the Mexican American women by focusing on ensuring equity and representation at all levels of the curriculum and in all school activities. Mexican American women should be humanized in these institutions so they may have the skills necessary to thrive in a system of education that has been historically oppressive. I believe that this should begin at the most primary level of the parent(s). Parents should demand that their children be educated in a manner that does not dehumanize and invalidate them and their children. Teachers should become aware of techniques that empower students, and administrators need to become sensitive to the needs of those they administer to. I also believe that a resurgence of community activism is needed to demonstrate the poor conditions of all groups oppressed and underrepresented in all segments of this society's institutions, but particularly higher education. If action is not taken to ensure this population's continued participation and growth in higher education, our society will not only suffer nationally but, more importantly, globally.

Reflections of the Researcher

One of the core tenets of participatory research is transformation for the researcher and the participants. I was definitely transformed in this process. I feel fortunate to have had the privilege to discover with other wonderful women the beauty of Mexican American women in higher education. Through these women, I learned more about myself and other persistent Mexican American woman than I had previously. They allowed me to understand my journey better. They also helped me complete a process of internal reflection that has enriched my life. Marissa, Barbara, Juana, Maria Elena, and Angela opened up their hearts to me, and I was touched by their generosity. They are all successful and I look forward to hearing more about their journeys. We must also be mindful that success is not a destination, but a journey.

Participatory research is an endeavor that should be experienced by all educators. It was liberating to experience such an event where people come together to share experience and in the process recover what they believed lost. I have always questioned my ability. I lost a belief in myself. Even as successful as others see me, I do not see myself similarly. I have internalized my oppression and in the process of socialization, lost myself. I have shed so many tears I could fill an ocean. As I listen to the voices of these women I could see myself, my pain, and my agony, but more importantly my successes. It is my hope that they saw in me what I genuinely want for them--a full and

happy life. I have often wondered why I love to sit on the beach watching the waves crashing on the shore. As I reflect, I believe I sat in solace on the beach as I watched my tears trying to return. Once they have gone they can never return. When I completed the dialogues and had written my findings, I went to the beach to cry. But as I sat on the beach that day my tears were no longer heavy, they were light. It was as though my tears became butterflies that flew away seeking only to land on the most beautiful of flowers.

Upon further reflection of women who transfer from a community college to a four-year university I believe this poem concludes my reflections while speaking volumes for *mis hermanas*:

Viva la mujer who pursues higher learning,
she is courageous, yet humble.

Viva la mujer who pursues higher learning,
she is blessed with desire,
desire to love.

Viva la mujer who pursues higher learning,
She Is....
She truly Is.

VIVA, LA MUJER!

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Appendix A

Consent to Participate

I intend to participate in a study being conducted by Ms. Deborah Ramirez Lango, doctoral candidate, University of San Francisco. I understand the results of this study are being presented to the Faculty of the School of Education, International and Multicultural Education Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education. I further understand that I will be entering into a process of dialogue analysis with Ms. Ramirez Lango. From this, I, the participant, and Ms. Ramirez Lango will seek to generate knowledge which will illuminate answers to questions the study is designed to address. I understand that the dialogues will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed individually and collectively.

I understand that I have the right to allow my name to be used in full, elect to have an alias used in place of my name, or remain entirely anonymous. I further understand that I have the right to terminate my participation in this study at any time during the research process.

Name

Date

Telephone number

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Deborah Ramirez Lango
2128 57th Street
Sacramento, CA 95817
(916) 731-8842
drlango@ns.net

Date

Name

Address

Dear Ms. _____,

It was a pleasure speaking to you on the phone, I am looking forward to your participation in my doctoral research. I have enclosed a consent to participate form that needs to be signed and returned to me prior to the start of the interview. To lessen any confusion, please bring the consent to participate form with you to the scheduled interview, do not send it in the mail.

I have also enclosed a profile of myself that will be included in my dissertation. I am also required to write a profile of yourself and would appreciate your input. I do not want to wrongly state who you are and so I would appreciate a written profile. You may use my profile as a guide. Please feel free to write it however you see fit and I will make any necessary edits, however I will only submit a final profile of yourself with your full knowledge and approval.

Our interview is scheduled for Day, Date, 1998 at _____. Please allow for the interview to take as long as two hours. As stated in our phone conversation the above date is the initial interview and a follow-up interview will be necessary to complete the research.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can also be reached in Bakersfield beginning Friday, June 5, 1998 at (916) 387-9884. I look forward to interviewing you!

With great anticipation,

Enclosures