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Chicanas in higher education : the road to success

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Salazar, Laura Alicia, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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CHICANAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Science
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

CHICANAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

by Laura A. Salazar

This thesis examines the Chicana educational experience leading to academic success, defined here as college graduation. Based primarily on ethnographic research among Chicanas at San Jose State University, the study focuses on: 1) the decision to attend SJSU; and 2) the decision to continue to graduation. Ethnographic decision tree modeling provides an "emic" (informant-generated) perspective of the decision processes. Findings support "deficiency," "discontinuity," and "internal colonial" models of minority educational success. Family emerged as a key source of emotional support; however, family views of education as a male prerogative limited women's educational choices. Ethnic identification contributed to academic success, through on-campus support from peers, mentors, and ethnic organizations; and as primary motivational goals --i.e., ethnic "pride" and "helping the community." Finally, the study found that while Chicanas perceived ethnicity as their primary barrier to academic success, both ethnicity and gender play significant roles.

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STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Mexican Americans or Chicanas/os¹ constitute the largest segment of the nation's Hispanic American population. Mexican Americans, 10.3 million, are greater than the next most populous group, Puerto Ricans, at 2.6 million (McKenna & Ortiz, 1988, p. 195). Mexican Americans are young, with more than 50 percent of the population being under the age of 25 (McKenna & Ortiz, 1988, p. 195; Astin & Burciaga, 1981, p. 31). However, colleges and universities do not reflect these numbers. For example, according to the Department of Finance, the state of California has approximately 7,687,938 Hispanics, but of the total CSU graduating class of 1990 there were only 3,855 bachelor degrees awarded to Hispanics (Rodriguez, 1991, p. 14).

Equal educational opportunity has long been a goal of the Chicana/o community. The majority of the battle has been fought through the courts, beginning with the Mendez v. Westminster School District decision in 1945, which declared illegal the de-jure segregation of Mexican American school children on the basis of race, and proposed bilingual education as a partial remedy to past segregation (Astin & Burciaga, 1981). This decision helped pave the way for the

¹ The terms Chicana/o and Mexican American are used interchangeably and, for purposes of this study, are defined as an individual of Mexican descent living in the United States. Some persons make a distinction between the terms and refer to Chicanas/os as those who support a particular political ideology or movement in relation to their ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, some do not make this distinction and thus refer to themselves with either term.

historic Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. However, Chicanas/os continued to attend segregated schools, "because Chicanas/os had been classified as Caucasians; thus, orders to desegregate were often evaded by assigning Blacks and Chicanos to the same schools, separate from Anglos" (Astin & Burciaga, 1981, p. 26; Cortese & Duncan, 1982). It was not until the 1974 decision of Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District that Chicanas/os were in fact an identifiable ethnic minority and therefore covered under the Brown v. Board of Education decision (Astin & Burciaga, 1981, p. 26).

Chicanas/os' participation in higher education remains low, and when broken down further according to gender, the numbers for Chicanas are even lower. Chicanas have historically been members of a dual minority, facing the double barrier of racism and sexism. In addition to this, Chicanas as a group have had an extremely low socioeconomic status (Chacon, Cohen, Camarena, Gonzalez & Strover, 1985). It is therefore not surprising to find that Chicanas are among the most poorly educated women in American society (Gandara, 1982).

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education (1976, p. 10), in 1976 only 1.1% of Chicanas completed 4 years or more of college. For Chicanos, in 1976 the number was twice as large, at 2.4%. The situation has not improved much over the years, and in 1987 only 6.2% of Mexican Americans under

the age of 35 had received their bachelor degree (National Council of La Raza, 1990, p. 89; McKenna & Ortiz, 1988, p. 203). When this percentage is divided by gender it shows that Chicanos comprised about 70% and Chicanas 30% of the total 6.2% bachelor degrees.² These numbers clearly illustrate the educational crisis that exists in the Chicana/o community, especially for Chicanas.

There is a dearth of research that effectively examines how the educational experience of Chicanas differs from Chicanos. The majority of the existing research assumes that the educational process is the same for males and females (Jaramillo, 1988; Rumberger, 1983), and therefore ignores the reasons for Chicanas' underrepresentation in higher education. The research does not take into account cultural expectations and socialization factors which define women and men to their perspective gender roles. For example, Chacon et al. (1985) reported that the most important difference between Chicanos and Chicanas in higher education was in the area of unpaid domestic work. Domestic work, in combination

² It was difficult to find specific percentages for Mexican American men and women because the data either combined both gender and race under the heading of Mexican American without being gender specific, or it was only gender specific to Hispanics and not Mexican Americans per se. Therefore, the percentage was arrived at proportionally by 1) finding the percentage of Mexican American recipients to the total Hispanic bachelor recipients; 2) multiplying the percentage arrived at in #1 to a) the total Hispanic male recipients and b) the total Hispanic female recipients; and 3) dividing the numbers arrived at in #2 by the total Mexican American bachelor recipients. This calculation assumes that graduation rates for females and males are similar for all subgroups classified as Hispanic.

with outside employment represented a significant negative factor in the educational progress of women. Basically, the women, unlike the men, are responsible for domestic work as well as any outside employment, thus allowing less time for school work. In addition, males and females differ in the emotional and/or financial support received from the family unit. Within the Chicano family the men are seen as the primary wage-earners, and therefore men's educational needs are believed to take precedence over those of a woman (Saavedra-Vela, 1978; Mirande & Enriques, 1979).

Furthermore, there is the methodological error of treating Hispanic women and Hispanics, for that matter, as a monolithic group. For example, one ethnic subgroup or its socioeconomic level (e.g., high income Cubans) can be generalized to all Hispanics, and thereby invalidate the results (DelCastillo, Frederickson, McKenna & Ortiz, 1988; Olivas, 1983). Combining all Hispanics into one category masks variations due to culture, religion, socioeconomic status, and location. Hence, a Chicana's experience in higher education is further marginalized and misinterpreted. The research is in response to a call from McKenna and Ortiz (1988) for more studies on Chicanas in higher education. The call is for research that would methodologically include ethnographic approaches, such as interviews, and go beyond the traditional, almost exclusive use of survey data.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

There are several theories to explain the low educational attainment of Mexican Americans. These theories, although not directly addressing Chicanas, purport to encompass the unique Chicana educational experience. The theories fall into three broad categories. Barrera (1979), a major figure in Chicana/o educational literature, has termed these deficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories.

The earliest theories are what Barrera has termed "deficiency theories." The three "deficiency theories" contend that there is a deficiency within the minority group which is responsible for its inferior economic, social, and political status (Barrera, 1979, p. 174; Blea, 1988, p. 9). The "biological deficiency" theories attribute racial inequality to genetics and hereditary genes (Barrera, 1979, p. 174). For example, educational psychologist Arthur Jensen's (1973) work on the measurement of IQ between Blacks and Whites speculates that the differences in educational attainment can be explained biologically through hereditary genes. However, his work and others that heavily rely on IQ test scores have serious methodological problems. Often studies confound the variables of race and class because it is hard to separate the effects of heredity and the environment on test scores. Therefore, there is very little

support for the "biological deficiency" theories (Barrera, 1979, p. 174) within the scientific community.

The "social structure deficiency" theories argue that minority racial groups in the United States are held back by problems in the social structure of the group (Barrera, 1979, p. 176). Barrera (1979, p. 180) argues that even if the "social structural deficiency" theories could be established, they would only succeed in identifying certain intervening variables, and that the fundamental causes of racial inequality lie elsewhere. According to Barrera, the theories conceptualized from the perspective of "cultural deficiency" are based on a model which misunderstands and misrepresents the complexity and diversity of the Mexican culture (Blea, 1988, p. 9; Barrera, 1979, p. 179). This model attributes the ethnic group's social, educational and occupational immobility to culture, family background, and parental attitudes (DelCastillo & Torres, 1988). For example, the work by Herschel Manuel (1965) depicts the Chicano culture as highly traditional and nonadaptive, because of the language handicap, fatalism attitude, and present rather than future orientation (Solorzano, 1986, p. 56; Evans, 1969). In a sense this theory blames the victim for being the victim.

The "bias theories" of the 1960's were in response to the "cultural deficiency" theories. The "bias theories" blame racial inequality on prejudice and discrimination (Barrera, 1979). Under the "bias theories," minorities

experience racial inequality because of the discrimination encountered based on racial prejudice. Therefore, the bias theories focus on the continued discrimination experienced in school such as racism, sexism, segregation, and lack of opportunity (California Post Secondary Education Commission, 1980).

The "structural discrimination" theories of racial inequality in the United States locate the source of minority disadvantage in the social structure of society (Barrera, 1979). Structure in these theories refers to the "regular patterns of human interaction in the society" found in either formal institutions (such as schools) or more informally (the class structure) (Barrera, 1979, p. 184). Unlike the bias theories, it is not prejudiced individuals who are to blame for racial inequality, but rather the source of the inequality is the social pattern of society (San Miguel, 1987). For example, the "discontinuity" theories focus on cultural differences between Mexican Americans and the mainstream community, and attribute differential success to the degree of discontinuity experienced between the home culture and school culture (Del Castillo & Torres, 1988; Foley, 1991; Ogbu, 1982, 1987, 1992). Specifically, there is a difference in cultural values, style of interaction, communication, and social competence, as well as limited English skills (Quezada, Loheyde, & Kacmarczyk, 1988; Valverde, 1976). It is the degree of discontinuity in the

new school environment that will affect educational attitudes, aspirations and expectations. Therefore, in order to succeed, an individual must become bicultural (defined as functioning awareness and participation in two contrasting sociocultures) (Coker, 1981; DelCastillo & Torres, 1988).

Another structural discrimination theory is the "caste theory," which puts emphasis on the relationship between a minority community and mainstream society (Ogbu, 1982, 1987, 1992). This approach postulates three types of minorities: autonomous minorities, voluntary immigrant minorities, and castelike or involuntary minorities. Autonomous minorities have a distinct ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural identity, and therefore meet with prejudice and discrimination. However, autonomous minorities are not economically, socially, and politically subordinate. An example in the United States is the Jews who have a distinct identity but are not economically, politically, and socially subordinate (Ogbu, 1987). Voluntary immigrant minorities are people who have moved voluntarily to the United States in search of greater economic well-being, and have retained a separate group identity. An example is the Chinese who immigrated voluntarily to the United States in search of economic well-being. Involuntary castelike minorities "are people who were originally brought into the United States society involuntarily through slavery, conquest, colonization or forced labor" (Ogbu, 1987, p. 321). Some examples are

Native Americans who were conquered, African Americans who were brought for the sole purpose of slavery, and Mexican Americans who were colonized. All these groups continue to suffer the consequences. The label can also be assigned to later immigrants of a castelike minority, such as recent Mexican immigrants.

Mexican Americans are involuntary castelike minorities because the southwestern states (California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and part of today's Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma), once Mexican territories, were conquered (Cortese & Duncan, 1982). Mexicans on the territory were stripped of their economic as well as political power. Acuna (1988) points out that the conquest was through violence and brutality which was justified through a system of privilege based on racism. As a result, Chicanas/os developed specific characteristics that play an important role in the school experience (Arce, 1978). First there is a sense of social identity in opposition to the social identity of the dominant group. This social identity involves differences in terms of cognitive style, communication style, interaction style and learning style (Ogbu, 1987). In addition, a deep distrust also characterizes the relationship between Chicanas/os and the public schools. Mainstream society does not differentiate between recent Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans who

have been in the United States for generations; therefore, both are assigned the same castelike status.

Ogbu (1987, 1992) has suggested that academic performance of involuntary minorities is dependent on three different circumstances. First is whether or not the individual comes from a segment of society where education is economically meaningful. In contrast to immigrant minorities whose frame of reference are the people back home, the frame of reference of nonvoluntary minorities is "White Americans." When nonvoluntary minorities compare themselves to "White Americans," their future opportunities for mainstream employment are limited. The second circumstance is whether or not the school has encouraged individuals to perceive and define school learning as the instrument that will replace their cultural identity with that of the "oppressors" (mainstream society). Unlike immigrants, involuntary minorities perceive the cultural differences they encounter in school as threatening to their identity. Nonvoluntary minorities fear that if they learn the language and culture of "White America" they will lose their identity as minorities along with the ties to their community. The third circumstance is whether or not the school generates a trusting relationship that encourages the minority to accept school rules and practices that enhance academic success. Schools tend to approach involuntary minorities defensively

through strategies of control and paternalism, thereby deflecting efforts to educate minority children.

Barrera (1979, p. 196) proposes the "internal colonial theory" as another type of structural discrimination theory. Internal colonialism is a social historical model that focuses upon institutional racism as the basis for systematic discrimination. There is an historical relationship of ethnic/racial subordination that coincides with regional population concentration (Barrera, 1979). Internal colonization exists initially in the economic sector of a society and then spreads to other areas (Blea, 1988). The internal colonial model contends that the dominant group carries out deliberate policies to constrain, transfer, or destroy the native population's values, orientations, and ways of life (Barrera, 1979; Blea, 1988). The internal colonial model, like the "bias theories," focuses on the continued discrimination experienced in school, and in addition incorporates the historical origins of prejudice. Therefore, it looks at how minority groups do not have the same opportunity to acquire education and skills as the dominant group. Often the school culture (i.e., individualism) devalues the cultural values of a minority group, and school becomes psychologically stressful and is viewed with mistrust (Blea, 1988).

Deficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories look at minority groups as

homogeneous. These theories do not even pay attention to gender differences within a group. Yet gender is vital in the United States educational arena and may exert a greater influence on women than ethnic or racial identity (Pitman & Eisenhart, 1988). Gender affects the way school is experienced. Specifically, individuals possess gender identities, and gender identities are crucial to the reproduction of social arrangements (Goetz & Grant, 1988; Pitman & Eisenhart, 1988; Holland & Eisenhart, 1988). It is through the school that a women's submissiveness to men is reinforced and perpetuated (Goetz & Grant, 1988).

A woman's alternatives in school are or appear to be more restricted than a man's (Pitman & Eisenhart, 1988). A specific difference is what Fordham (1993, p. 15) calls the first commandment for women in school: "To be taken seriously." Women encounter male teachers who treat them as sex objects or as incompetent because they assume women are not serious students (Holland & Eisenhart, 1988, p. 120). For example, women in science classes or science majors are not always acknowledged as intelligent individuals (Holland & Eisenhart, 1988).

Early gender socialization can profoundly affect the school experience (Goetz & Grant, 1988). Gender research has found that women are socialized to be silent and non-assertive and this can lead to significant consequences (Fordham, 1993). For example, Vasquez (1984, p. 280) points

out, "a woman sometimes hesitates to assert her opinion and her rights, because she has been socialized to defer decision making to significant males." Silence can be distressing for women because in an academic setting silence can be interpreted as ignorance (Fordham, 1993). Therefore, silence in the classroom can lead to invisibility and alienation and possible withdrawal from school.

With the growing Chicana population in the United States, the need for educated Chicanas is crucial. The purpose of this study was to examine aspects of the educational experience that lead to academic success. In this study academic success is defined as having graduated with a bachelor's degree. The study examined two decision processes: 1) the decision to attend San Jose State University; and 2) the decision to continue on to graduation, rather than dropping out. It sought to identify the factors underlying each decision, the impact of cultural and institutional factors on the final decision, and the kinds of barriers encountered and how they were overcome. An ethnographic decision tree was constructed to represent the "emic" (informant generated) model of the two decision processes leading to academic success. Rather than being constructed to test an existing hypothesis, the model identifies what informants perceived as crucial choice points and key decision criteria in their choices.

METHODOLOGY

Background to Study

During my undergraduate years I often felt alienated by the university because, as Chicanas, we are members of a triple minority (race, gender, and socioeconomic level). As a result, I had an interest in researching the decisions other Chicanas made during their undergraduate career. Having a broad contextual knowledge of the Chicana/o culture, I pursued this topic.

I decided to use San Jose State University as the location for my study because of the strong, vibrant Mexican American community. Also as a graduate student at San Jose State University, I could do ethnographic research on the Chicanas on campus. Thus, during the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years, I was a participant observer in three Chicana/o organizations, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), Hispanic Business Association (HBA), and the Chicano Commencement Committee. The initial ethnographic research gave me a broader context for understanding the Chicanas on the San Jose State University campus. Furthermore, it was through these organizations that I was given access to students who would be willing to participate in the intensive interviews.

However, before I started the intensive interview stage, I obtained aggregate institutional data from the Office of Institutional Research at San Jose State University. This

data included information on residence status, mean age (28.1), number of years in attendance, and mean grade point average (2.94) for the SJSU 1992 baccalaureate class. From this data I was able to construct a profile of the class that graduated from San Jose State University in 1992.

Intensive interviews with a small sample of Chicanas have provided the bulk of data reported in this study. The informants, although a non-random sample, represent a broad range of the 90 Chicanas who graduated from San Jose State University as part of the baccalaureate class of 1992 (the total number of graduates from SJSU was 4,012). Potential informants were selected from the Chicana/o commencement 1992 graduate list because it was the only source that would provide a name list with phone numbers. From the list, phone calls were made to contact the 20 women on the list. Seven phone numbers on the list were disconnected, with no forwarding numbers, and one woman did not want to participate in the study.

Actual informants were recruited through the initial phone call (see Appendix A for recruiting speech). A date, place and time for the interview was then scheduled. The interviews were conducted from February 1, 1993 through March 20, 1993. Nine of the interviews were conducted at the informant's home and the remaining three were at a public restaurant, at the insistence of these informants. They did not want the interview in their home because they did not

feel comfortable with it taking place there, and/or it would be more convenient to meet in a public place. Each interview lasted for about two hours and was loosely structured using a guiding framework of five questions (see Appendix B for questions). The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the informant and later transcribed by me. For the interviews that took place in the home, family members, with the exception of little children, retired to another room. After the interview, informants were given a questionnaire (see Appendix C for questionnaire). The questionnaire was used in order to compile a profile of informants.

The final interview sample, then, consisted of 12 Chicanas between the ages of 22 and 53 with an average age of 29. Seven of the women were transfer students, having spent 2 or more years at a two year community college. The other five had entered San Jose State University right out of high school. Eight informants were born in the United States of America. The other four informants were born in Mexico and lived in the USA between 19-21 years with an average of 20 years residence in the United States of America. Two informants were married, two divorced and eight were single. Informant grade point average (G.P.A.) ranged from 2.6 to 3.5 with an average of 2.8. The number of years it took to get their bachelors degree ranged from 4 to 14 years with an

average of 6.6 years. Appendix D contains a breakdown of the characteristics of each informant.

Design

The overall methodological approach used in this study is called ethnographic decision tree modeling (Gladwin, 1989; Mukhopadhyay, 1984), a relatively new approach in anthropology. This approach provides a method for collecting interpretable data on a decision process or the factors underlying a course of action, taking into account the relationships between cultural and non cultural factors and using an "emic" (informant generated) perspective. It focuses on individuals and the manner in which they select a particular course of action, as well as the "emic" considerations (decision criteria) which are used to select between alternatives. For each choice situation, available alternatives are identified as well as the criteria, conditions, or considerations affecting the final outcome. These relationships are specified in the form of a flow diagram and illustrate the process underlying or generating informant behavior.

The ethnographic decision tree modeling approach was applied in this study as a way of understanding factors leading to the academic success of Chicanas in higher education, with "success" being defined here as graduating from a university with a bachelor degree. The two major decision processes examined were: 1) the decision to attend

San Jose State University; and 2) the decision to continue on to graduation, rather than dropping out. By studying how 12 Chicanas succeeded at San Jose State University, we can begin to understand how Chicanas in a university setting cope with their triple oppression. Furthermore, an understanding of the considerations affecting these women's "decision" to succeed can be a basis for educational policy that will increase the representation of Chicanas in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

There are four limitations to this study. First, all of the women interviewed were participants in the San Jose State University's 1992 Chicano Commencement. This is a graduation ceremony that is bilingual and highly nationalistic.³ I believe because these women have a strong identification with their Mexican culture, they emphasize their ethnicity and therefore overlook the importance of their gender in the decision process. The second limitation was in not interviewing Chicanas who dropped out of the university. I only examined the decisions of Chicanas who had attended and graduated from a university, and therefore have no comparative data. Third, two of the interviews were interrupted by the telephone, family members, or friends. This was a problem because informants would lose their train of thought, and the intensity of the interview was reduced.

³ Ramirez (1984) defines nationalism as believing in a collective movement to raise the group's status.

Unfortunately, these informants could not be rescheduled.

Fourth, there were no males interviewed.

THE DECISION TO ATTEND SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

Attending a university is often seen as the next educational progression step after high school, or after a community college. However, not everyone is eligible to attend a university, for one must fulfill the entrance requirements. For incoming freshmen to be eligible they must have taken college preparatory classes throughout their four years of high school and have an overall grade point average of 2.0 or better. As freshmen they must also have taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) during their junior or senior year of high school, and received a minimum score of 560 or better, depending on their grade point average. For transfer students to be eligible they must have taken 56 or more transferable units and have completed general education courses in English and mathematics at a community college, and have an overall grade point average of 2.0 or better.

All 12 women in the ethnographic sample had met the eligibility requirements and had the desire to continue their education at the university level. They were all first generation college students. Five of the women had an older brother or sister who had gone to a university before them, but the women said they were still unfamiliar with what to expect. The schooling of their parents ranged from second grade to twelfth grade, with the average being sixth grade. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home to their parents and English was spoken with their siblings. The two

married women and the two divorced women spoke a combination of Spanish and English in their home. For the majority of the women both parents worked as day laborers, and if the mother didn't work she stayed home. Ten of the women had attended local high schools or community colleges, except for two, *Patty*, a transfer student from San Bernadino, and *Irma*, an incoming freshman student from San Diego County.

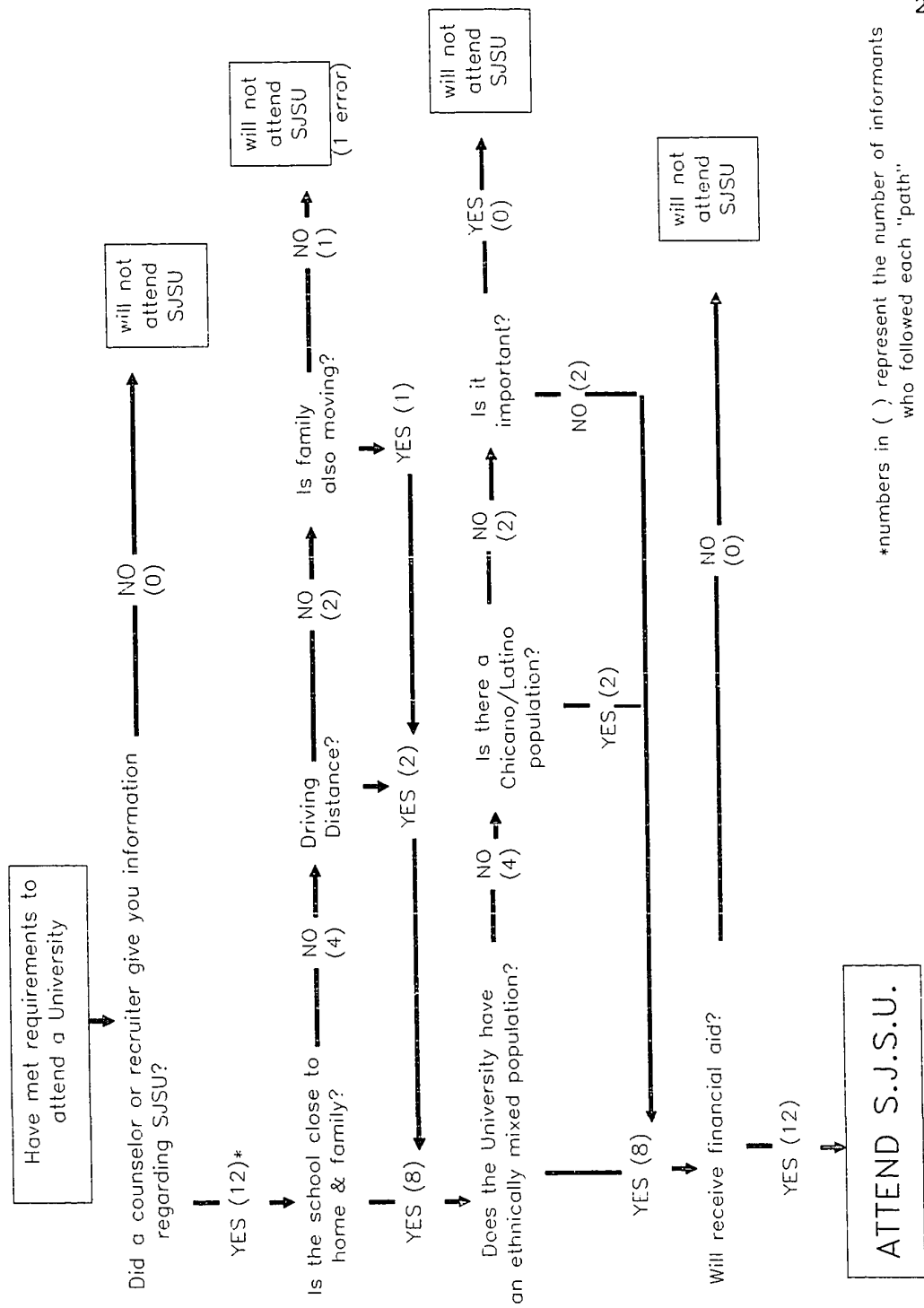
The choice to go to San Jose State University was contingent on specific criteria and factors. The decision criteria the women identified are summarized in Figure 1, a tree model. The diagram is organized with what the women considered most important on the top and least important at the bottom. The decision criteria or the factors leading to the women selecting SJSU were: 1) influence of a counselor or recruiter 2) distance to and from the home 3) ethnic population of the school, and 4) availability of sufficient financial aid.⁴

Counselor or Recruiter

The first step in deciding which university they would attend was contingent on knowing information about the university and the procedure on how to apply. The first exposure to San Jose State University for all 12 women was

⁴ According to figure 1, financial aid was considered to be the least important factor for the informants. However, implicitly through the interviews it appears that without financial aid none of the informants would have attended San Jose State University.

Figure 1. A model of the decision to go to SJSU



*numbers in () represent the number of informants who followed each "path"

through a high school counselor, or an Equal Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS) community college counselor, or a San Jose State University recruiter. Through a counselor or a recruiter these women were able to acquire enough information about attending a university. They were also given that extra needed push to consider San Jose State University as one, if not the only option among universities.

All the women who transferred from a community college said that it had been their EOPS counselor who had recommended SJSU. The women were aware that other universities existed, but had never taken the initiative to find out about them, because they considered it a "tedious task." They "trusted their EOPS counselor and depended on them" for guidance. The only schools they considered applying to were the ones their EOPS counselor suggested. To these women the counselor's opinion was highly valued and they truly believed that their counselor would "not steer them in the wrong direction." *Norma, (26, B.S. Business Administration)* had spent three years at West Valley College, and knew that the next step was to transfer, but she "had become very comfortable and was scared of moving on." It was her EOPS counselor who recommended that she "transfer to San Jose State University and get her 4 year degree." It was through the counselor's persistence that *Norma* applied to SJSU "without knowing anything about SJSU, but fully trusting

her counselor." This was also the case for *Patty (53, B.A. Sociology)*, a divorced mother of three. Her two older children were married and living away from home but her 17 year old son was still living with her. *Patty* had returned to school at the age of 47 when she was injured on the job (she worked as a clerk at a store), and the State Disability Department had sent her back for skills training. She transferred to SJSU from San Bernadino Valley College at the suggestion of her EOPS counselor. Her counselor wanted her to transfer to a university where there would be "many Latinos," where *Patty* "could have the support of other Latinos on campus." Her counselor recommended SJSU, because of the "thriving Latino community" there. *Patty* "trusted her counselor" and only applied to SJSU.

For the women who came directly from high school to San Jose State University, it was either their high school counselor, or a SJSU EOPS recruiter who gave them the information on applying to SJSU. Like the transfer students, they also only considered applying to the universities that their counselor had suggested. They did not research other universities, because like the transfer students "it was tedious." They also said they "trusted their counselor," and as first generation college students they could "not ask their parents." *Elena (22, B.A. Administration of Justice)* had known all along that she wanted to go to a university, and even though she had an older brother who had gone to a

university, she didn't know where or how to apply. It was her high school counselor "who suggested San Jose State University since she was an alumna of the school." To *Elena*, all of the universities, "Sacramento State, SJSU, and San Diego State sounded the same" to her, so she chose SJSU, because "if it was good for my counselor it was good enough for me."

A recruiter from San Jose State University was the person who influenced *Cathy* (25, *B.S. Health Management*) to apply to SJSU. *Cathy* was the oldest child in her family, and had always considered college. In high school she had taken college preparatory classes, and had been a member of the high school soccer team. However, when it came time to apply to a university she was still undecided about where she wanted to go. This indecision was due to her lack of knowledge about how and where to apply. *Cathy's* high school counselor did not speak to her about applying to a university and she was "afraid of looking dumb" if she asked her for help. During the fall quarter, the recruiter from SJSU went out to her high school to recruit students. *Cathy* approached the recruiter and was given a university application and an EOPS application and told, "Complete it and mail it back to the university." She carried the application in her school bag "forever" and then the day before the deadline she said, "what the heck," completed the application and mailed it in. *Cathy* never received information from other universities and

thinking about it now, she "wishes she could have gone to another school, maybe down south, but nobody was there to say well here are your other options besides SJSU."

The majority of the women only received information on San Jose State University, and therefore when they had to make a choice about what university to apply to, they didn't have to be selective. San Jose State University sounded good to them at the time, because they lacked information on other universities. As stated before, they attributed their lack of information to their unwillingness to inform themselves about other schools, described as "a tedious" thing to do. The fact that they were first generation college students meant that their parents did not have the knowledge to guide them. They also trusted their counselor and believed that their counselor would not "steer them in the wrong direction." Four of the women did receive information on other schools (only California State Universities) from their counselors, but like the other eight women they did not go research other schools (the same reasons were given as the other eight women).

Distance

Whether they applied to San Jose State University after receiving the information was dependent on how close the university was to their home. The distance to and from the university was equally important for married women and single women. The distance was very important to the informants, and the manner in which they selected what was an appropriate

distance depended on two things. The informants considered whether they would have transportation if they were going to be commuting every day from home to school. Some of the women commuted on the bus, and the only time they ran across any problems was when they had to "stay late on campus to study," or when they "had an evening class." They were scared of catching the bus during the night for "fear of being raped" or "robbed." It was also a problem because their parents did not want "their little girl out by herself at night." Namely, the parents thought somebody would harass or attack them during the night. Second, if they were going to move away from home and live around the university, they were concerned that the distance was close enough so that they could go home on weekends. The women were concerned with the distance because they felt a sense of responsibility towards their family and felt an obligation to be home during their free time.

There were 10 women whose main consideration when deciding on whether they would apply or attend a university was the distance of the school to their home. Six of the women stated that if the university had been far from their home, a member of their family either their husband or one of their parents, would have been against them moving away from home because a woman "should not live by herself." When asked if the same restriction on moving away from home had been or would have been applied to a brother, they said,

"No." However, at the time they felt it would have been useless to argue with their parents, because at least they could go to a university.⁵ In these cases, the women had to choose between applying to a university that was close to their home so that they could live with their parents or husband, or not applying to any university. This was the case for *Cathy* as the following passage illustrates:

Leaving the house would have been the radical thing to do. I was the first one ever to go to college, and I did not want to make waves. However, when it was time for my brother to apply to schools he applied to Santa Clara, Stanford, UCLA, UCSC, UCSB and God knows what schools in the east coast. My parents didn't do much, they were like, he wants to go, go like he is the guy, go if you gotta go, leave.

Four of these 10 women wanted to go to a university that was close to their home because they wanted to be close to their family. In these cases, the women were concerned with the distance rather than a husband or a parent and indicated they felt "a sense of responsibility towards their family." The responsibility they felt was due to a sense of obligation they had towards their parents. For example, women reported they were their parents "translators" and helped their parents "organize the financial records." These women had

⁵ Parental reasons and expectations will be explained later in the thesis because they are the basis for family support.

been doing these tasks from a very early age and therefore they felt guilty if they had to move far away from home. For example, *Mary (25, B.S. Business Management)* was the older child of two and ever since she had learned to speak English had been translating for her mother who only spoke Spanish. She did not want to move away from her home and "abandon her mother," so she commuted from Mountain View.

In three cases, the women were the oldest or second to the oldest sibling, so they wanted "to be around in case a younger brother or sister needed them. This was the case for *Monica (25, B.A. Psychology)*, the second oldest of four children in her family. *Monica* had an older brother, but he was married and did not live at home. She wanted to help them "with their homework" and "be there for them if they had a problem and needed someone to talk to." In these cases the women had to decide if they wanted to apply to a university that was far away and in the process leave their parents and family to fend for themselves, or apply to a university that was close by so that they could go home on the weekends.

There were two women who did not let the distance constrain their choice of a university. One of the women was *Patty*, who did not consider the distance of potential universities. However, her circumstance and the consideration towards her family were different from the other 11 women. This informant was neither constrained by parents or by a husband, nor was she leaving her family

behind. *Patty* was divorced, and her son would be moving with her wherever she decided to go to school, so in her case she did not feel she was leaving anybody or anything behind. She was ready to "move away from the area" and the idea of starting in a new area "excited her."

The other woman who did not let distance constrain her was *Irma* (24, B.A. *International Business*). Specifically, *Irma* wanted to go to a university that was far away from her family. *Irma* was the oldest child of five in her family, and believed that by her going away she could "become a role model" for her younger siblings, because they would have "more options" and "not limit themselves to local schools." *Irma* also served as translator for her parents, but she didn't feel guilty leaving because her younger sister would be taking over that role.

Ethnic Composition of School

For 10 informants, the school's ethnic population was an important consideration when deciding whether or not they would attend San Jose State University. The ethnic population was important to these women because they wanted to attend a school where they could feel comfortable. Comfort to them involved being in a multicultural university environment where there would be a representation of many ethnic groups. For eight of these 10 women it was the "different ethnic groups" at San Jose State University that was very appealing. They had read in brochures or had been

told by their counselor (ethnicity of counselor unknown) about the multicultural environment at San Jose State University. They did not want to go to a school where they would feel out of place because there were few other people of color represented on campus.

Two of the eight women were looking for a specific ethnic group when they were considering San Jose State University. These women wanted a university that would have a "high population number of Chicanos and Latinos" at the school. Specifically, they wanted to be around other people who "looked like them" and with whom they could "culturally relate." They did not want to feel isolated at the university, and feel as if they were the "odd ball," simply based on their ethnicity. Having other "Chicanos and Latinos" on campus was very important for *Irma*, because she was moving far away from her family and she wanted to be "around people who could culturally understand" her. It is interesting that none of the women said that they were looking for Chicanas or Latinas, they only said "Chicanos and Latinos." The other two women said that ethnic population of the school was not an "important" consideration when they were in the process of deciding to come to San Jose State University. As a "matter of fact" the ethnic population of the school "did not cross their mind" when they were considering the school.

Financial Aid

Another consideration which arose when deciding upon which university to attend was financial aid. All of the women had received some form of financial aid, either through reduced fee rates, a grant, loan, or work study. They all stated that if financial aid had not been available they would not have attended San Jose State University. Receiving a good financial aid package was essential, because all of the women came from a low income economic background. This meant an annual family income of "\$19,000 or less." The \$19,000 or less also applied to the women who were married, because their husbands were also attending school and working part time. All of the women worked while attending SJSU, and for the majority of the women it was through the work study program on campus. For example, *Elena* came from a family where both parents worked in the fields year around, and they were still making below "\$15,000 a year." She received the federal Pell Grant that paid her school fees, and received a monthly state grant of \$169, but she still needed to work to pay for her rent. *Elena* worked 20 hours a week on campus as a clerical assistant through the work study program. *Isabel* (24, B.A. Social Science) was from a family of eight, and both of her parents worked "seasonally in the fields of Hollister." Her parents could not afford to pay for her education. She received a federal grant that paid for her

school fees and worked off campus as a teacher's aid 20 hours a week to supplement the "little her parents could afford to give her."

Identifying criteria women used to decide whether to attend San Jose State University deepens our understanding of Chicana's experience in choosing between all potential universities. For example, why not attend Santa Clara University, a school in the same county as San Jose State University? Or why not select another school in the San Francisco Bay area like Berkeley or Stanford? As the decision tree model in Figure 1 indicates, the first step in deciding which university to attend was dependent on which universities were mentioned by a counselor or a recruiter. If the universities were not mentioned they were not considered as possibilities. As it so happened, the counselors or recruiters did not often mention private universities or UC schools, and therefore the choice for these schools became immediately eliminated. The informants were aware of other schools, but they did not want to pursue the "tedious task" of finding out more information on their own. If the schools were mentioned and became an option, then they were eliminated when the issue of distance was considered. In terms of distance to and from the university, Santa Clara University and San Jose State University are very close to each other. However, Santa Clara University did not look like a very good choice when the issue of mixed ethnic population on the campus was important. Even

if the ethnic population was not important (in only two cases), when the financial aid package was considered San Jose State University was a more attractive choice because it was less expensive to attend.

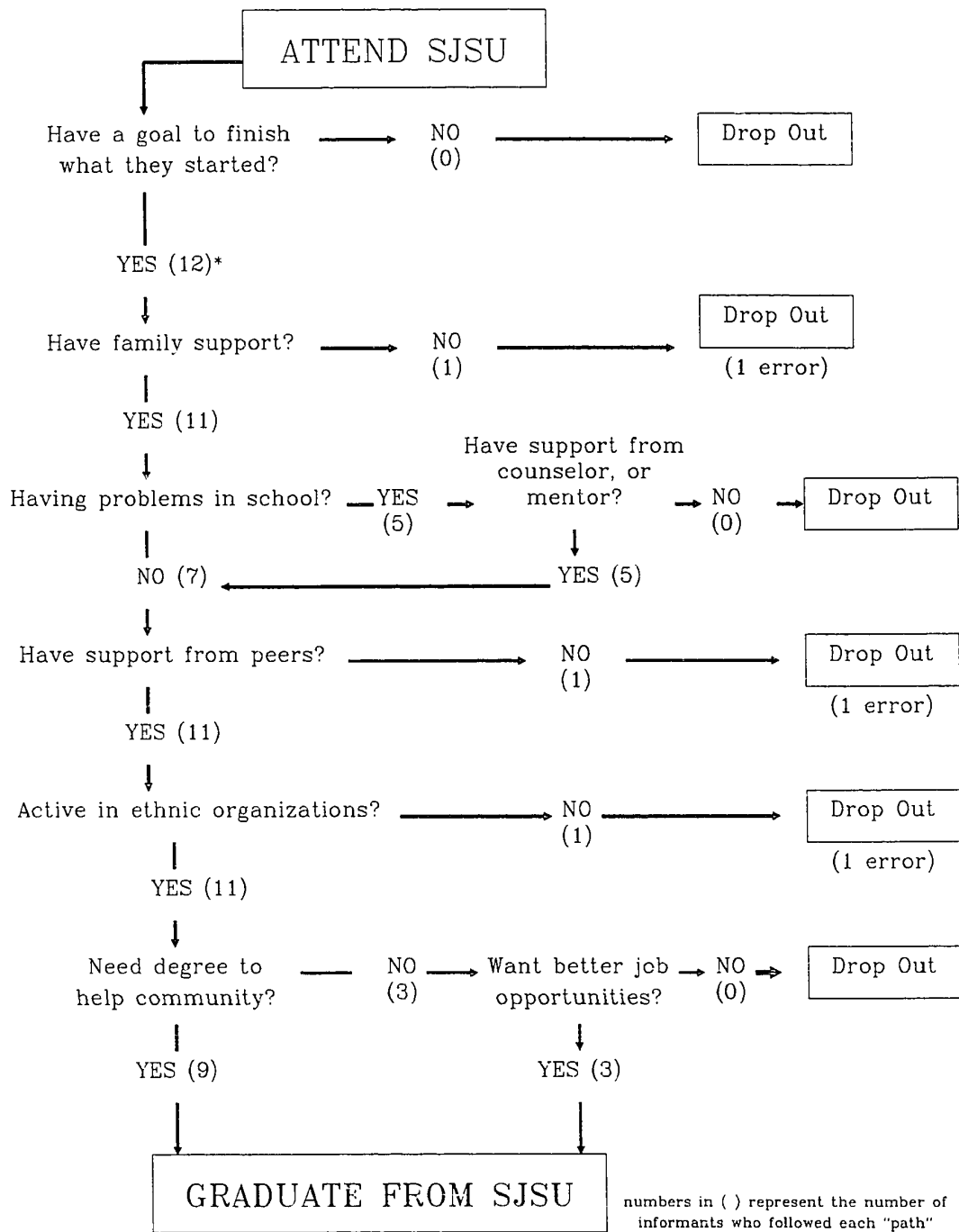
THE DECISION TO CONTINUE ON TO GRADUATE FROM SJSU

Once the women had decided to go to San Jose State University they had to make choices that would have an impact on whether or not they would succeed academically. As noted earlier, for the purpose of this study, academic success is defined as graduating from San Jose State University. Overall, the choices the 12 women made during their undergraduate years at San Jose State University were many. Yet the implicit and on-going decision that seemed to recur throughout their stay at San Jose was whether to continue on and eventually graduate from SJSU. The women identified six factors as having the greatest impact on the decision process leading to their graduation from SJSU. These are summarized in Figure 2, a tree model of the decision to graduate from San Jose State University, and the process involved. The diagram is organized according to what the women considered important, with the most important criteria on top and the least important at the bottom.

Have a Goal

The first and most important decision for all of the women was whether to continue their education and graduate. For the freshmen, San Jose State University was not like their high school where by law they had to go to school until they reached a certain age. To go to school and to continue their education after high school was a decision they had made when they entered the university and their main reason

Figure 2. The decision to continue on to graduation



for staying in school. The women reported that whenever they would think about dropping out of school, they changed their minds after reminding themselves of what an "accomplishment" graduating from SJSU would be. To have entered the university was one thing, but to actually follow through and graduate was their goal. Four factors apparently reinforced their drive towards the goal of graduating from SJSU: 1) having made a commitment, 2) having a positive attitude, 3) a love for learning, and 4) their view of life without a degree.

Informants repeatedly mentioned not wanting to be a failure for not completing something they had started. For example, *Alicia (22, B.A. Psychology)*, when asked if she had ever considered dropping out of SJSU stated, "No, never, that was never an option... I figured I was there, it was a commitment." For *Mary* the commitment was stronger each day she stayed at the university. "If I had wanted to drop out during my first year it would have been easy, but as time went by, the commitment was stronger." The commitment often was reinforced when they would see their peers drop out, and they would be reminded that they did not want to "follow in their footsteps." *Martha (39, B.A. Liberal Studies)* explains how her peers kept dropping out. But rather than letting it discourage her, it enabled her to become more determined to finish:

I felt a lot of stress from the competition, because I could see people quitting, you know dropping out of

classes, and even quitting the semester. I thought I'm not going to let this happen to me, I'm not a quitter, I'm in here for the long run. It was really sad because you just start to bond with somebody in class and they decide to quit.

Along with the satisfaction of receiving their degree, informants often seemed to believe a degree would also provide some sense of security. Their degree also represented something tangible for all the years of hard work. Furthermore, their education was something that nobody could ever take away from them. For example, *Rita (36, B.S. Industrial/Organizational Psychology)* expressed these sentiments: "I wanted to have that degree as security, something that nobody could ever take away from me. During my second year at SJSU, I decided I was going to get it."

Two women believed they had graduated from SJSU because while they were students, they had a "positive attitude" towards life. They believed that those who went to school with a negative outlook were the ones who "didn't complete their degrees." When *Martha* was asked how she handled things differently from her peers who had dropped out of school, she answered:

I mean everybody is different, I don't think ... well education fits everybody differently. I don't know if it is education or attitude. I think you can make better decisions, but a lot of it has to do with your

attitude towards whatever the decision is. I guess to keep it simple you either have a positive attitude or negative one.

Informants' decision to finish their goal was also based on their desire to learn. Two women pointed out that the driving force behind their goal to graduate was, "their love for learning and expanding their knowledge." They did not view their education as a task but rather a wonderful experience. Patty explained how the love for learning started when her grammar school was desegregated from a predominantly Mexican American school to ethnically mixed school:

We were in the fifth grade, and we were read to. We had three little rooms and we were not allowed to go to the school where the White kids went, but in the sixth grade something happened. I don't know what law went in, but they condemned that little three room school, and they sent us to the school up the hill. I always liked school, ever since I started to go to the school up on the hill, and I found a library. I don't know how in the world I had the reading skill, because I started one book and another and another. I started reading and up to this day I'll read. I think you have to have some kind of love of learning, because I don't see what else kept me going.

Their goal to graduate and get their degree was reinforced when they would encounter friends who had not gone on to a university. The option of not finishing school and their degree was a bleak option. Specifically, to informants, not having a degree meant they would have to lead the same lifestyle as their friends. This type of lifestyle was described as, "boring and constraining." It was not as though they were judging their friends for their lifestyle, but it was a lifestyle in which they could not picture themselves. *Monica* explained how her friends from high school took a different path from her:

All my friends from high school are either married or single mothers. This is very depressing to me because they have not gone beyond my old neighborhood. What is even more upsetting is that they don't even realize it, because that is the only life they know. I don't think I'm better than them, but that lifestyle is just suffocating. I think that if I had dropped out and not finished my degree I would have lead this style of life, and this thought made me commit even more to my education.

Family Support

Eleven women mentioned family support as being very influential in the decisions they made while attending San Jose State University. They believed that without family support they would not have been able to graduate from San

Jose State University. Support in this case mainly refers to emotional support rather than financial aid because, as mentioned before, all of the women in the ethnographic sample were from low socio-economic households, and their parents could not financially afford to help them out. Family support does not necessarily include the whole family, and in some cases it came from just one or both of the parents, or the brothers and sisters, or the husband, or children. Table 2 shows the breakdown of who in the family provided emotional support.

Table 2. Breakdown of source of family support

Sources of Support Mentioned	Number of Cases
Parents only	0
Brothers & Sisters only	3
Husband only	2
Children only	1
Both Brothers & Sisters and Parents	5
Total	11*

*One of the women (Martha) did not mention family support as having an influence on her education.

For the two married women, it was the husband who had been very supportive and had encouraged them to continue

their education. When the women felt they were getting "burned out on school," it was the husband who was there to tell them that they had already invested time and effort into their education and they should finish school and get their degree. In both cases, the husbands were also going to school. Education was something both the husband and wife strongly believed in. The women said it was the fact that they were both trying to better themselves through education that had initially attracted them to their husband. Therefore, if they had decided to drop out of school they would have been "letting down their husband."

For the women who were not married, and whose parents did not emotionally support them going to school, they received support from their brothers and sisters. In some cases it was an older brother or sister who had gone before them to college and was encouraging them to stay in school. Furthermore, they had seen their older sibling go to a university and graduate and this inspired them to want to do it too. However, as mentioned before the women did not want to go far away to school like their older siblings because they wanted to stay close to their family. For example, Rita commented in a humorous way on how her brother's education affected her:

My brother went to Stanford University and I thought, wow you got a scholarship and everything. Maybe when

the brains went around I did get some, maybe I can do that too, you know, so he was very motivating.

For *Isabel* it was her older sister who motivated her to go on to college:

I think it was my older sister. She is 4 years older than I am, she went to Berkeley. I think it was my freshman year in high school, she invited me to go to Berkeley, and she just told me about the life there. We knew what I wanted, freedom, and my own person kind of thing, and she influenced me to do this. She gave me a whole speech about you choose what you want out of life as opposed to life choosing you. She influenced me to apply and do well, and she helped me find tutors and so on, and motivated me by calling me. How was I doing? How are my grades? and this and that.

In other cases the support came from younger siblings. The support from their younger siblings was in the form of admiration and praise because the women were going to a university. Due to this support, the women believed they had a "responsibility" to their younger siblings to complete their education. They believed that if they made any wrong choices, their younger brothers and sisters would have to "pay the consequences." In this case, the impact could be that their younger siblings would "not be allowed to go to a university." *Irma*, the oldest child in her family and the

first to go to college described it this way:

I often felt burned out and tired of school, but then it would disappear as soon as I remembered my family. You see I was the first one to go to college, and to drop out would have had an impact on my younger sisters. They were so proud of me and bragged about me, I could not disappoint them. Plus if I dropped out it would have been easy for my dad to say to my younger sisters, see why go, Irma had a hard time and it didn't do her any good.

Then there were the women who received support from both of their parents and from their brothers and sisters. Parental support manifested itself through words of encouragement, "we are proud of you," or "*dale ganas*" (keep making an effort). Often it was the mother who would say these words of encouragement to the women "and the father not saying much." If the women needed emergency money, often food money (\$20-\$40), they would ask their mother because she would go "out of her way" to help. These women wanted to graduate, because if they didn't then they felt they would be letting everyone they loved (their family) down.

One of the women, *Patty*, mentioned her son as her main family support. She wanted to graduate in order to show her son that it could be done. *Patty* wanted to inspire her son who was in high school to continue his education.

The only woman who did not mention family support as having an influence on her university education was *Martha*. During her undergraduate education, *Martha* was divorced twice because her husbands were not supportive of her trying to better herself through education. However, she did get support from somewhere else and that support was what kept her going. *Martha's* support came from her adult pupils in her English as a second language class at the Center for Employment Training. They admired her determination for wanting to better herself and this gave her the strength to continue.

The issue of family support is a complex one because of different expectations and roles for males and females. When asked if they had been treated differently than their brothers, informants uniformly answered, "yes" and cited examples. However, it wasn't until I asked this question that they started to question themselves about how they might have been hindered educationally because they were women. Basically, their parents were more supportive of their brothers' education than theirs because, according to parents, "*El es hombre, el va a ganar el dinero*" or "he is the man, he is going to earn the money." Therefore, a man's education should "take priority" over the woman's. Education was something women were not expected to take seriously because as soon as they would get married "*el hombre te va a cuidar*" (the man would take care of her). The difference in

support was not only manifested vocally but in different expectations for sons and daughters in the home.

The main expectation for all of the women and "not" the men was "domestic responsibility" and the "amount of time" the women were expected to put into it. Domestic responsibility is a category that includes child care, caring for elderly relatives, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic work. The women who were the eldest in their families were expected to put domestic responsibility first above everything else and often it was at the expense of their school work. For example, Ana (28, B.A. Liberal Studies) from a very early age was expected to look after her younger siblings and the home. Both of her parents worked in the fields, and did not receive an education higher than sixth grade. Her parents expected her to put housework first, and to baby-sit her younger siblings, and then if there was time "school." If one of her younger siblings got sick, her parents would not get a baby sitter because she was the one expected to "stay home and baby-sit."

In one way or another, all the women talked about the burden of domestic responsibility and the impact it had on their education. For example, Rita had to interrupt her college education when her parents got sick, and she had to move back home with them in order to take care of them.

Then there was *Alicia*, whose parents would make her feel guilty for not going home on weekends and spending time with the family:

My parents wanted me to go home every weekend, and I sometimes couldn't because of school work. Well, my parents would call Saturday evening and start asking me, Why can't you come home? Don't you love us? The rest of your brothers and sisters were here, they made an effort, couldn't you make an effort. At times my mother would start to cry on the phone to give me a guilt trip.

To fulfill their domestic responsibilities, the women made decisions that at first affected their school success negatively. For example, *Isabel* was not able to manage school work, her job, and domestic responsibilities her first year at SJSU and went on academic probation. As a result she acquired study skills that enabled her to manage her time more effectively and productively.

Besides their domestic responsibilities, women were expected to behave in a certain way at home and in public. Namely, outside the home they were expected to behave in the most moralistic of ways, what informants called, "virginal." This was done so that they would not disgrace their family name. This meant that "their name should never be in gossip," or that they should not be exhibiting themselves with their boyfriends in public. At home the women were expected to be quiet and obedient, and not question their parents' authority,

while the opposite was true for their brothers. For the women this was a very hard thing to do, because in order to excel in school they had to question things, be vocal in class, and to make sure they were noticed so that they would not be lost in the shuffle. The decision to be vocal was often very painful to the women because they didn't want to expose themselves to others for fear of being ridiculed. Ana explained how oral book reports were a hard thing for her to do as a Chicana, but doing them was necessary:

Somebody that has the same background, they can understand your fears about presentations. Well, because you are not used to it, in my house you are a girl you are not supposed to talk when you are not asked to talk, you know since you are small. You never learn to talk or to do presentations, so that was pretty scary, to be in front of people who are going to criticize you.... After a while I just tried to think, you don't have to please them, the only person who counts is the teacher.

The different expectations and roles for men and women, however, made the women more determined to succeed and graduate. The women wanted to prove to their parents and to themselves that they could attain their B.A. or B.S. degree and be self sufficient. They did not want to be the typical wife; they wanted to prove that their education was just as important as their brothers'.

Support from a Mentor or Counselor

All of the women had at one time or another felt overwhelmed with the environment at San Jose State University. They felt overwhelmed with the size of SJSU when compared to the size of their high school or their community college. However, only five women said they had problems in school and were ready to drop out because they had experienced feelings of "loneliness" and "isolation." They attributed these emotions to being at a new school without knowing anybody and feeling different from everybody else because of their ethnicity. The women believed they were not being taken seriously by their professors like the "white students." They defined "not serious" as not being recognized in class (the professor never called on them to answer questions), or professors saying things that reduced their self esteem. This was the experience for *Patty* when she went to speak to the undergraduate advisor for social work, ironically, an Hispanic man. He told her she "was not cut out to be a social worker" and at the time *Patty* was ready to drop out of school. She believed that the advisor was not taking her seriously because she was a Chicana. She had overheard him being "nice on the phone to a White girl, he was saying, oh Kim it is so good to hear you, why don't you drop by my office, I'm always here for you, I was so mad." Many students also felt uncomfortable about being one of a few "brown" faces in the class. For

example, *Martha* said she felt uncomfortable in her classes when she would get assigned to a group project and the majority of the "people were not Hispanics," because she felt "inferior" to them. The examples reveal women's perception of the source of their discomfort and feelings of alienation. Unlike *Martha* who linked her discomfort with her ethnicity, *Patty* accused a particular professor, not the school or the society, for her problem.

The five women having such problems had to decide on who, if anyone, they were going to turn to for help. Their choices were their peers, family (parents or siblings), or someone in the academic sphere. The five women could not talk to their parents because their parents lacked the knowledge of how the United States educational system worked. Their parents, like many people from Mexico, viewed education as primarily in the hands of the teachers and not the parents. Furthermore, the informants did not want to burden their parents with the emotions they were experiencing. On the other hand, they did not want to talk to their peers, because they wanted someone whose opinion was as valued as the professor or the institution that made them feel alienated. Therefore, the women decided to turn to a counselor or a professor whom they called a "mentor," for the guidance and support they needed to overcome these problems. The following passage illustrates how counselors or mentors often helped students who were ready to quit or who felt

alienated. *Monica* was the first in her family to attend a university and was not doing as well as she had been doing at the community college. San Jose State University was "too big" and "impersonal" and, therefore, she felt alienated by the whole situation:

I was really doubting myself, and whether I belonged there at all, because I could not bond with my professors. Then I met Dr. P [a Chicana woman] and she started building up my confidence and telling me not to get discouraged, because I would only become a statistic if I gave in. She used to praise my school work. This did miracles for my self-esteem, because she had the same degree as the other professors, and she was just as respected if not more. I felt I had her respect and this was all that mattered. I think it was even more valid because she was part of the institution. She guided me and I wanted to be just like her.

The mentors and counselors were also instrumental in helping the five women who were having problems adjusting to SJSU choose a major. Choosing a major was a hard decision for all of the women, and as more time went by it became a particularly stressful problem for the five women. All were unsure about what they wanted to do. In *Patty's* case, she didn't know because she had been told she didn't belong in the major she wanted (social work). The reasons for their indecisiveness in declaring majors was also due to the

feelings of alienation they had experienced and because they felt a need for extra guidance from someone they "loved and respected." *Cathy* explains how it was her mentor whom she calls her "mom at San Jose State" who helped her declare a major:

Going to her was great, one day we just sat down and I said, I don't have a major yet, and she said, what do you mean I thought you did. I go, well in paper it says there, but officially no... I told her I wanted to help kids, and she goes OK we'll look through the catalog to see if we can find something. Pulled out the catalog and it seemed like as soon as she opened the book there it was, health care management, and that was it. She said go to admissions and records and declare it. I did, and she goes OK you declared it now go see your advisor for health care management, which I did and that was it.

Peer Support

Having support from a mentor or counselor was not the only support the women said they sought out. Eleven of the twelve women "wanted" support from their peers. Specifically, they wanted "somebody from their age group" with whom they could "discuss their problems," and go out "and party with." The decision they had to make was, did they want support from their old peers (high school and community college), or their new peers at San Jose State

University. The women decided they wanted the support of their new peers at SJSU. Their old peers could not provide the type of support they needed at that point in their lives. Their old friends had not gone on to a university and had "no concept" of what the women were going through at SJSU. It was therefore "hard" for the women to explain to their old peers the pressures they were experiencing at their new school. Furthermore, their old peers "often seemed bored" with conversations about school, and at times expressed antagonism by calling them "school girls" [an insulting remark in local terminology]. It was also hard to meet with them because of their daily activities, and it seemed as if their interests and goals in life had become different. It was time to move on to the next phase in their life.

The women wanted to make new friends who were also adjusting emotionally to their new environment. San Jose State University was "so big" in comparison to their last school, they said, and they were lonely. For the five women who were not living with their parents but instead were living in a dorm or an apartment within walking distance to the school, new peers could help fill the void of not having family members around. Specifically, they hoped new peers would provide the emotional support they had left behind and were in "dire need of."

This was especially true for *Irma*, the only one who had gone to a university that was far away from her family

and old friends. The following passage illustrates *Irma's* desire for new friends at the school:

I was so lonely. I missed my family a lot during my first year. I had decided that I would just complete my first year and then try to transfer to a university there, but then I started making friends with people in my classes, and we would have some deep discussions about what we were going through. It was to them whom I run to when I was feeling lonely, upset, or happy. I don't think I would have made it without them, my family away from home.

Their peers were also an essential social network on campus. It was often through their friends that they met new people and experienced the university social life. As mentioned before, the women had said they were shy and uncomfortable in their new environment and they believed it was their friends who gave them courage to "come out of their shells" and be more social. In *Isabel's* case the person who helped her adjust was her roommate in the dorm:

The first weeks at school were difficult. I wanted to go home. My roommate (she was Anglo) pulled me out of my shell and took me everywhere and exposed me to different people. Well, I was shy so it took me a while to make friends, and she helped by inviting me to go with her to lunch and intermingle.

In *Patty's* case, it was hard for her to bond with new friends because she was 50 years old when she transferred to San Jose State University. Nevertheless, the friends she made she used as role models. She would try to talk to people who had the qualities she felt she lacked and tried to build them within herself. It was through this process she was able to "build up her self esteem," and make friends on campus.

Peers were also instrumental in helping some of the women develop study skills. For example, the majority of the women said that while attending high school they had studied with the radio or television on, didn't use the library properly, and didn't know how to take proper notes. *Ana* believes it was the friend (a Japanese woman) she made during SJSU orientation week that made the transition from her community college to SJSU possible. It was *Ana's* friend who would suggest that they should "go to the library, do their homework, and review their notes" whenever they had free time between their classes. *Ana* had never done this at her community college, and believes it was the discipline of her friend that "helped" her make it through "the first year," and "prepare her for the years that followed."

The only woman who did not mention peer support as being an important factor in her staying in school was *Rita*. However, *Rita's* circumstances were different from the other women. *Rita* had been working at San Jose State University as a full time employee for two years before she transferred

there as a student. Rita already felt comfortable around the campus and continued to socialize with her coworkers (who were not students) as before. Her main support was her husband who was also a student at San Jose State University but she didn't consider him as peer support, rather as family support.

Ethnic Organizations

Feeling part of the university was important to the women and they tried to do this by belonging to an organization on campus. Through an organization they believed they could start to network with individuals with whom they had common interests. The question then was, what kind of organization did they want to become active in? Did they want to be in one that was made up of people in their major, an ethnic organization, or a sorority? Ultimately, the answer for 11 of the informants was to be active in an organization that was made up of Chicanas/os in the same major. If this was not possible, then they wanted to belong to a Chicana/o organization that was doing things with the Chicana/o community in San Jose.

Eleven of the women identified being active in an ethnic organization as a positive influence on their education at San Jose State University. Being active in an ethnic organization was something they had planned to do from the very beginning. As Figure 1 illustrates, one criterion for choosing San Jose State was that it had an ethnically mixed

population and a Chicano/Latino population. For the business majors, the Hispanic Business Association (HBA) had been the organization with which they most identified. For the other women there was no other organization that was able to combine their major and ethnic group. Therefore, these women became active in Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), a student organization that promotes the academic, political, educational, and social interest of Raza students and their communities. In the case of *Isabel*, she was a social science major who eventually wanted to get her teaching credential. "There was no organization on campus" that was composed of Chicano/Latino future educators, so she reestablished the Mini Corps club, an organization for future teachers. By reestablishing Mini Corps she was able to be part of an organization that combined both ethnicity and her future professional interests into one. *Cathy* found organization support through the Mathematics, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) program. MESA is a tutoring/mentoring program for Chicana/o high school students.

It was through these types of organizations that the women gained a sense of community within the university. They could meet with people who looked like them and whose goal was also to graduate. It was through MEChA that *Elena* found the "most social gratification." At the MEChA statewide conferences she was meeting other Chicanas/os who

were "proud of being Mexican and were doing things with the Mexican community." Furthermore, these organizations were credited with being responsible for helping the women acquire leadership skills. *Irma* credits the Hispanic Business Association for her "public speaking" and "organization" skills, because as vice president of HBA she was required to do these two things. Being an active member of HBA was also gratifying to *Irma* because she was "hanging around with other Mexicans" and doing things that were "beneficial to the Mexican community in the area." Being involved in ethnic organizations went deeper than just hanging around with other Chicanas/os, it was involvement in "La Causa." It allowed the women "to give back" to their community, and help improve the conditions there. For example, through Mini Corps *Isabel* would go out and tutor third graders, an activity that gave her "gratification because she was helping younger Chicanitos start in the right foot."

There was only one woman, *Patty*, who did not use an organization on campus to help her get through school. *Patty* had transferred over from San Bernadino because she had been told by her professor that in San Jose she could find more "cultural roots." When she had called San Jose State University to get information on what groups were available she was told, "The hardest part was to get here, and to find a place, but once she was here she would have wonderful support groups." However, she was greatly disappointed. She

wanted to be in a group, "with other Mexican women my age (50 years old) that are struggling to pass these tests, to work to keep the family together, and there were none." She went to a MEChA meeting, but everyone there was "young, I could not relate to them." She also attended the Faculty Mentor program on campus but she could not connect with her mentor, and at the end only got "free coke and chips from the meetings." The other Chicana/o organizations were "pretty much the same, everyone was young, and I felt out of place." Patty never found the type of organization she was looking for, but she believes she was able to graduate because she wanted to be a "role model for her son."

How their Bachelor Degrees would be used

The attitude of trying to graduate for the sake of somebody else was a common attitude among the women. Often the need to excel was for reasons beyond themselves and their immediate family and included their community. Nine of the women decided that their degree was going to be used for the betterment of their community and not as a "money making machine." Specifically, they planned to work in a neighborhood that was predominantly Mexican, and work there as teachers, doctors, lawyers, or maybe perhaps establish a business. For example, Rita believed that education was an "important thing for the Raza (Mexican Americans)" and that if she could get her degree she could become a role model. Elena came from a migrant working family, where both of her

parents worked in the fields. She wanted to get her degree and then apply to law school, because as a "lawyer she could go back" and help her parents and "people like" her parents "who don't know their rights or are to scared to speak up for anything." Whenever she would get "fed up" with a class and "could not go on" she would say to herself, "You are lucky to be here, look at how hard your parents had to work in the fields to get you here." Every time she would go home to visit her parents the decision to get her degree would be reinforced because "of all the injustices that were happening to *mi gente* (my people) in my little small town."

There were three women who said they wanted to receive their degree because with it they would have an "opportunity to get better jobs." However, their degree was not really viewed simply as a device for earning money but rather as a tool for bettering their chances in life. Unlike the other nine women, they did not want to remain in the Mexican community. They were business majors and wanted to get into the "corporate world." They believed that their degrees would allow them to compete with people who had started off life with "an advantage." For example, they could compete with people who came from a higher social economic status, or who were from European ethnic origins. To *Mary*, a degree would allow her to "get her foot in the door" of the business world, and it would "improve her chances of competing in the

work force because sheer determination was not going to do it alone."

Summary of the General Model for Continuing and Graduating from SJSU

The 12 women in the study made many choices during their undergraduate years at San Jose State University. The first and most important decision for all the women was whether to continue college to graduation. SJSU was not like their high school where by law they had to go to school until they reached a certain age. Instead, they were free to come and go as they pleased. Unlike many college students who simply assume they will graduate, these women were constantly reevaluating their initial educational decision, essentially asking periodically, "why should I be here?" For these students, graduating - i.e., not being a "quitter" - became a compelling motivating device.

The goal to accomplish what they had started was fueled by the emotional support they received from their family. The family support was a motivating element for the women. Their graduation from SJSU would not only be a personal accomplishment but one shared with their family. To drop out of SJSU would let down those loved ones who believed in them. Therefore, the decision to stay in school was greatly influenced by their family.

For women with academic problems, family support alone was not sufficient. They also needed someone who could

address their academic problems. The question then became who would provide that type of support. Their options were their peers, a professor, their family or a counselor. They decided to turn toward their counselor or a professor who was willing to act as their mentor.

Having a mentor on campus to guide them in academic affairs was important, but to deal with the emotional and social adjustment problems they generally experienced, they needed peer support. The choice generally was between old friends and new friends at SJSU. Most women decided they wanted support from their peers at SJSU who were going through the same situation and could relate to their experience. It was through their peers that they acquired study skills, interacted with other people, and found a "family" away from home.

Feeling part of the university was important for the women and hence they decided to be active in a campus organization. Given the variety to choose from at SJSU, they had to decide what type would best meet their needs. The women were mainly looking for a Chicana/o organization of people who were in the same major, but if this was not possible then any Chicana/o organization would suffice. A Chicana/o organization provided an atmosphere in which they could feel comfortable, while at the same time strengthening their motivation.

An important source of their motivation to graduate came from the way they were going to use their degree from SJSU. Three of the women decided that they wanted to get their degree in order to get a job in the "corporate world." The majority of the women wanted to get their degree and go back to help their community, by becoming a doctor, lawyer, or opening up a business. Others wanted their degree because it would allow for better job opportunities, although not necessarily high paying jobs.

DISCUSSION

In the previous section, I have described the results of an "emic" natural decision-modeling approach to understanding the academic experiences and success of a group of Chicanas who graduated from San Jose State University in 1992. I have described the crucial choice points and the considerations involved in deciding to attend San Jose State University; and the subsequent decision to continue on to graduation. What are the larger implications of these findings for existing theories of Chicano/a success?

Deficiency theories

The data from this study provided little support for the "biological deficiency" theories (Barrera, 1979). However, the data supported the "cultural deficiency" theories and "social structural deficiency" theories to a certain extent. Specifically, the view by Chicano parents that education is a male prerogative because of men's future wage earning role in the family (Carr, 1989) could constitute a structural barrier to women's educational success (see Mukhopadhyay & Seymour, forthcoming, on the impact of family structure on female education). The women in this study were not given the same support their brothers were given. For example, brothers were not restricted only to a university close to their parents' home. In contrast, the majority of the women were "told" to stay home, or felt they had to stay close by because it was "expected" of them. In addition, the women

were expected to give priority to domestic responsibilities in their parental home. Their education was not to interfere with this primary responsibility. Domestic responsibilities often became a source of role conflict for women. They had to plan and schedule in order to fulfill their domestic responsibility; males in the family were not asked to do the same. Thus role conflicts stemming from dual positions as family members and as students clearly had an impact on the decisions they made.

In a study of Chicanas in higher education, Chacon et al. (1985) found a similar situation despite the fact that they studied women at a private university, UC, CSU and community college. They found that domestic labor or the number of hours spent per week on child care, care of the elderly, cooking and cleaning, had a sharp impact on their progress as students. The highest impact was on the women who were living at home with their parents while attending school.

Significantly, however, the women in this study believed that it was their ethnic identity, not their gender, that tended to exert the greater influence on their academic lives. In a study of African American and White women in college, Holland and Eisenhart (1988) found a similar situation. The African American women did not have the perception that their school experience was influenced by their gender. Yet their data indicated gender had a profound

influence on their informants' college choices and experience. In my study, this was also true, for both the Chicanas who were born in Mexico, and the Chicanas who were born in the United States of America. As students at San Jose State University, they believed that the problems they were experiencing stemmed from being Chicano, not Chicana. To solve their problems, these Chicanas would turn to others who were Chicanas/os, because their belief was that only Chicanas/os would be able to provide the "support they needed." Chicanas wanted peers who were of their same ethnic background and wanted to participate in campus organizations that were especially geared for Chicanos. Ethnicity was even an issue when deciding what would be the benefits of getting an education. As noted earlier, a university degree, for many, would specifically be used as a tool to improve the Chicano community.

In reality it was a combination of both gender and ethnicity that was affecting their experiences and decision outcomes, but the women were unaware of it. Blea (1988) suggests that the reason for this is that Chicanas are being socialized to think about ethnic barriers and not those of gender. Her examination of the Chicano social science literature showed that gender issues were virtually ignored. The Chicano movement at San Jose State University seems also to have given little attention to women's struggle within the Chicano community. I would argue that this is a major reason

my informants were unable to go beyond ethnicity and understand how their gender roles restricted their wants, needs and feelings. They had been socialized to accommodate others before themselves and they did this when they were making decisions, including choices of future careers. When they were applying to a university they limited themselves because of their gender and their family's expectations, even though they did not see it as a gender issue.

Discontinuity theories

Data from this study provided some support for the "discontinuity" theories. When the women were deciding whether they would go to San Jose State University, they wanted to experience as little cultural discontinuity as possible (Del Castillo & Torres, 1988; Ogbu, 1982, 1987). They believed they could achieve this by going to a school that had a mixed ethnic population or where there were many Chicanos whom they could "relate to" and who would understand their "cultural values." There was more discontinuity for the women who moved away from home and lived close to the university because they did not have the support network of their family.

The women who were having discontinuity problems were able to resolve them by seeking out a mentor or a counselor. The mentor, often a faculty member, usually Chicana/o, provided support, academic knowledge, and guidance at the university. Coker (1981) in a study of the motivation of

Mexican Americans found that counseling services, such as help with housing, financial assistance, class scheduling, transportation needs, health, job placement and tutoring have a significant impact on whether or not Chicanas will continue with their education. Jaramillo (1988) also found that having a mentor to guide Chicanas in critical academic decisions helped them adjust to the school culture.

Caste theories

The data do provide some support for John Ogbu's "caste theory" (1982, 1987, 1992) of the differences between nonvoluntary immigrants and voluntary immigrants, particularly Mexican Americans are classified as involuntary immigrants. All of the women, whether born in the United States or Mexico, exhibited the three characteristics of a nonvoluntary minority. First, the women's frame of reference was of "White Americans" and they compared themselves to them when considering future mainstream employment opportunities available with a Bachelor's degree. Secondly, they perceived the cultural differences they encountered at school as threatening their ethnic identity as Chicanas and were afraid their academic status would be viewed as "selling out." Third, they did not trust the school system and said they did not feel like they were an integral part of it. These Chicanas would turn to others who were Chicanas/os when they needed emotional support. However, the Chicanas/os they turned to were also students at SJSU, because they could not

relate to their old peers. Thus here, as in the Hoffer (1988) and Eisenhart and Holland's (1988) studies, the peer group has an independent effect on school retention.

Internal colonization theories

There was also support for Barrera's (1979) "internal colonization" model with respect to how the women viewed themselves in the classroom. The women said that they were not being taken seriously because of their ethnicity. They seemed to think professors would not acknowledge them in the classroom and would make remarks they considered racist. The majority of the women believed that the "dominant group" did not value their culture and would therefore try to diminish its importance within the education arena. Furthermore, the women often felt alienated in the classrooms because of their awareness that they "were brown" and their belief that they "stood out" among their fellow classmates. Informants also had a hard time viewing their education as an individualistic process because they said they were receiving the education to benefit "others" in their ethnic group, not themselves.

Viewing one's life and educational experiences solely from an ethnicity point of view can be limiting and, as I have suggested in the case of gender, can also mask significant influences on one's educational decisions and achievements. Nevertheless, it is the perception of themselves as Chicano, and their strong sense of pride in the Chicano culture, that has been a major impetus behind their

desire to graduate, as also reported by Castaneda (1984). Aware of the forces which hold back Chicanos in society, the women want to change this discrimination through the arena of education. Because women feel that the core of their oppression is ethnicity, they believe the amelioration of racial inequality will solve all their problems. Ethnic identity has also led them to seek out Chicano peer support, mentors, and to join organizations which alleviate cultural discontinuity, thus contributing to their academic success. It remains to be seen if women will eventually recognize that they have actually faced and overcome barriers of gender and class as well as those of ethnicity.

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Appendix A

Recruitment script:

"Hi my name is Laura Salazar, and I am a graduate student at San Jose State University in the Social Science Program. As part of my program I am working on my master thesis, and the topic of my thesis is Chicanas in higher education. Through research I was made aware that you had graduated from San Jose State in 1992 with a B.A. or B.S., and had participated in Chicana/o commencement. I would be very interested in having you participate in my research study. As a participant I would like to conduct a tape recorded interview with you, and after the interview ask you to fill out a small one page questionnaire. The questions I will be asking you in the interview will be regarding your academic career, and the questionnaire will be asking background questions. However, I should mention that if you do not feel comfortable during your participation you are under no obligation to continue, this is strictly voluntary. Would you be interested in participating? [If yes continue, if not Thank them and say good bye]. I would like to set up a time and a place that are both convenient for you, so that we can meet for about 2 hours. Where and when would you like to meet?"

[after arrangements set up I would thank them, ask them if they have any more questions, and say good bye].

Appendix B

The interview consisted of 5 main open-ended questions. The questions underneath the 5 five main questions are questions that were asked if the subject needed guidance or got stuck during the interview. They are the following:

1. How did you decide to go to San Jose State University?
 - Did you consider other schools?
 - Did you consider going away from home?
 - Did anyone influence you on your decision?
2. In what ways did high school prepare you for college?
 - Did you lack skills?
 - Did your high school reflect San Jose State University?
3. How did you decide on a major?
 - Did anyone influence you on your decision?
 - Did you consider other majors?
 - How did you get information on majors?
4. How did you adjust to San Jose State University?
 - Did anyone play an important role?
 - Did you consider leaving San Jose State University?
 - If so, where? and why?
5. How did you handle things different from your peers who didn't receive their B.A. or B.S.?

Appendix C

Subject I.D. # _____

Chicanas in Higher Education Questionnaire

1. What term or terms do you and your family use to describe your ethnic origins?(circle one)

American of Mexican descent Mexican Mexican-American

Chicana Raza Latina

Hispanic Spanish Anglo

Other(specify)_____

2. Place of birth:_____

3. If not born in U.S. how long have you been in this country?___

4. Present age:_____

5. In what kind of neighborhood did you grow up?(circle one)

Mainly people of Mexican descent Mainly Anglo

Racially and Culturally mixed Other (specify)_____

6. What language or combination of languages was spoken in your home when you were growing up? (circle one)

English only Mostly English Some English & Some Spanish

Mostly Spanish Spanish only Fully Bilingual, equal use of and ease in both

7. University grade point average:_____

8. Were you ever on academic probation? _____ If yes how many times:_____

9. How many years did it take you to graduate?_____

10. Did you receive any academic honors, scholarships or membership in any scholastic society? If so specify:

Appendix D

Table 1.

Breakdown of informants personal information.

Name	Age	Born	Years in USA	Martial status	G.P.A.	Years to get Bachelors
<u>Transfer</u>						
Rita	36	USA	N/A*	Married	3.0	10
Martha	39	USA	N/A	Divorced	2.8	14
Ana	28	Mexico	21	Married	2.5	8
Norma	26	USA	N/A	Single	2.8	6
Patty	53	USA	N/A	Divorced	2.7	5
Monica	25	Mexico	19	Single	2.8	5
Irma	24	Mexico	21	Single	3.2	5
<u>Freshman</u>						
Elena	22	Mexico	20	Single	2.8	4
Cathy	25	USA	N/A	Single	2.6	6
Alicia	22	USA	N/A	Single	3.0	5
Mary	25	USA	N/A	Single	2.0	6
Isabel	25	USA	N/A	Single	3.5	5
Average	29	N/A	20	N/A	2.8	6.6
Average SJSU class of 1992	28	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.9	6

* Not applicable.